

Talk of the Town: Prescott council election — what are the water issues?

By GARY BEVERLY, Special to the Courier

Every other year some brave and optimistic citizens try to convince you to vote for them for Prescott City Council or mayor. Two candidates for mayor and five for council will be competing in the Aug. 5 primary election. The candidates identify water as an important issue, and the Citizens Water Advocacy Group (CWAG) agrees.

CWAG conducts a candidate forum for every election. The forum is not a debate with winners and losers. It is an informed and civil discussion about water policy in Prescott. CWAG is nonpartisan; we do not endorse candidates.

The purpose of our candidate forum is to insert water issues into the political and electoral dialogue, to educate voters and candidates, and to inform the public about where the candidates stand on water issues.

Water policy is not a partisan issue. Our forum is not a fight, and we don't play "gotcha." We distribute the questions to the candidates and the public in advance. We provide a "Basic Facts" document that contains scientific data and a summary of relevant Arizona law. We offer to meet with candidates to answer any questions. The forum questions and Basic Facts documents are publicly available for download at <https://cwagaz.org/prescott-candidate-forum> .

Our questions target the most important water issues:

Water Policy: Prescott uses a water budget to manage growth at a controlled rate that permits the city to provide necessary services. Another policy specifies that no new municipal water and sewer services outside the city limits shall be approved, with specified exceptions.

Big Chino Pipeline: In April 2024, the City of Prescott updated the cost of the Big Chino project to an estimated \$360 million, which did not include the cost to mitigate likely damage to the Verde River. If the pipeline is built — and it won't be soon — Prescott voters must vote to approve the financing prior to construction.

Regional Cooperation for Water Management: Cities in the Prescott Active Management Area (PrAMA) share a common water resource, yet they continue to compete for more water to facilitate growth. CWAG believes that regional planning and management of water resources is the best strategy to preserve

our shared water resource and assure long-term quality of life for all current and future citizens.

Conservation: Although Prescott has the best water conservation program in the PrAMA, it can be improved. Water conservation alone will not solve the overdraft of our aquifer, but it is easy to implement and the least expensive strategy — a foundation for all other measures.

Water Quality: Some of Prescott’s municipal wells have tested high in PFAS. One source of the PFAS is treated wastewater recharged at the airport. Also, some of Prescott’s wells in Chino Valley are high in arsenic, a naturally occurring contaminant.

Prescott Long-term Water Management Planning: Prescott city staff has begun to develop a long-term water management plan scheduled for completion in December 2026.

That’s a big list. These important issues will affect the future of Prescott, including population growth, quality of life, water rates, recreation, and the Verde River. The candidates know this, so they have all mentioned water as a key concern.

Mayoral candidates Brandon Montoya and Cathey Rusing will participate in our mayoral forum. Council candidates Robert Garing, Jay Ruby, and Mary Frederickson will participate in our council forum. Council candidates Henry Ebarb II and Greg Lazzell informed us they have scheduling conflicts and will not attend.

Learn where the candidates stand on water at CWAG’s 21st Candidate Forums on June 28 via Zoom. Register for each forum separately under “Next Event” at cwagaz.org .

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