

# Talk of the Town: Prescott Council should respect, include citizens

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In recent months Prescott officials have twice proposed and twice postponed expanding the city's existing overly broad water policy to authorize, with few restrictions, providing water and sewer services to up to 25,000 acres outside the city limits without annexation.

The existing policy requires an Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) between Prescott and another governmental entity, such as a Yavapai County water improvement district. The proposed policy eliminates the IGA provision, making a bad policy even worse.

Both the existing and proposed policies are a very bad idea for many reasons. Both reduce planning, promote sprawl, facilitate uncontrolled growth, discourage citizen comment and increase the overdraft of our water resources. Both schemes dodge the City Charter provisions added by the Reasonable Growth Initiative (Prop. 400), an initiative approved by voters in 2005, requiring a super-majority vote of city council to approve annexations of 250 acres or more, a 60-day public comment period, and that all wastewater go to permanent recharge of the aquifer.

These serious deficiencies are the result of inadequate analysis and public review. The council has failed to provide a written explanation of why the policy is needed. There has been no analysis of alternatives, no factual rationale, no review of fiscal, social and economic impacts, and no scrutiny of effects on water resources. The result is an inadequately justified, poorly crafted policy that accelerates growth by subsidies for private developers using public water resources.

Lack of public input is a fundamental problem. The council does not show respect to the public that elected it. Repeatedly, the city fails to provide adequate public notice, holds no public meetings and restricts citizen comment to two to three minutes, which is grossly inadequate for complex issues. Citizens receive no response to written or spoken comments except disrespectful and disdainful body language from the some council members and staff.

The council apparently intends to award water without annexation to enable rapid development of 25,000 acres north of the city limits. Under current water policy, if a developer creates a water improvement district with Yavapai County, then that district can sign an Intergovernmental Agreement with Prescott and receive water without annexation. The proposed policy removes the IGA requirement.

The Citizens Water Advocacy Group (CWAG) is primarily concerned about the growing overdraft of our aquifer, moving us further away from safe yield. When annexed, new subdivisions over 250 acres must follow Prescott's new water-conservation policies, and all wastewater must be dedicated to permanent recharge. Even then, every new home will consume more groundwater.

Subdivisions that are not annexed are not required to dedicate wastewater to permanent recharge, permitting the city to use recharge credits to support even more development and consume even more groundwater.

We can do better. Every new subdivision receiving city water should be annexed. All new construction should have net-zero groundwater impact.

Prescott can begin to rebuild public trust by improving transparency and encouraging public participation in developing thoughtful water policies. CWAG agrees with the city on two important projects that require water resources: improving water quality in the creeks and saving the Dells, but we ask that the current IGA-based policy be replaced.

Let's build on areas of agreement by finding win-win solutions. A good beginning would be for the mayor to establish a workgroup, including citizens, to recommend procedures ensuring greater transparency and effective public comment.

I will discuss Prescott's water policy in a Zoom presentation Saturday, Feb. 13. For details and Zoom link: [www.cwagaz.org](http://www.cwagaz.org).

*Gary Beverly is president of CWAG and a retired business owner working to protect the Verde River.*

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