



Canutillo Independent School District

7965 Artcraft Rd.
El Paso, Texas 79932
(915) 877-7481

Mailing Address: P.O. Box 100
Canutillo, Texas 79835
FAX (915) 877-7483

MEMORANDUM

To: Board of Trustees
From: Gustavo Reveles, Public Information Office *GMR*
Date: November 8, 2012
Subject: Village of Vinton Sewer Update

The Village of Vinton remains without any clear path toward resolving its water and sewer infrastructure issues. As you may remember, the Village Council has been divided on the issue of seeking grant funding to establish water and wastewater services in the area. The matter has received thorough media coverage and public scrutiny.

It's worth noting that both CISD facilities located in Vinton (Bill Childress Elementary School and the Transportation hub) are served by the recently upgraded wetlands facility on Cap Carter Road and are therefore not affected by a lack of water or wastewater services in the municipality.

The water and wastewater issue in Vinton seemed to have been resolved in October when the El Paso County Commissioners Court voted to seek grants for sewer and water on behalf of the Village of Vinton. Commissioners canceled those plans, though, after the Texas Water Development Board informed the County that it would require a financial commitment of \$500,000 to start the process, as well as a resolution from the Village Council supporting the County's decision to apply for the grants on Vinton's behalf.

County Commissioner Chozet informed the Canutillo administration that the decision to cancel the County's plans to seek the funds for Vinton would have been cost prohibitive for the entire county (much more so than if Vinton sought the grant for themselves). Chozet also said there was doubt the County could secure the resolution of support from Vinton.

At this moment, the water and wastewater issue in Vinton seems to be stagnant and without any clear resolution in sight.

Please find attached to this memo copies of recent news articles regarding the water and wastewater issues in Vinton.

El Paso County Commissioners take action on Vinton waste water grant applications

By Cindy Ramirez / El Paso Times El Paso Times

Posted:

ElpasoTimes.com

>> Photos: El Paso County Commissioners vote on Vinton waste water grant

The county will work with local water entities to try to bring water and wastewater systems to the embattled Village of Vinton by applying for state and federal grants, commissioners said Monday.

County commissioners voted 4 to 1 to enter into an interlocal agreement with the city's Public Service Board to submit wastewater system grant applications for Vinton, a community of about 2,000 residents in west El Paso County that relies on septic tanks for those services. Commissioners also agreed to spend up to \$20,000 for the PSB's previously conducted engineering studies and all required documents to apply for the grants.

Commissioner Dan Haggerty voted against both measures, arguing that the county should not be in the business of rescuing failed governments.

The village's divided council earlier this year voted down grants that could have spurred millions in state and federal assistance for water and wastewater services, and recently failed to approve an operating budget for fiscal year 2013. Vinton also has not entered into an interlocal agreement with the county for septic tank inspection services, which some fear could lead to contamination and health hazards if sewage seeps.

"We have the opportunity to ensure the health, safety and welfare of county residents," County Judge Veronica Escobar said. "We can't turn our backs on that."

The county has until Nov. 1 to apply for the grants and will work with the Border Environment Cooperation Commission to help secure them, Escobar said. She added the process is pending the county attorney's clearance of any legal hurdles that may come up.

Several Vinton residents attended the commissioners meeting on Monday where the discussion at times became heated.

Commissioner Tania Chozet said she was "boiling over with anger" over Vinton's inability to provide basic services for its residents, and felt annoyed that the county needed to step in to protect the health of the community. Chozet voted to move forward with the grant applications, saying somebody had to be responsible for the residents of Vinton.

Village of Vinton Mayor Madeleine Praino said she, too, was irate at the situation, but was glad the county was willing to help.

"I would have preferred the Village of Vinton took this action," said Praino, who along with two council members is up for re-election this November. "But because of a divided council, we are faced with this embarrassment of having to come to the county for help."

Praino said she was grateful to the county for "its action and compassion," for the residents of Vinton.

Guadalupe Gaytan, a 20-year-resident of Vinton, cheered after commissioners agreed to lead the grant application process.

"I'm very happy with the vote," said Gaytan, adding that she's among numerous residents who support a possible tax increase for water and wastewater services. "I'm disappointed our own council couldn't make this happen for us. I'm just glad the county sees this is what's right."

Last week, the county deliberated on whether it could take any legal action against the Village of Vinton, whose bickering council has failed to pass an operating budget for the 2013 fiscal year.

County Attorney Jo Anne Bernal on Monday said the county had no legal recourse on that matter, but that preliminary research indicated that the county could apply for state and federal grants for water and sewage services for the village.

Earlier this year, a divided Vinton council failed to agree on a plan that would bring millions of dollars in state and federal grants for water and sewage service.

The majority of Vinton's council members decided to keep the septic tank system, choosing not to accept some \$500,000 in grants from the Border Environment Cooperation Commission. The grants would have paved the way for up to \$38 million in grants for a water and wastewater system. The council also failed to approve resolutions to submit applications for the grants from the Texas Water District Board and the Texas Water Development Board-Economically Distressed Area Program.

Monday, Vinton's Mayor Pro Tem Juvencia Rios Ontiveros, who is up for re-election next year, blamed a lack of transparency, accountability and communication on the village's problems.

"We can't begin to apply for grants and raise taxes if we don't know how the money is being spent," Rios Ontiveros said.

Rios Ontiveros and the councilors who voted against the grant and the resolutions earlier this year said they wanted to keep taxes down, as the federal and state grants would require some matching funds from the village. Some officials estimate that would have cost taxpayers in the village about \$12 a year.

Cindy Ramirez may be reached at cramirez@elpasotimes.com; 546-6151. Follow her on Twitter @eptcindyramirez

Follow us on

-
-

Thursday, Nov. 8, 2012 | 10:05 a.m.

Hi, (not you?) | Member Center | Sign Out

Sign In or Register



El Paso 63°

Las Cruces 61°

- Wx Alerts
- Weekend in View
- Neighborhood

Posted: 4:49 p.m. Monday, Oct. 29, 2012

County involvement in Vinton sewer system in jeopardy



KFOX14 News

By Genevieve Curtis

EL PASO COUNTY, Texas — The county faces some new challenges before it can move forward with applying for grants on behalf of the Village of Vinton.

Last Monday, commissioners voted 4-1 to apply for the grants in order to bring sewer to the village, but new requirements from the Texas Water Development Board could put the whole effort in jeopardy.

The county received the information late Friday and because of the Open Meetings Act could not discuss it during the court's meeting Monday night. County commissioners went into recess around 11 a.m. Monday and will resume discussing the issues with Vinton at 5:45 p.m. Monday.

Judge Veronica Escobar said the Texas Water Development Board is requiring two things from the county of El Paso, in order for the county to maintain priority status in its grant application.

The first is a financial commitment of \$500,000.

"The court was not prepared to appropriate a match this quickly. We thought we were just going to submit the grant application and be in the queue, and try and work through things with Vinton and see if things get better," said Escobar.

The second is the county will need to obtain a resolution from the Village of Vinton to allow the county to obtain the funds on their behalf and construct the sewer system.

"I don't know if the court is going to want to appropriate the money, I don't know if the court is going to want to send representatives, including me, to the Vinton city council meeting (Tuesday). Those are two big 'ifs,'" said Escobar.

Escobar explained the TWDB is looking for some assurance from the county after its own storied history with Vinton.

"They have been one of the agencies that have put in innumerable hours and blood sweat and tears trying to get the money to that community and to the families that need it. So I think that they think they don't invest anymore time or energy, and frankly set aside the needs of a different community that would compete for this money, so they want those assurances," said Escobar.

If the county goes forward with the application process, commissioners will also need to decide how they will recuperate the \$500,000 they will shell out for the project.

"The Village of Vinton was going to raise taxes in order to fund this and those taxes would be about 12 bucks a year, a dollar a month, if we would try to recoup the investment, which I'm certain would be the will of the court, that certainly would be my concern the fees that we would access could be up to \$50 a month for the residents. They turned down the opportunity to pay a dollar a month for these services," said Escobar.

Escobar clarified, the county hasn't run any of the numbers and they're not sure how much they will actually charge residents. However, it will more than likely be more costly than the opportunities they had, and squandered.

The county must make their decision in time to apply for the grants by Thursday at noon.

More News

We Recommend

- El Paso attorney accused of conspiring to launder money of drug cartel (kfoxtv.com)
- Police: Man sexually assaults intoxicated woman at party (kfoxtv.com)
- Driver, 19, killed in northeast accident identified (kfoxtv.com)
- KFOX14 reporter arrested after allegedly becoming aggressive with flight crew member (kfoxtv.com)
- Pit bulls set to be euthanized returned to owner (kfoxtv.com)
- El Paso voters excited about their future (kfoxtv.com)

From Around the Web

- 10 Worst Cars of All Time (TheStreet)
- 10 Things You Should Never Buy at Garage Sales (Reader's Digest)
- Kissing Angelina Jolie Was 'Awkward, Sweaty, And Not Very Nice' (StyleBistro)
- Sorry Fellas: Women Who Broke Hearts By Coming Out As Lesbians (Bossip)
- Flesh-Eating Bacteria Kills Killer (Web2Carz)
- Dog Rescues Abandoned Newborn Baby (itsybitsystems)

[?]

Comments

If you would like to post a comment please [Sign in](#) or [Register](#)

Lawsuit accuses 3 Vinton officials of misconduct

By Daniel Borunda \ El Paso Times El Paso Times

Posted:

ElpasoTimes.com

VINTON -- A multimillion-dollar state grant application deadline that would have brought a water and sewer system to this small village went down the drain, in effect, Tuesday night when three members of the Vinton council did not show up to a meeting.

The absence of the three alderwomen -- failing to make a quorum -- was the latest incident that has brought local government to a halt in this hamlet of 2,000 people near the western edge of El Paso County.

The chairs of alderwomen Juvencia Rios-Ontiveros, Martha O. Garcia and Maria Medina were empty, and Mayor Madeleine Praino said the water project that has been planned for four years would not meet the grant application deadline of noon Thursday.

Two Vinton residents feel the situation has gotten so bad that on Tuesday morning they filed a lawsuit asking a state court to remove the three alderwomen from office for actions the lawsuit claims has placed the village on the brink of extinction.

The lawsuit filed in 346th District Court accuses Rios-Ontiveros, Garcia and Medina of misconduct, carelessness and incompetence that have "crippled the ability of the Village of Vinton to operate for the benefit of its citizens and may well cause the Village of Vinton to be dismantled in its entirety."

The 44-page lawsuit by Robert E. Williams and J. Brandy Gardes, who is an assistant U.S. attorney but is acting as a resident in the suit, claims that the three alderwoman act as a political block that have kept the village from passing a budget, approving a tax rate and other government rule violations.

The lawsuit alleges the three women are "absent or by staging a walkout" break the quorum needed for a government meeting of the council, which has a total of six members including the mayor. Gardes declined to comment.

In a letter read at the Vinton meeting, County Judge Veronica Escobar stated that Commissioners Court had decided Monday evening that the county could not support the application because of doubts that the Vinton council could be reliable partners. The county had previously sought to work with local water utilities to bring the water system to Vinton.

"We are very disappointed we could not make this work," Escobar stated. "I find it absolutely shameful that three elected representatives within the Village Council have allowed for this opportunity to fail."

If Vinton had received the grant for the water service, the fee for residents would have been about \$12 a year, Escobar said. Without the grant, the fee would be about \$50 to \$60 a month.

State Rep. Dee Margo, R-El Paso, had been helping Vinton with its grant application to the Texas Water Development Board. Margo said Vinton had its paperwork in order, but the application was moot without the village council's approval.

"I'm depressed," Margo said at the Vinton Village Hall. "I have never seen anything like this. Three

elected representatives fail to show up, and by doing so, they are hurting and punishing the people of Vinton. ... It is beyond any form of rational comprehension."

Why the alderwomen did not show up to the meeting and apparently blocked the application was unclear. Rios-Ontiveros, Garcia and Medina could not be reached for comment Tuesday. There is a political feud between the three women and the mayor.

Rios-Ontiveros, who is up for re-election next year, had previously blamed a lack of transparency, accountability and communication on the village's problems saying that Vinton could not apply for grants and raise taxes without knowing how the money would be spent.

Vinton residents backing the water project said that having safe, clean water was a health issue and that the new water system could bring economic development to the village. Some residents held signs demanding that the three alderwomen resign.

Praino said she was disappointed that the water system application was dead but added she would continue fighting. Praino said she is hopeful that Vinton can apply again in six months to a year but she was not sure. "I'm not that optimistic," she said.

"Basically, what will happen is we go to the bottom of the barrel, so to speak," in the application process, Praino said.

Daniel Borunda may be reached at dborunda@elpasotimes.com; 546-6102. Follow him on Twitter @BorundaDaniel.

"Basically, what will happen is we go to the bottom of the barrel, so to speak."

Madeleine Praino