



OKLAHOMA MUNICIPAL LEAGUE, INC.
***MUNICIPAL POLICY
REVIEW***

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OWRB REGIONAL WATER MEETINGS

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Water issues have become a major issue for Oklahoma municipalities as the OWRB Comprehensive Water Plan marches forward. **Stage two** in the multi-year planning process will begin this week with the first of eleven regional meetings. Water promises to be an extremely busy arena until 2011 when this process is scheduled to end.

Six OWRB Projects. However, this is not all that is happening at OWRB. There are currently six active OWRB projects that have been funded, with an additional nine planned for the future. These go to the heart of determining how much water will be available for major users such as municipalities now and in the future. These studies will be discussed in a future Municipal Policy Review.

Technical Study. In addition to these six projects, a major technical study is underway for OWRB by the engineering firm Camp Dresser & McKee. This detailed technical study will significantly impact both the amount and cost of water going forward. Last fall, at an OWRB sponsored briefing for OML by the project engineers, we discovered the study will measure the effects of both conjunctive use and environmental or instream flows.

In November 2007 we emailed OWRB asking how these terms, new to Oklahoma water law, were being defined. The engineers must have been given some definition in order for them to measure the impact on water availability. Despite repeated requests, no answers have been forthcoming.

In April 2008, the Oklahoma Water Law Group, an association of representatives of major water users, conducted a detailed study and made written comments on the Camp Dresser project. However, OWRB approved the plan as proposed without any of the suggested substantive changes. This group is composed of municipal and agricultural interests, industrials, public utilities, oil and gas and the state chamber. The group, formed at the invitation of OML over a year ago, meets monthly at League offices.

OWRB's Next Step. Beginning this week in Big Cabin, the regional meetings will be held over the next three months in each COG region. Statewide some 350 plus participants will evaluate, consolidate and prioritize the dozens of water issues raised in the 42 regional "listening sessions" held in 2007.

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There are numerous municipal officials who were chosen by OWRB to participate in these meetings. OWRB has released the list of names of the participants by COG district and we are identifying municipal officials. We will be sending informational materials to them prior to their scheduled regional meeting.

Future phases of the planning process have been announced. Stage 3 is set for 2009 as a series of workshops to engage, with the help of experts, participants in formulating recommendations for strategic water resource management. At Stage 4, in the first half of 2010, the Oklahoma Academy for State Goals will sponsor a three-day Town Hall meeting to consider the various Stage 3 workshop recommendations and reach agreement on which should be incorporated into the State's water plan. Finally, in early 2011, Stage 5 will be eleven regional meetings to obtain reactions to the draft water plan as well as suggestions on how the plan should be implemented.

Talking Points of Others. One environmental group has circulated talking points to its members who are participants in the regional meetings. It is one of several organized interests that were not present when the current water law was developed in the 1960's and 1970's. These environmental and recreational interests have worthy concerns that could well impact the amount of water available for current and future water use.

The talking points advocate: (1) An end to groundwater mining with allocations limited by law to a perpetually sustainable amount; (2). Preserving in-stream flows necessary to support a healthy aquatic community by measuring the minimum flow necessary to ensure enough water is left in the stream; (3). Recognizing the interaction between surface and groundwater and regulating the use of groundwater so streams do not run dry; (4). Avoiding large-scale water transfers from one area to another; (5). Ending private groundwater ownership since the water is "too precious a resource to be subject to the whims of private ownership and should be held as a public trust"; and (6). Water conservation education is a key to the public's perceptions so that sound water use practices would reduce the amount of stress that is placed on existing water resources, both by limiting water usage and decreasing wastewater discharges.

Regional Meeting Format. OML's Cheryl Dorrance, a board member of the Water Research Advisory Board, participated in a mock regional meeting last week. In each regional meeting the 30 plus participants will be divided into four issue groups and assigned one of the following topics: (1). Water quality, quantity, conservation & reuse; (2). Water sales & transfers, land management & hazard mitigation & water resource management planning; (3). Water appropriation & uses; (4). Water management agencies.

During the three hour meeting, with the aid of a trained facilitator, each of the four issue groups will consider sub-issues that were consolidated from the 2,500 public comments obtained during the 2007 "listening sessions. The issue group will assign a high or low ranking to each sub-issue and then present its findings to all the participants at that regional meeting.

Interestingly, at the mock regional meeting attended by Cheryl, there was no sub-topic to rank specifically on public water supply. This may be added as a sub-topic but not until the fourth of the eleven regional meetings.

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All meetings are open to the public. However, in the afternoon meeting the public will not be able to actively participate. There will be an evening meeting in which public comments are welcome.

When and Where. The schedule for the Regional Input Meetings, which begin at 3:00 p.m., is: August 7: **Big Cabin** at the GGEDA Cafeteria; August 12: **Elk City** at the Civic Center; August 21: **McAlester** in Room 101 of the S.E. Expo Center; September 11: **Beaver** in the Beaver County Fairgrounds Pavilion; September 18: **Lawton** in the Worley Seminar Center at the Great Plains Technology Center; September 25: **Enid** in Buffalo Room at the Cherokee Strip Conference Center; October 2: **Tishomingo** at Murray State College Student Union Ball Room; October 9: **Tulsa** at the Central Community Center Auditorium; October 23: **Muskogee** in Room D of the Muskogee Civic Center; November 6: **OKC** in the Big Dipper and Carousel Rooms of the Metro Technology Center and November 13: **Seminole** at the Seminole State College Ball Room.