

Expert says recycled water is the way to go

By Andrew Knittle

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— A water expert with the Association of Central Oklahoma Governments said when it comes to water supply options, recycled water -- not brackish or salty water -- is the way to go as the City of Norman looks at ways to meet its future water needs.

Speaking at the third of eight public water forums at City Hall Thursday night, John Harrington, director of ACOG's Water Resources Division, said brackish water -- an object of curiosity for many residents who've attended previous water forums -- is 10 times saltier than sea water. He said existing technology barely can treat sea water in a cost-effective manner, if at all.

"When it comes to brackish water ... that's still fruit way up in the tree," Harrington said, adding that he felt the city should further its recycled water use rather than spend too much time worrying about its saltier counterpart.

The Garber-Wellington Aquifer, which lies beneath Norman and numerous other cities in central Oklahoma, also was discussed at length by Harrington. He said the Oklahoma Legislature recently agreed to fund a study of the aquifer, which he says will end the practice of issuing temporary permits to draw water out of it.

Harrington also addressed the concerns of many owners of private wells -- those used by residences, not municipalities -- saying that aquifers are multi-layered and aren't comparable to lakes or other bodies of water. He said municipalities typically drill much deeper than homeowners.

Tracy Clinton, a water treatment expert with Arizona-based Carollo Engineers, talked about the use of recycled water, saying the practice has been around for nearly 100 years in some parts of the country, including arid regions like southern California and Arizona.

Clinton said she didn't have any clue how much it would cost to build a recycled water treatment plant and related infrastructure for broader use in Norman -- the University of Oklahoma currently uses effluent water from the city's water treatment plant to irrigate part of its golf course -- but said it would be considerably cheaper than some other options.

"It's a lot less than \$400 million," Clinton said, referring to proposed plans to link Norman and other cities in the area to Sardis Lake in southeastern Oklahoma.

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