

LOWER RIO GRANDE CITIZENS FORUM

Wednesday, November 14

3:00 - 5:00 P.M.

USIBWC Conference Room

325 Golf Course Road

Mercedes, TX 78570

***Meeting Notes**

Welcome and Introductions

Tricia Cortez, Citizens Forum Co-Chair asked board members and audience members to introduce themselves.

Overview of McAllen Public Utility and Current Projects, Marco A. Vega, P.E., General Manager, McAllen Public Utility

The McAllen Public Utility (MPU) has an operating budget of \$43 million from water and wastewater appropriations. The Board, comprised of 5 members, is an elected board – the only one in Texas.

The 240 employees work in two divisions, which is further broken down into 12 departments. Its allocation of 40,570-acre feet of raw water supply comes mainly from four irrigation districts. Water usage is roughly 22 million gallons per day (MGD), with a peak of 37-38 MGD in the summer and 16-17 MGD in the winter.

Its water and wastewater system consists of: 770 miles of water distribution, 630 miles of wastewater collection, 54 lift stations, 48,000 accounts and 55,000 connections.

It maintains 1 water treatment plant and 2 wastewater treatment plants, and 6.75 million gallons of elevated storage plus three raw water reservoirs.

Its water treatment plant is being expanded to 53 MGD and total water system capacity = 64 MGD.

Mr. Vega stated that the MPU has the lowest water rate in Texas at \$1.35 per 1,000 gallons. The price goes to a second tier at \$1.45 per 1,000 gallons after 8,000 gallons. He spent time looking at utility rate comparisons showing that with the standard 10,000-gallon consumption for cities with populations over 100,000 – McAllen is the lowest with \$8.45 base + \$1.35 commodity (water) and \$10.50 base + \$1.60 commodity (sewer).

He discussed a list of future projects lined up for the utility agency and discussed a \$56 million upgrade to the South Wastewater Treatment Plant and plans for improvements to the North Wastewater Treatment Plant.

He also discussed at length an innovative “purple pipe” project for reuse water and its unique relationship to serve an upcoming 2,500-acre Tres Lagos master planned community, CalPine energy plant, and McAllen Palmview Golf Course. This will involve selling Type 1 Recycled water (the highest standards in the state) for residential and commercial irrigation – the first of its kind in South Texas. The return on investment will be five to six years by selling discounted

water at \$1.08 per 1,000 gallons. This summer they plan to sell 500,000 gallons per day and next summer increase that to 1 MGD.

Other future projects involve water and sewer lines, smart meters, civic center utility improvements and water rights acquisition.

He also discussed some of his agency's community giving and water education projects.

Hidalgo County Drainage District No.1 Mission and Current Challenges, Raul E. Sesin, P.E., CFM, General Manager, Hidalgo County Floodplain Manager

Mr. Sesin discussed the Hidalgo County Drainage District mission to allow for the efficient exportation of drainage water to protect life and property.

The Board is comprised of the county judge and four commissioners. It maintains a drainage system of 554 miles of open ditches and manages 25 IBWC floodway gates. It's also planning on the construction of 81 more miles of ditches and serves 89% of the populated area of Hidalgo County.

Mr. Sesin reviewed how water is moved out of Hidalgo County – which includes northward and out toward the Arroyo Colorado. The Watershed Protection Plan includes three directions for the runoff:

1. Raymondville Drain
2. Hidalgo Drain
3. IBWC Waterway and river (Rio Grande).

Mr. Sesin gave an overview of the Drainage District's staffing (132 Maintenance & Operations Employees, 5 temporary Maintenance & Operations employees, 33 administration employees, and 2 student engineer assistants. He's responsible for a fleet of 73 pickup trucks, 12 dump trucks, two haul trucks, 42 shredders and 41 pieces of heavy equipment.

Mr. Sesin reviewed the control structure of an IBWC floodgate (Panchitas Structure) and reviewed multiple flood mitigation projects. Examples included the South Main Drain I & Alamo Lateral Drain (to double capacity); the Mercedes Lateral Drain (to double capacity), and the Raymondville Drain (new construction) & Delta Region Water Management project.

He would like to consider the possibility of selling water but challenges include Total Dissolved Solids (TDS) due to high salinity from irrigation districts.

Mr. Sesin discussed the \$93 million plan and goals for the Delta Region Water Management project which includes excavating a reservoir (phase I) and a 225-acre flood control facility and re-use project.

He highlighted the community's approval of the November 2018 \$190 million drainage bond election, which will call for a 3-cent property tax increase per \$100 valuation. The proposed improvements for this bond improvement call for 535 acres of regional detention facilities, 100 miles of new and existing drainage improvements, and additional structures at the IBWC floodway. The bond program came about, in part, due to record rainfalls in Hidalgo County in June 2018 that came in second to Hurricane Beulah in 1967.

He also reviewed struggles with illegal dumping, especially discarded tires, and highlighted a TWC study from 2008 which showed that there will be a water shortage for the Hidalgo County area in the next 50 years.

Public Comment & Board Discussion

There was very little public comments and questions after the two presentations.

Suggested Future Agenda Items

Board members request February 2019 presentation topics to focus on the proposed Border Wall, namely: current plans, treaty implications, and wider floodplain impacts.

5:00 MEETING ADJOURNMENT

The next meeting will be February 13 at 3:00 p.m. at USIBWC Mercedes Field Office. Melisa Gonzales will serve as co-chair.

**Meeting notes are tentative and summarize in draft the contents and discussion of Citizens Forum Meetings. While these notes are intended to provide a general overview of Citizens Forum Meetings, they may not necessarily be accurate or complete, and may not be representative of USIBWC policy or positions.