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## City looks to buy first installment of easements for water pipeline

**By Cindy Barks**

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PRESCOTT - More than a year after initial letters went out to property owners along the Big Chino water pipeline route, the [City of Prescott](#) is poised to buy 20 necessary easements.

In addition, Big Chino Project Manager Jim Holt told the [Prescott City Council](#) this week that another 10 to 15 easements should be ready for council review by January.

He maintains that the purchases indicate that the city is "moving forward, definitely" with its plans to build a 30-mile pipeline from the Big Chino Water Ranch northwest of Paulden to the tri-city area.

Even so, Holt allowed that some owners have balked at the prospect of selling the city the right to cross their land for pipeline construction and maintenance.

"There is a percentage of property owners who are not real interested," Holt told the City Council this week. "We're setting those aside."

Indeed, the easements under consideration this week represent a relatively small percentage of the total 128 easements that Prescott and its partner Prescott Valley need to proceed with the pipeline.

In October 2007, letters went out, notifying the owners along the identified pipeline route that an easement was necessary.

After that, consultants began negotiating with the owners for purchase of the easements.

While Holt said he earlier hoped that the easement acquisitions would be further along by now, he noted that the city opted to wait to start the easement purchases until after the Arizona Department of Water Resources made its determination on the city's application for a modification of its assured water supply.

ADWR released that determination in mid-November, announcing that the city was entitled to about 8,000 acre-feet of groundwater annually from the Big Chino Water Ranch.

Holt said that determination increased the city's "level of comfort" about proceeding with the easement acquisitions.

But Councilman Robert Luzius questioned the decision to move forward now - especially in light of uncertainty about the Salt River Project's reaction to the ADWR decision.

"My understanding was that we were going to sit back a little," Luzius said, adding that with "SRP looming over our shoulder, this whole thing could go into litigation."

The council also heard objections from Joanne Oellers of the Center for Biological Diversity, who urged the city to come up with a comprehensive plan for dealing with adverse effects to the Verde River before breaking ground on the pipeline.

At a combined cost of about \$72,740, the 20 easement purchases will be under consideration at the council voting session on Tuesday.

Prior to that vote, Luzius asked Holt to provide a full accounting of how much the city has spent so far on the Big Chino Ranch project, including employee salaries.

Contact the reporter at [cbarks@prescottaz.com](mailto:cbarks@prescottaz.com)

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