

Feb. 08

Hello:

We seem to have only one wise
person on the City Council here in
Moscow, Idaho. See enclosed
article.

We residents of the Town keep
getting cost increased in water cost.
and we frequently ask not to water
our grass & flowers because of low
water bills.

Question is why is our Council
giving free water to a business in
Washington State.

Can you & will you help.

Sincerely,
Kathryn L. Soper

OPINION

Friday, February 15, 2008 ■ Moscow-Pullman Daily News

HIS VIEW

Why I oppose selling Moscow's water

On Feb. 4, I was the only member of the Moscow City Council to vote against the mediated settlement between the city and the Hawkins Companies, a Boise developer that wants to build a shopping center in rural Whitman County just west of Moscow. I owe Moscow residents an explanation for my dissenting vote.

I first learned of the settlement the previous Thursday but was unable to discuss it with anyone outside the council because of the confidentiality agreement. But it was clear to me at first glance that this agreement was not in Moscow's long-term best interests. This possible gain was too small given the large policy changes that were about to be made with no citizen input.

Moscow's appeals of the Washington Department of Ecology's water right transfers to Hawkins were about protecting the groundwater resources of the Palouse. In approving the settlement, the council majority not only dropped the appeals, it created an unprecedented public policy of selling water and sewer services across the state line. The city should not make such a significant policy move without advance public discussion. This reason alone should have stopped consideration of the agreement at the Feb. 4 meeting.

In addition, I am not convinced that it is legal for an Idaho city to sell water to a private entity in another state. The proponents provided no evidence of any benefit to Moscow, other than the small amount of money in water fees. We cannot collect



Tom Lamar

taxes from the development, nor can we annex it, yet this decision might leave Whitman County and/or Hawkins millions of dollars in utility development costs. Why should Moscow give up its precious resource to benefit another county and a private company?

I have not seen a retail study showing that a retail development of this size — 714,000 square feet is needed or justified. If it is such a development should be in Moscow — so our residents can control the development to fit our community.

Instead, by subsidizing Hawkins' water and sewer costs, this agreement gives the company an opportunity to undercut retail rents next door at the Palouse Mall. This decision will subject existing Moscow businesses — many of them locally owned — to unfair competition.

Locating a giant shopping center in an unincorporated area is poor community planning. It runs contrary to Moscow's comprehensive plan. It will likely promote additional sprawl, and increase the costs of services that will be required by Whitman County. It will be more difficult for Moscow residents to reach via walking, biking or bus than our current shopping choices. Moscow residents who work in Pullman likely will face longer commute times.

I am also greatly concerned by the amount of water that Moscow has agreed to

sell: 45 acre-feet now (over 14.6 million gallons), plus an additional 90 acre-feet of this water for irrigation use, until some terminated future date when this water in the aquifer can be replaced with reclaimed water. How will this long-term commitment of water affect the future ability of Moscow businesses to grow? Or our ability to start new businesses?

Like many legal documents, the settlement agreement declares "time is of the essence" but gives no justification for the rush. To me, the needs for our residents to understand, digest and support such a policy shift — facilitating a shopping center in another county and state — is more important than the impetuosity of one Boise developer. We were elected to serve the people of Moscow, not residents of Whitman County or a private developer 300 miles away.

For these reasons when this agreement came to the City Council, I moved to delay a decision until we had the opportunity to discuss it publicly. My motion died for a second.

What happens next? The Idaho Department of Water Resources will either request from the city of Moscow to the sale of this water. This permit process is public: one I urge residents to send comments to IDWR.

I'd like to thank the many residents who have contacted me since Feb. 4 thank for my opposing vote.

Tom Lamar is a member of the Moscow City Council.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Moscow water deal is a scandal

Hawkins development, a 714,000-square-foot mall proposed in Washington near the Palouse Mall, was granted up to 85 acre-feet of water and sewerage services by Moscow, a contract that lasts forever. This out-of-state development, a direct competitor with Moscow, was given up to a 14 million subsidy by the taxpayers of Moscow. Hawkins is not obligated to pay bonds for upgrades to our infrastructure, like Moscow taxpayers. This gives Hawkins an unfair, competitive advantage. They get to use our services, but don't have to pay for upkeep.

Hawkins is responsible for selling the water it gets to its end-users, meaning they potentially could profit from the water we sell them. Why did the City Council agree to providing sewer services? How does that fit in with the water-rights appeal? They agreed to this corporate welfare because they wanted to be able to have some control over the water.

Unfortunately, the agreement does not prevent Hawkins from applying for water rights and drilling wells. Probably, those water rights will be used by other developers in the corridor, meaning the council gave Moscow away, without getting much back. They opened the door to develop the corridor in full force, starting by the border. Meaning, those businesses are competing with Moscow even more. And they were given an unfair advantage by our council, expecting you and I to subsidize their growth. Home Depot pulled out of building in Moscow because they determined they couldn't profit. Hawkins may cost up to \$100 million to build. That's money they hope to make back, and more, leaching off Moscow. And they cut this deal behind closed doors, signing secret documents, and not letting the public see it until after they passed it. What a scandal!

Garrett Clevenger
Moscow

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Help your own town first

The Moscow City Council recently approved a secret scheme to provide Moscow water and sewerage service to a wealthy developer's retail shopping center in another state, using Moscow's taxpayer-built infrastructure to do so. Reportedly, a Lowe's lumber and building supply store will be the new center's chief business.

It's no surprise then that about a week later, Home Depot — chief competitor of Lowe's — revealed that it now would not build a store in Moscow. They did not request or need the kind of subsidy Moscow is providing. Whitman County retailing, Home Depot's store would have been in Moscow (within sight of Lowe's) and would have paid into local tax coffers hundreds of thousands of dollars each year in sales, property, and income taxes to Moscow and the state of Idaho. All this is now revenue lost to our town. Also lost is land rental revenue that would have gone to UI, an institution that badly needs every cent that it can get.

Thank you, Moscow City Council, for stabbing your hometown's economy in the back. Whitman County is proud of you, and the rich land developers of the region are especially grateful to you. Those who also

think that local government's work is best done in secret are particularly happy.

Just one council member voted to oppose this rush to subsidize out-of-state retail development — Tom Lamar. Lamar appears to believe that one of the proper jobs of the Moscow City Council is to support Moscow's economy, instead of trying to kill it off to help the poor folks of the state of Washington. What a novel idea: actually helping out your own town first.

Meanwhile, here's the City Council's message to Moscow business owners: drop dead.

Dennis Baird
Moscow

involved to make the amount of the request the very best for the district — the taxpayers. The board and administration of the Pullman School District is thoughtful in spending the public's money. The quality of district programs is excellent and local support through the levy is to that excellence.

The M&O levy is always a replace levy, it is not added onto the current. The support of district patrons has been very strong and very much appreciated. It truly is an advantage for our district.

I encourage all to find those mailboxes and get them in the mail by Tuesday with a "yes" vote on this important issue.

Claudia P

Water down the drain

Here is the letter I have written to members of the Moscow City Council.

Our most precious resource going the drains of public toilets at an out-of-state retail complex? What were you thinking?

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I first learned of the settlement the previous Thursday but was unable to discuss it with anyone outside the council because of the confidentiality agreement. But it was clear to me at first glance that this agreement was not in Moscow's long-term best interests. The possible gains were too small given the large policy changes that were about to be made with no citizen input.

Moscow's appeals of the Washington Department of Ecology's water right transfers to Hawkins were about protecting the groundwater resources of the Palouse. In approving the settlement, the council majority not only dropped the appeals, it created an unprecedented public policy of selling water and sewer services across the state line. The city should not make such a significant policy move without advance public discussion. This reason alone should have stopped consideration of the agreement at the Feb. 4 meeting.

In addition, I am not convinced that it is legal for an Idaho city to sell water to a private entity in another state. The proponents provided no evidence of any benefit to Moscow, other than the small amount of money in water fees. We cannot collect

taxes from the development, nor can we annex it, yet this decision might save Whitman County and/or Hawkins millions of dollars in utility development costs. Why should Moscow give up its precious resource to benefit another county and a private company?

I have not seen a retail study showing that a retail development of this size

— 714,000 square feet is needed or justified. If it is, such a development should be in Moscow — so our residents can control the development to fit our community.

Instead, by subsidizing Hawkins' water and sewer costs, this agreement gives the company an opportunity to undercut retail rents next door at the Palouse Mall. This decision will subject existing Moscow businesses — many of them locally owned — to unfair competition.

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I am also greatly concerned by the amount of water that Moscow has agreed to

sell: 45 acre-feet now (over 100 million gallons), plus an additional 20 acre-feet for irrigation use, a terminated future date when the aquifer can be replaced with surface water. How will this long-term loss of water affect the future ability of businesses to grow? Or our ability to start new businesses?

Like many legal documents, the settlement agreement declares "findings of fact" but gives no justification for the rush. To me, the needs for our community to understand, digest and support a policy shift — facilitating a shift in another county and state — are more important than the impatience of our opponents. We were elected to serve the people of Moscow, not residents of Whitman County or a private developer 300 miles away.

For these reasons when the settlement came to the City Council, I requested a decision until we had the opportunity to discuss it publicly. My motion was seconded.

What happens next? The Washington Department of Water Resources is reviewing a request from the city of Moscow for the sale of this water. This is a public one. I urge residents to contact IDWR.

I'd like to thank the many people who have contacted me since Feb. 4 for my opposing vote.

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The M&O levy is always a levy, it is not added onto the tax. The support of district programs has been very strong and very much appreciated. It truly is an advantage to the district.

I encourage all to find the best way to get them in the mail with a "yes" vote on this issue.

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Our most precious resource is the drains of public toilets and sinks. What are we doing?

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Claudia Peavy
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Moscow

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