

City OKs lobbyist in water issue

September 30, 2018

Messer, assistant to be paid combined \$15,500 per month

Kimberly Rubio

Assistant editor

Uvalde City Council on Tuesday night authorized city staff to enter into a consulting services agreement with Bill Messer PC of Austin to serve as a lobbyist as part of ongoing litigation involving the Edwards Aquifer Authority.

The action was taken after council reconvened from closed session.

Uvalde County Underground Water Conservation District and Uvalde County are also listed as clients in the agreement.

According to the contract, Messer will also enlist the assistance of Ron Lewis, a governmental affairs consultant with Ron Lewis and Associates.

According to the agreement, Messer and Lewis will assist clients in developing legislation to resolve ongoing litigation with the Edwards Aquifer Authority.

Messer will be paid \$8,000 per month for his services, while Lewis will be paid \$7,500 per month. Of those amounts, 50 percent will be the responsibility of the water district, while 25 percent will be paid by the city and county each. The agreement will take effect on Oct. 1, 2018, and remain in effect until June 30, 2019.

History

The city of Uvalde joined the Uvalde County Underground Water Conservation District and George and Carolyn Ligocky in a lawsuit against the Edwards Aquifer Authority.

The lawsuit aims to force the EAA to backtrack on a recent rule change that allows outside interests to pump 100 percent of a landowner's water elsewhere.

The lawsuit says the rules are unsupported by state law and violate the Texas Legislature's longstanding mandate that a landowner may sell 50 percent of his or her water but the other 50 percent must remain with the land.

According to UCUWCD general manager Vic Hilderbran, the rule amendment – which was approved Dec. 12 by the EAA – will greatly diminish Uvalde County's economy within 30 years.

EAA representatives maintain that the ability to transfer 100 percent of water usage rights has been possible for the last 17 years given the appropriate scenario.

The original suit was filed Jan. 16, and the city joined the plaintiffs as an intervener on Feb. 2.

The suit asks the court to permanently enjoin the EAA from their rule change, and if UCUWCD and other plaintiffs prevail, the move would protect Uvalde County residents' water from being pumped out of the area for use in other regions of the state.

UPD phone

Council approved a proposal by city staff to replace the phone system at the Uvalde Police Department at a cost of \$19,704, plus \$431 per month.

According to director of city planning Susan Anderson, many individuals seeking 911 services mistakenly phone the department's non-emergency line, which was installed nearly 18 years ago and does not allow for caller ID.

In addition, Anderson said dispatchers cannot record calls.
