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# Tarpon Springs looks to produce its own drinking water by late 2011

BY MARK SCHANTZ

THE SUNCOAST NEWS

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TARPON SPRINGS - Public Services staff members that have worked eight years on plans to build the city's reverse osmosis water treatment plant can almost hear the rushing of fresh water that will be produced by the \$45 million facility.

At Tuesday night's City Commission meeting they noted they will actually have to wait slightly more than a year before plans come to fruition.

Project manager Bob Robertson said only a Southwest Florida Water Management permit stands in the way of construction of the plant, north of the Anclote River. This is one of the toughest permits to acquire, Robertson said. For several months the city has been working with SWFWMD officials to resolve the agency's concerns over mitigation. Robertson said he hopes the latest information given to the agency will resolve all issues. Several years ago, SWFWMD pledged slightly more than \$20 million for design and construction of the plant.

The city already acquired permits to build the plant and discharge brackish water into the Gulf of Mexico, in a canal also used by Progress Energy's Anclote River power plant. Once the SWFWMD permit is secured, about five pre-qualified bidders will be considered to construct the plant.

The city could produce its own fresh water by the end of 2011, Robertson said. Tarpon Springs currently buys most of its water from the county, with a small percentage of water produced from its own wells. Local officials have long hoped for the city to produce all its drinking water to reduce rising costs of purchasing the commodity. In 2006 a referendum found 72 percent of residents approved of the city producing its own supply.

Robertson said test samples proved the city can produce its own fresh water from brackish well water through reverse osmosis that would be equal to bottled water in quality. The city uses about 3.5 million gallons of water each day. The plant will be able to produce 5 million gallons a day.

Commissioner Robin Saenger asked if solar power can be integrated in plant operations. Robertson said due to cost constraints solar power was not included in the current design but that it could be considered in the future.

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About 15 deep-water wells drilled to depths of 100 to 150 feet are needed to supply the treatment plant with an estimated 4.2 million gallons of brackish water each day to be turned into fresh water through a series of membranes. The city is looking to operate up to 22 wells, so as not to over-pump wells and to provide backup.

All wells would be located within the city and not in unincorporated areas of the county.

The city will also have a 5 million gallon storage tank which will provide a day and a half of water in reserve.

The city also plans to keep its four connections with the county in case of emergency, he said.

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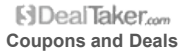
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