

BASTROP: Beal's comments to Austin continue to stir waters

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Debbie Moore Special to the Bastrop Advertiser

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The Feb. 24 Bastrop City Council meeting began with some fireworks centered around Councilman Joe Beal's recent comments to the Austin City Council.

In a Feb. 9 meeting with Mayor Steve Adler and other Austin officials, Beal encouraged the city of Austin to look toward Bastrop and Lee counties as sources of inexpensive water. Beal said that during the almost two-hour meeting with Austin officials, he was one of four people asked to participate in the part of the session that encouraged "thought-provoking comments" regarding water. Beal introduced himself at the meeting as a civil engineer, a former manager of the Lower Colorado River Authority, and a member of the Bastrop City Council.

Bastrop resident Mary Liz Singleton took exception with Beal's meeting with Austin officials, and she told the Bastrop City Council how she felt in a prepared statement during the Citizens Comments item on the night's agenda.



Bastrop City Council member Joe Beal

In particular, Singleton took exception to Beal's use of the pronoun "we" when speaking about the steps Austin should take to alleviate its dwindling water sources. She read from a transcript of his comments that stated: "We're fortunate there is an abundant supply of water under Bastrop and Lee counties that is available to us. I've done the numbers. It can be brought in here pretty cheaply, but we have to act quickly. I would say to you that we need a call to action today, and let's figure out what we're going to do for these additional supplies that I believe are needed."

Singleton also questioned whether Beal's concern was of a "private interest in creating a new water supply for the region."

She went on to ask the Council: "Specifically, are you brokering water, or perhaps helping someone like the LCRA or your Boy Scouts group work with Austin to buy our water?"

"It is my understanding that the Council is asking the water board to grant permission to dig deep wells to supply water for the city of Bastrop," Singleton said, referring to the Lost Pines Groundwater Conservation Board that must permit all but private water wells. "How can we possibly show a need for new wells at the same time Councilman Joe Beal is eagerly offering to sell our water to Austin?"

Mayor Ken Kesselus stopped Singleton in the middle of her next sentence when she described Beal's appearance as a

“stunt.” Kesselus took exception to that characterization and said that if she would use another word, he would be happy to hear the rest of her statement.

Singleton obliged.

“In conclusion, I would like to ask Mr. Beal if actions like this were worth your reputation, or did you just think no one would find out about it?” she said.

Singleton closed by urging the Council to adopt a resolution “assuring Bastrop citizens that you do not support any efforts to sell Bastrop County water to any entity.”

State law prohibits Council members from discussing any Citizens Comments because they are unknown and could not be posted 72 hours in advance of a meeting.

Kesselus then read a prepared statement from Beal, who was not able to attend the meeting. In the statement, the councilman reiterated a number of points previously reported in the Feb. 21 edition of The Bastrop Advertiser.

The statement summarized Beal’s remarks to the Austin City Council as follows:

“Cities upstream of Bastrop utilize water from a single source – the Highland Lakes on the Colorado River (Austin and much of Williamson County are the major users.).

“While Austin and the Central Texas region has and continues to experience massive population growth and a booming economy, it is a fact that this single source of water is dwindling.

“The LCRA [Lower Colorado River Authority] has issued statement after statement warning that this water system is experiencing tremendous stress and is reaching unprecedentedly low levels.

“Austin needs to diversify its water supply now for the benefit of the region.”

Beal also included a Feb. 18 release from LCRA which states in part, “the drought gripping the Highland Lakes is now the most severe drought the region has experienced since construction of the lakes began in the 1930

Beal’s statement concluded: “So the issue we all face today is not whether communities in Central Texas (and around the state for that matter) need to develop additional water resources, but rather where, when and at what cost. Urban areas are going to get the water they need one way or the other, and I think it is critically important for our community to be a proactive part of this discussion or we could be left behind.”