

Commissioners change water policy

By Billy Ball
Dec 05, 2008

Monroe

The new Union County Board of Commissioners began overhauling the county's controversial water allocation policy Thursday, calling for two days of lawn watering per week for Union County customers.

Union County's water plan, which divvied up the county's 20 million gallons per day of capacity among competing projects and current residents, included one day of watering each week for locals.

Board of Commissioners Chairman Lanny Openshaw said residents deserve first use before officials decide how much is available for developers.

"We should establish a baseline for our general public," he said. "Two days a week watering is what I consider the minimum, minus the drought situation."

Thursday's actions continue commissioners' pattern of rapidly overturning decisions of the previous Board of Commissioners, which approved the policy in October.

New commissioners Tracy Kuehler and Kim Rogers sat through hours of review on the plan Thursday, after opining that the policy is flawed.

Openshaw said the county needs the goodwill of its water customers, who carry the burden of the county enterprise fund, which pays for capital improvements to the county's strained water system. The county implemented water restrictions during last year's drought, after demand from Union County customers exceeded the county's capacity.

But some developers who have been guaranteed water are unable to proceed with projects in the current financial downturn, Openshaw said.

"We're looking for a system that's fair that will allow some possibility or some potentiality of getting some new customers in there," he said.

Many concerned developers attended parts of Thursday's meeting, but declined to comment before the board went into a long closed session to consider the legal implications of the plan.

Openshaw said county staff will present estimates in an upcoming meeting on what will be left for builders after the new watering restrictions take effect.



Crew members work on an elevated water storage tank being constructed off Rocky River Road Thursday.

The panel's next scheduled session is 7 p.m. on Dec. 15 in the Union County Government Center.

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