

Mineral springs hot topic of discussion at work session

By Anthony Welch

All in attendance at the Manitou City Council work session Tuesday night were in agreement that the mineral springs are a vital part of the city.

Questions still lingered, however, as to who should be responsible for the springs' maintenance and how sustainable funding for that maintenance can be created.

Mineral Springs Foundation (MSF) President Dave Wolverton and foundation member Terry Sharpton were on hand to discuss implementing some of the recommendations from environmental consultants John Shomaker and Associates and the mineral springs aquifer study.

Those recommendations include revising the foundation's current monitoring program for the aquifer. Proposed revisions call for continued tracking of changes and health of the aquifer system. The tracking of collection of data comes with a price tag of \$3,000 a year.

Mayor Marc Snyder cited that money would come from the mineral pool development fund, which sits at a balance of \$24,000. Snyder said that fund and money from the Conservation Trust Fund could go towards future maintenance of the springs, but it would only last for so long.

The city used to have primary responsibility for maintaining the springs, but under an agreement

signed in March 2009, the foundation provides \$8,000 a year for maintenance, with the city matching that amount. However, the foundation recently had to nix its end of that agreement, not being able to afford the \$8,000 a year.

Questions were asked regarding how important frequent monitoring of the aquifer was. Wolverton said the data collected deemed it crucial. It also provided insurance for the city, as well as resource protection.

"For example, if someone was excavating and punched a hole in the system, we'd be able to measure the affects that the hole had," Wolverton said.

Talk turned to having a possible groundwater management district that would regulate and protect the aquifer. The foundation presented the idea at a Council work session back in April. Because a district would raise money through taxation, it would have to be approved by the voters.

"This would be a focused entity, with some funding that would focus on this resource," Wolverton said.

Snyder said, thus far, taxpayers haven't had to help pay for the mineral springs maintenance. However, Council could put together a ballot measure for the November 2012 election.

"If we're going to maintain the springs, we're going to have to find a way to fund it," he said.

Wolverton said a management district would be the way to go, because the foundation sees some big projects ahead, including a complete overhaul of the Seven-Minute Spring.

Councilman Matt Carpenter said he was always under the impression that donations and money the MSF raised went toward maintenance. Snyder said money went toward maintaining the organization.

Sharpton added that the foundation used funds for promotion and creation of brochures about the mineral springs. While the foundation was not out of the maintenance business, maintenance wasn't a part of the foundation's original mission, Sharpton said.

"I always thought that's what (MSF) did," Carpenter said of the foundation and maintenance of the springs. "That's kind of what the perception has been. I think maintaining them is more important than promoting them."

Councilwoman Coreen Toll felt the city should take on maintenance of the springs.

"It's the city's responsibility, not four volunteers," she said. "The citizens of Manitou Springs are really behind developing the springs. We've got the support of the community."

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