

It's not easy being green

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Eddie Liebold proposes a cutting edge community to county commissioners, who are not so easily swayed from the traditional system.

Reaching for the sky with an empty cup in hand, innovators claim to have discovered an alternative method of water collection just as successful, if not more so, than pulling it from the earth.

"We do not want to poke any more holes in the ground," Eddie Liebold told commissioners during their Nov. 8 regular session.

Inspired to go green, Liebold sought commissioners' input regarding a new subdivision on FM 1283 that subsists on rain harvesting solely for its water supply. He proposed roughly 85 two-to-five-acre home sites and an 18-hole golf course that would each support a 40 to 50-thousand-gallon underground tank filled by rain, dew and other naturally occurring water fall. The system, Liebold said, is designed to maintain a home's water supply in the event of a drought without depleting groundwater.

Claiming the harvesting a viable alternative to drilling wells, Bryon Moseley, owner of Rain Catchment Systems, Inc., of Utopia, compared the proposed project to a subdivision in Travis County. Moseley said commissioners there approved the subdivision and it is reportedly thriving on rain water catchment without a central water system or individually drilled wells.

Moseley said that there are, on average, between 95 and 100 days between rainfalls. The main focus for the proposed Lakehills community is to design the storage units to exceed 120 days without rain.

Citing the last major drought of the 1950s, a reported 12 inches of rain was accumulated over a large period of time. Moseley said a 20,000-gallon storage tank would sustain a family of six through a drought similar in severity. Each house in the new community Liebold proposed would have, at a minimum, a 40,000-gallon storage unit, as well as an independent filtering system for potable water.

Not built for everyone, the subdivision would only appeal to a specific type of consumer. Those who enjoy a 20-minute shower, for example, would not be the kind of homeowner targeted. Liebold said that the project would cater to conservative people who want to live in a green community.

Home sites would begin at around \$500,000, and deed restrictions would require a minimum roof square footage to ensure adequate water catchment.

A 3,500 square foot roof would collect over 20 gallons of water from a morning mist, Moseley said, who is also researching other sources to regenerate, such as air conditioning condensation and recycled septic water.

Concerned about fire protection, Fire Marshal Ralph Dresser suggested that each home also be equipped with a sprinkler system, which could reduce the amount of water needed to extinguish a fire by thousands of gallons. Liebold said that other alternatives being explored for fire protection include tapping into a water system, drilling a well or using lake water.

Although deed restrictions would stipulate that any additional water needs not met by harvesting would be at the homeowner's expense, County Engineer Ray Rendon was extremely uncomfortable proceeding with approving a preliminary plat without, at the least, a water availability study.

"You need water availability no matter what," Rendon said. "People will come to the county [if there is no water] because the county approved the plat. The county does not have the authority to enforce deed restrictions."

Commissioners resounded agreement with Rendon.

"We are on the edge of a desert here," Pct. 4 Commissioner Doug King said.

King added that he loved the idea of water catchment and aspires to build a home based on that premise, but that he believes a well backup is essential.

"I think y'all are on the cutting edge, I applaud this," Pct. 2 Commissioner Bruce Elikor said. "But I'm scared to say, 'yea, this is fine.' We still need to ensure that there is ground water available."

Moseley said that the availability study is an excess cost, however Elikor argued that the money spent would be recuperated with the sale of the homes. He said that the court would keep an open mind, but more data was needed before any decisions could be made.

"Use your system," Rendon said. "But you have to have your water availability study."

For more information on rain catchment systems, go to www.catchrainwater.com.