Comments for SA City Council – Vista Ridge 10-1-14

I am speaking for the Greater Edwards Aquifer Alliance, which counts 15 member groups in San Antonio: Alamo Group of the Sierra Club, AGUA, Bexar Audubon Society, Bexar Green Party, First Universalist Unitarian Church of San Antonio, Friends of Government Canyon, the Headwaters Coalition, Native Plant Society of San Antonio, Northwest Interstate Coalition of Neighborhoods, San Antonio Audubon Society, San Antonio Conservation Society, Scenic Loop/Boerne Stage Alliance, Solar San Antonio, Sisters of the Divine Providence, and Wildlife Rescue and Rehabilitation.

Our motto is not on our water, not with our money. GEAA groups are very concerned that these new water supplies will be used almost exclusively to support high density development in the areas that supply us with our main source of water.

The 51 member groups of the Alliance have unanimously agreed to oppose the Vista Ridge Pipeline since SAWS refuses to amend their CCN, which is the area where they are required to provide service, to exclude portions of the Edwards Aquifer Recharge Zone and Contributing Zone in northeast Bexar County, extending well into Comal County. If SAWS does not supply water and sewer service to this largely undeveloped area, development would most likely be restricted to 2 to five acre homesteads, which are consistent with the current land use patterns and recommended impervious cover limits. We would like to present a more comprehensive look at this issue, to include maps of the areas in question, if you provide the opportunity.

While we are supportive of SAWS goal of reducing dependence on the Edwards Aquifer, we question whether this is the right project to achieve that goal.

SAWS states that this is a regional approach to addressing water needs of communities along the IH 35 corridor. They have mentioned issuing short term contracts to supply water to Spring Branch, Wimberley, Dripping Springs, San Marcos, and Blanco. All of these communities are within the Edwards and Trinity watersheds, where high density development will have a negative impact on these aquifers. Given that GEAA is a regional Alliance, with member groups in all the aforementioned areas, we would also like to see a regional approach that takes in the impacts to these communities and to our groundwater supplies.

GEAA is not anti growth. We realize that San Antonio will grow, and we appreciate SAWS and your efforts to plan for adequate water supplies. We also realize that the allocation of additional water supplies will dictate how our city grows. It is alarming that we have heard not one mention of supplying water from this project to communities to the south and east of San Antonio - that are not located over our sensitive karst watersheds.

Should you favor approval of the contract, you have the opportunity, which we hope you would consider, to attach caveats to your approval of the contract. For example, you could require SAWS to amend the aforementioned portion of their CCN and require the application of San Antonio water quality ordinances to developments in other cities, such as Helotes, with the issuance of SAWS service contracts. We would be happy to work with you to devise such caveats that would address some of the concerns of our member groups.

Please consider GEAA as a resource that is at your disposal as you deliberate on the Vista Ridge Contract. We look forward to working with you on this, and other issues.