To: The Honorable Mayor and Members of Council

GEAA statement to Item #5 Regarding Disposition of Sales Taxes 8-13-2020

These comments are submitted on behalf of the Greater Edwards Aquifer Alliance and our 15 San Antonio member groups. (highlighted).

Although it is not the main topic for discussion for this agenda item, you are considering permanently retiring two highly popular programs. The Edwards Aquifer Protection Program is internationally recognized as a successful model of watershed protection. It was awarded the City of San Antonio’s Sustainability Award for 2020. The Greenway Trails are widely used for transportation and outdoor recreation while protecting San Antonio’s riparian areas. As of today, no source of future funding has been secured to continue these programs at their current levels.

GEAA has a very strict process for taking positions on issues because all GEAA positions require 100% consensus of the member groups. In January of 2019, when the prospect of shifting the sales tax funding first came up, our San Antonio member groups were asked to review the ConnectSA plan prior to meeting so that we could make an informed decision. We also consulted a transportation expert to look at the ConnectSA plan and consulted the Edwards Aquifer Protection Program (EAPP) Scientific Evaluation Team to determine need for continuing the EAPP. During the subsequent discussion, folks very thoughtfully weighed the merits of the EAPP and Greenway Trails program against ConnectSA. After discussions with their boards and members, the groups agreed that the sales tax should not be shifted to ConnectSA. As for workforce development, no one even asked for our opinion.

We regret that you did not make the same effort to consider the merits of all programs as carefully as did the GEAA groups. There was a short staff presentation on the current status of the EAPP and Greenway Trails programs at a Community Health and Equity Committee meeting. However, you all have never had a presentation by experts that discusses their findings on the need for continuing the EAPP in order to adequately protect San Antonio’s Edwards Aquifer water supply. We requested a B Session briefing by Dr. Ronald Green, hydrogeologist and member of the EAPP Scientific Evaluation Team (SET) and the National Cave and Karst Research Institute to present the recommendations of the SET. This would have provided scientific opinion to counter various statements that were being bandied about averring that the EAPP is no longer needed. Frankly, we can tell from the way you consider requests for rezoning over the Edwards Aquifer Recharge Zone that you all do not understand the fragility and need to protect San Antonio’s primary source of water.

We are grateful that Mayor Nirenberg met with us multiple times to discuss continuing the EAPP without the sales tax. After each discussion, however, the GEAA member groups considered the various proposals for alternative sources of

Member Organizations

Alamo, Austin, and Lone Star chapters of the Sierra Club
Bexar Audubon Society
Bexar Green Party
Bexar Grotto
Boerne Together
Bulverde Neighborhood Alliance
Cibolo Nature Center
Citizens for the Protection of Cibolo Creek
Comal County Conservation Alliance
Environment Texas
First Universalist Unitarian Church of San Antonio
Friends of Canyon Lake
Friends of Dry Comal Creek
Friends of Government Canyon
Fuerza Unida
Green Party of Austin
Green Society of UTSA
Guadalupe River Road Alliance
Guardians of Lick Creek
Headwaters at Incarnate Word
Helotes Heritage Association
Hill Country Planning Association
Kendall County Well Owners Association
Kinney County Ground Zero
Leon Springs Business Association
Medina County Environmental Action
Native Plant Society of Texas – SA
Northwest Interstate Coalition of Neighborhoods
Preserve Castroville
Preserve Lake Dunlop Association
Preserve Our Hill Country Environment
San Antonio Audubon Society
San Antonio Conservation Society
San Germaino Valley Alliance
San Marcos Greenbelt Alliance
San Marcos River Foundation
Save Barton Creek Association
Save Our Springs Alliance
Scenic Loop/Boerne Stage Alliance
Securing a Future Environment
SEED Coalition
Sisters of the Divine Providence
Travis County Green Party
Water Aid – Texas State University
West Texas Springs Alliance
Wildlife Rescue & Rehabilitation
Wimberley Valley Watershed Association

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funding and still came back strongly in support of retaining the sales tax for the EAPP/Greenway Trails.

Regarding your approval to put the PreK4SA renewal on the ballot, we feel that the decision was rushed and premature. You might have considered how a full ¼ cent sales tax could have been divided more equitably between all these programs. Of course, if you had not put PreK4SA on the ballot, you would have ticked off a lot of big wigs. But, by voting for the ballot propositions that you are considering today, you are really angering a lot of citizens who strongly support continuation of the EAPP and the Greenway Trails.

The members of GEAA recognize that our community has many competing needs. Yet, we feel that proposals to meet these various needs have been put together in a slapdash manner without fully examining how we might best work together to make our city both sustainable and equitable. We propose that you put a two-year extension of the 1/8 cent sales tax to be dedicated to the Edwards Aquifer Protection Program and the Greenway Trails. This will provide time to examine other funding options for these programs, workforce development, and VIA – as well as time to flesh out proposals for shifting sales taxes to other uses if that is a preference.

Thank you for your attention to these comments. Please consider the Aquifer Alliance a resource that is at your disposal and feel free to contact me at your convenience.

Respectfully,

[signature]

Annalisa Peace
Executive Director