

OPINION

Commentary: Put Edwards Aquifer protection on the ballot

By William Sibley for San Antonio Express News Aug. 2, 2020



William Sibley

With the upcoming Aug. 13 San Antonio City Council vote on the compromise ballot initiatives, one gets the impression that all has been neatly put to bed, with Mayor Ron Nirenberg and the council agreeing to “split the baby” by dividing the ¼-cent sales tax to fund Pre-K 4 SA, workforce development and VIA Metropolitan Transit.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

Since 2000, San Antonio voters have made their intentions emphatically clear by dedicating a portion of the 1/8-cent sales tax to protecting our unsurpassed local gift of nature, the Edwards Aquifer, one of the most prolific artesian aquifers in the world.

In addition to buying land and conservation easements (more than 160,330 acres) to protect the Edwards Aquifer recharge zone, voters have consistently endorsed the aligned Howard W. Peak Greenway Trails System — more than 80 miles of trails and linear parks designed

to offer relief to city dwellers from the increasing urban disarray of noise, pollution and overcrowding.

Anyone driving west on Interstate 10 can clearly see where the majority of growth and development in our city has advanced the past few decades — over our city's drinking water. To now defund the consistent, needed work that has, at a minimum, kept the Edwards Aquifer contributing zone from turning into one vast strip mall/apartment complex/gas station-convenience store is not only a slap in the face to San Antonio voters but extremely harmful and negligent governance.

No one can deny the importance of overhauling VIA, and Pre-K 4 SA has a much-needed and desirable place in our city's future. But one as well cannot simply ignore the loud and clear voices of San Antonio voters for the past 20 years to protect and secure our city's main water supply.

We live on the edge of the vast American Southwestern desert. Climate change is reality. No matter how many exorbitantly profligate Vista Ridge pipelines are constructed — that San Antonio residents are forced to pay for through their never-diminishing water bills — the Edwards Aquifer will remain our primary and precious source of life-giving subsistence. Now is not the time to turn our backs on the steady, necessary progress we have diligently achieved.

A fair and reasonable solution is this: Why can't we equitably split the full ¼-cent sales tax across all important initiatives: Edwards Aquifer protection, greenway trails, VIA, workforce development and Pre-K 4 SA?

Nirenberg and City Council, I urge you to include the successful and necessary Edwards Aquifer protection and greenway trails programs in the proposition that voters will consider this November.

William Sibley is a board member of the Greater Edwards Aquifer Alliance.