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TWO DOWN, ONE TO GO

Sparks, Washoe Co. OK river flood project agreement

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SPARKS — Concern over creating a new layer of government didn't stop the City Council on Monday from approving the creation of a new joint powers authority (JPA) to collect fees for the Truckee River Flood Project.

Moving forward with a sorely needed flood mitigation project was foremost on the minds of several Sparks leaders who have been intimately involved in the process over the last decade.

The formation of the JPA is the culmination of efforts to manage and finance the Truckee River Flood Project, a joint effort of area governments to restore the Truckee River and build structures to pre-



Tribune File/Debra Reid
Flood waters hit the industrial area of Sparks in December 1998 and again in 2005, causing millions of dollars in damages.

vent and mitigate floods such as the ones that occurred in 1997 and 2005 and caused more than \$1 billion in total damage.

The JPA, if approved by Reno leaders, will be in charge of managing and collecting locals fees that will help fund the \$1.6 billion project. The costs will be shared with the Army Corps of Engineers, which will fund 65 percent of the project. The local share, to be funded with fees and a 1/8-cent sales tax, will

amount to about \$525 million.

On Tuesday, the Washoe Board of County Commissioners also approved formation of the JPA, leaving only Reno to give its OK to the new agency. The Reno City Council on Wednesday discussed the issue and decided to give it further review and take it up again at its Feb. 9 meeting.

At the Sparks council meeting Monday, the concern over bureaucracy was

tempered by excitement on the part of several leaders over being able to move forward with a much-needed project. Sparks Mayor Geno Martini said he joined the Living River Coalition when he joined the council in 1999 and is glad to see that the project has finally arrived at a point where "we can get the God darn thing in the ground."

"We've met with everybody, every stakeholder, for

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four years," Martini said. "We've been pretty good about listening to everybody's concerns."

Neil Krutz, director of community development for the city of Sparks, presented the JPA proposal to the council during Monday's meeting. He told the council that the JPA document had undergone a few significant revisions, including a requirement for unanimous votes by participating members on all project-related matters. Each local entity — Reno, Sparks and Washoe County — has two members on the six-member JPA board. Martini and others said they were not worried about the unanimity requirement because total agreement has been reached in more than 600 votes over five years, albeit with compromise and lots of hard work.

Councilman Mike Carrigan asked about what might happen to the project if federal funding does not come to fruition and what will happen to the money Sparks residents have already paid toward construction of the North Truckee Drain if the JPA is does not implement fees and start construction within the required time of about 18 months.

Krutz told Carrigan that the JPA document contains six pages related to the city of Sparks' interests. He said that if the JPA does not move forward with the

North Truckee Drain in the specified time, control of that project and the money associated with it will revert back to the city. Currently, Sparks has about \$4 million banked up from collected sewer fees to pay for realigning the drain farther downstream from where it currently backs up at the Vista Narrows during heavy rainfall, causing floods in the Sparks industrial area and other properties near Reno-Tahoe International Airport and University of Nevada, Reno agricultural fields.

For several years, Sparks residents and businesses have been paying fees to fund the North Truckee Drain realignment. Residents pay an average of \$5.41 per month and businesses pay between a few hundred dollars and \$50,000 per year depending on water and sewer use. Under the JPA, the fees paid in Sparks would remain about the same.

Area businesses have expressed concern throughout the JPA process that property development would have additional hoops to jump through if the agency were formed. Tray Abney of the Reno Sparks Chamber of Commerce and Mike Dillon with the Builders Association of Northern Nevada came to Monday's meeting and said that while they both were worried about additional review of development by the JPA, they both were satisfied that the issue had been addressed and that moving forward with the project necessitated formation of the governing body to over-

see it.

Flood project director Naomi Duerr said the JPA document contains a grandfather provision stating that any planned unit development that had prior approval does not have to be reviewed by flood project staff for future development associated with the project. Any amendments to an existing development or any new developments would need to be reviewed by flood staff — just as they would be reviewed by school, transportation or other local authorities — if they are within the watershed and could change how the water moves within it.

According to the agreement approved by Sparks and Washoe County, the project's purpose is to prevent the loss of life and property, prevent the disruption of commerce, transportation, communication and essential services which have adverse economic impacts; prevent the waste of water resulting from floods; provide for the conservation, development, use and disposal of water and improved quality of water; provide for ecosystem restoration and enhanced recreational facilities; and provide for the safeguarding of public health.

According to flood project reports, the 1997 New Year's Day flood caused \$500 to \$600 million in damage, led to the layoff of more than 800 people and affected 15,000 additional jobs. The flood also damaged more than 7,000 acres of land.