IndependentMail.com
ANDERSON, SOUTH CAROLINA

Printer-friendly story
Read more at independentmail.com

Seneca seeks assurance on new Lake Keowee drought protocol

By Ray Chandler

Wednesday, November 30, 2011

SENECA — City officials want to make sure a proposed drought protocol stemming from Duke Energy's relicensing effort for Lake Keowee will not affect the city's longstanding access to the lake water.

City council member Ernest Riley, chairman of the council's light and water committee, directed city utilities director Bob Faires to seek that clarification before the proposed protocol is brought before the city council for adoption.

Faires, who represents Seneca in stakeholder meetings related to the relicensing, told Riley that in his opinion the protocol would change nothing, but he would request an assurance from Duke Energy.

The protocol would involve the city to emphasize conservation and try to reduce its draw of water from Lake Keowee by from 5 percent to 10 percent during conditions of Stage 2 drought, as determined by state officials, Faires said.

"This is not a proposed change in any ordinance," Faires said.

Seneca already has its ordinances for dealing with droughts, Faires said, and the ordinances are governed by the lake levels. But since the operation of the Oconee Nuclear Power Station requires Duke Energy to maintain Lake Keowee within definite levels, the city's ordinance is seldom enforced.

"They have to maintain Lake Keowee's level even at the expense of (Lake) Jocassee," Faires said.

Reilly proposed a scenario in which, during a drought, Seneca had to back up the water systems of Westminster or Walhalla and be the supplier for the Pioneer Rural Water system.

That would easily mean that Seneca would not be able to meet the 5 percent to 10 percent reduction target, he said. Reilly's concerns centered on whether that failure would have any effect on Seneca's March 1969 agreement with Duke Energy giving the city an easement to draw as much water from the lake as needed to satisfy demands.

"We just need to make sure," Reilly said.

Faires said the idea is to put the protocol in place for about 18 months to test it before it becomes a part of the Duke Energy relicensing application to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission.

The Keowee-Toxaway project was granted a 50-year license in 1966. The relicensing process has been under way since 2009 and Duke Energy has to submit a final relicensing application by August 2014. The process involves stakeholders in the lake, including lakeside residents, adjoining counties and cities that draw water from the lake, such as Seneca and Greenville.

Seneca draws an average of about 8 million gallons a day from the lake, according to city sources. The city's treatment plant pumping capacity is 20 million gallons per day.

On Wednesday, Faires also outlined to city officials a plan to transition the city's water treatment system from the present one involving chlorine gas to a system using safer disinfecting agents.

The need to shift to a system not using the toxic chlorine gas, Faires said, reflects both environmental and safety concerns.

"As we go into the future, thinking about the future, we need to get into this," Faires said.

The shift had been discussed as long as 12 years ago, according to Reilly.

Faires said the engineering firm of Halsey, McCormick and Wallace of Greenville had agreed to do a preliminary engineering report proposing a design for a new system for $5,000.

With the engineering report, Faires said, the city could apply to the State Department of Commerce's revolving loan fund for the approximately $3 million the change is estimated to cost.

A likely timeline would see the construction of the project begin at the end of next year, Faires said.

Faires said an additional $1 million could possibly be added to the loan request to finance a replacement of the approximately two-thirds of the city's water meters that cannot be read remotely.

In addition, he said, fixed base reading and monitoring as part of the new system would enable city utilities workers to identify significant leaks earlier.

"If somebody has a leak that's underground," he said, "they might not know it until they got a big water bill."

Faires also proposed that the city adopt a six-month rolling averaging in the city's fuel adjustment charges for electric bills.

The current month-to-month adjustments sometimes leads to spikes in bills, he said, but a rolling average would be better for both businesses and residents.

The change will require a vote of the city council.

© 2011 Scripps Newspaper Group — Online