

THE WATER QUESTION IN COLORADO SPRINGS. IMPORTANT TO EVERY CITIZEN.

THERE was little unanimity of opinion at the citizens' meeting in the council chamber on Tuesday night. As usually happens on occasions of that kind, very few people made speeches. The great body of those in attendance had nothing whatever to say. Whether or not the speakers represented the sentiments upon the water question of those present at the meeting cannot be ascertained from anything which occurred at the meeting.

Mr. Howbert's advocacy of the immediate purchase of Seven Lakes, if the same can be had at a reasonable price, was applauded, as was also the diametrically opposite proposition of Mr. Henry C. Hall that no action should be taken hastily and that the whole matter should be thoroughly investigated by a commission of three. There were but six speakers at the meeting on Tuesday night. Mr. Van E. Rouse supported in a general way Mr. Howbert's position with reference to Seven Lakes. Mr. F. E. Brooks contented himself with a general discussion of the water situation as relating to this city. Mr. H. A. Watson very vigorously opposed the purchase of the Seven Lakes. Mr. Henry C. Hall advocated caution and a thorough investigation by a competent commission of the entire water situation before the city should incur a debt of some three-quarters of a million dollars in obtaining a water system which might have little or no value. Mr. A. G. Sharp supported Mr. Hall's plan. Therefore, in so far as the meeting of Tuesday night is concerned, neither the council nor the citizens could obtain any real light as to the feelings of the people upon the water situation.

The only proposition advanced which should meet with universal indorsement is that of Mr. Henry C. Hall. Mr. Hall's position, which he advocated most earnestly, opposed the idea of waiting for propositions from owners of water rights. He urged the appointment of a commission of three—one the best expert to be found in the United States, another the man in Colorado best posted on the formation of the country as regards water, and the third the man best posted on the water situation as it relates to this city, this commission to thoroughly investigate the possibilities and formulate a large plan for the general water system of the city. Mr. Hall said it was a matter that should not be settled in a day and the commission should be allowed several years if necessary. In the meanwhile, a minor water system, such as Austin Bluffs, or Brookside or Broadmoor, might be purchased to meet immediate needs. When the commission makes its report the city should go ahead and secure the rights it needs without quibbling and should resort to condemnation proceedings, if necessary. He urged this as a practical business plan, such as any large corporation would put into effect in planning for extensive improvements.

Undoubtedly this is the strong, conservative and wise business policy to be pursued by the city council in the settlement of the entire water matter. Colorado Springs is planning for the future, and for a city of from 75,000 to 100,000 inhabitants, and to make such plans carelessly or without proper investigation of the real value of the water rights to be acquired, or without having a plan which when carried into effect shall make a complete water system for this city, would be the height of business folly and a policy which no citizen should approve.

For several years this city has been attempting to acquire a perfect water system, but no effort in that direction has been made through the assistance of a water commission, composed of thoroughly competent persons to pass upon such questions. In the efforts heretofore made many thousands of dollars have been squandered through a lack of thorough system and thorough investigation. It must be borne in mind in this connection that it was a citizens committee, acting in conjunction with the city council, that recommended and forced through the contract relative to the completion of the Strickler tunnel, which has recently resulted in serious and expensive legal complications and in dangerous interference with the city's management of its own water system.

It may, as Mr. Hall suggests, take three or four years to perfect such a water system as this city needs, but by going at it in a business way we will know exactly what we are getting in advance, and every dollar expended will count for something in the actual development of such a system.

In the efforts which are now being made to sell this or that particular water right to the city of Colorado Springs, there is much wild exaggeration with reference to the immediate needs of the city, and the bugaboo of a water famine has been continually raised during the past few years to influence public sentiment towards the immediate purchase of someone's pet water scheme. There is no proposition which is offered to the city council at the present time which cannot be had at a much lower figure if the city takes hold of the matter upon a thorough business basis instead of holding out the belief that it is so anxious to obtain water that it is willing to pay any price which the owners may ask. There is no danger of any of the valuable water rights about Colorado Springs being sold to other persons. This city is and will remain the best market for such rights which can possibly be had, and no one knows this truth better than those who own such rights.

Mr. Hall's idea of condemnation proceedings in case the water rights cannot be had at a reasonable and fair figure is the correct and businesslike policy to be pursued.

The Gazette sincerely hopes the city council will take this matter up in a businesslike way and that it will not permit any influence of any kind to keep it from serving the city exactly as the individual members would serve themselves if it were a personal instead of a public matter.

By this time every taxpayer in Colorado Springs must have made up his or her mind with reference to the merits of the various water propositions which have been submitted to the city council, and every person must have some well-settled idea as to the plan which should be pursued by the city council in dealing with these propositions. It is incumbent upon every citizen to make his or her wishes known to the members of the city council, and it is to be hoped that within the next few days the people themselves will take this whole matter up and inform the members of the city council of their wishes in the premises. Those who have valuable water rights for sale have many strong and influential advocates to assist them in perfecting such sale, and the citizens should see to it that their own rights are protected and that their own wishes are obeyed by personally attending to the matter for themselves with the city council.

After these purchases have been made it will be too late to raise objections or quibble about the prices which have been paid or any careless or unbusinesslike method of procedure. It may then be the same old story of the Strickler tunnel contract over again, and may result simply in useless agitation and expensive litigation.

Now is the time for the citizens of Colorado Springs to act for themselves in making known to the city council just exactly what they desire the council to do with reference to the water question.

Neither the Gazette nor anyone connected with it cares one iota personally what action is taken with reference to any one of the pending propositions, but as a newspaper, endeavoring to represent the people, it most sincerely hopes that the people themselves will make their wishes known at this time, so that the council may act in accordance with such wishes. The Gazette favors a thorough investigation by a competent commission before any permanent action is taken.

It is barely possible that all of those who have water rights to sell to the city may already have entered into a combination to support each other in the selling of the same at the prices which they ask, or that such a combination may be formed for such purposes before the council finally acts. In such event, it is all the more important for a thorough investigation into the merits and value of each proposition and all the more necessary for the citizens to speak and act for themselves, as the combined influence of those who have rights to sell would undoubtedly give them a very large and powerful championship among citizens who either directly or indirectly might be interested in such sales. Every citizen should discuss this question with the members of the city council and through the public press, and for that purpose the Gazette throws open its columns for such a discussion from now until the water matter is finally settled.

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