

Testimony to San Antonio City Council on SAWS Rates, November 19, 2015
Bob Martin, President, Homeowners-Taxpayer Association of Bexar County

For the record, my name is Bob Martin. I am president of the Homeowner-Taxpayer Association of Bexar County.

The Homeowner-Taxpayer Association strongly opposes the proposed 50% rate hike over 5 years for residential ratepayers.

We are not opposed to a smaller rate hike to comply with EPA requirements or the desalination plant. However, most of the increase is to pay for the \$3.4 billion dollar Vista Ridge pipeline.

In an apparent effort to discourage opposition to the rate hike, some members of council said they were supporting Vista Ridge. This was long before even hearing from citizens at last Thursday's council meeting.

Now we are told that military bases might move among other disasters if council does not approve Vista Ridge. This appears to be a desperate scare tactic by proponents.

Our opposition is based on several issues.

First – raising rates 50% will adversely impact the poor, seniors on fixed income, and families struggling to make ends-meet. In addition, we have not even been told how much more homeowners will pay for Vista Ridge after this initial increase.

Notably, only homeowners are subject to higher water rates. Water used by existing businesses will not be subject to the water rate hike if their usage does not exceed their prior year's monthly average. Therefore, it comes as no surprise Vista Ridge has been endorsed by business groups and the Express-News. Second, a feasibility study identified the pipeline as high risk. The findings of this study were rejected by SAWS and city council and another study was demanded.

This second study led by a wildlife biologist and 5 individuals, identified only as experts, lowered the risk of the 142 mile Vista Ridge pipeline to less risky than the Edwards aquifer which is right under our feet. The names of the 5 experts still remain secret. What happened to transparency?

Last but certainly not least, the water will be pumped from a water district located 142 miles from San Antonio. We thank all the people from the district who made the long trip to tell us their concerns about SAWS pumping water from their aquifer. They also brought petitions signed by several thousand citizens from their area.

Unfortunately, not even one council member was available to hear their concerns. This was a surprise since this past May, voters gave council members a \$45 thousand dollar pay raise so they could work full-time. We see what we are getting for our money and now we want our money back.

We do have a couple of recommendations for council.

Let us vote on Vista Ridge. Do not fear the democratic process of an election. This would avoid the costly mistakes of the recent streetcar boondoggle. Look at the cost of runaway growth when you consider future business tax abatements and other benefits. This growth has caused city taxes, county taxes, school taxes, fees, and utility rates to skyrocket. Maybe it's time to slow down growth.