



CWAG 2021 Candidate Forum Questions

Prescott Council & Mayor Primary Election

1. Framework for Forum Questions.

1.1. Purpose:

- 1.1.1. To insert water issues into political and electoral dialogue.
- 1.1.2. Educate voters and candidates about water issues and about candidate knowledge and positions.

1.2. General:

- 1.2.1. Pose open ended questions; avoid yes/no answers.
- 1.2.2. Questions should address local issues important in the election to create awareness, in both the candidates and audience, of potential solutions to local water problems.
- 1.2.3. Forum questions are posed to generate explanations and discussion about policies and related issues. The "Our Water Supply" section of the CWAG website ([cwagaz.org](http://www.cwagaz.org)) provides a clear explanation of the scientific basis for CWAG's positions on Prescott's water management issues.

I. Respect for Citizen Initiatives: Prop 400

A. Introduction: A significant majority of Prescott citizens voted to amend the City Charter through Proposition 400, titled the "Reasonable Growth Initiative." The initiative requires, for annexations exceeding 250 acres, public comment, a 3/4 council vote to approve, and that all effluent be dedicated to permanent recharge which cannot be reused to support additional development. This requirement helps reduce the future overdraft on the aquifer. The City twice proposed new policies to serve water without annexation and thus circumvent the provisions of Prop 400; these were withdrawn in response to public opposition. CWAG believes that current water without annexation policy was approved by the Council with inadequate public notice and insufficient public information and opportunity to comment. This policy also evades the Reasonable Growth Initiative.

B. Question:

1. How will you ensure that the Council adheres to the requirements of the Reasonable Growth Initiative (Prop 400)?

C. CWAG Answer:

1. CWAG believes that the will of the electorate must be fully respected. Attempts to evade the requirements of the voter approved Prop 400 by supplying water without annexation are unacceptable and betrays the public trust.

II. Recognition of citizens as stakeholders in all water decisions.

A. Introduction: Some citizens believe that important policy decisions have often been developed and approved without a rational and public process. The council only provides a few days public notice without public informational meetings, without adequately responding to public comment, and without a published rationale and analysis. This is especially concerning for changes in water policy.

B. Question:

1. Please describe specific efforts you will make to include Prescott residents throughout the policy development process and in all decisions about water policy.

C. CWAG Answer:

1. The importance of city and county water policies cannot be overstated. In large part, they determine the ability to achieve a secure water future, the ability to protect the perennial flow of the upper Verde River, and the rate of local population growth. For this reason, citizens should be informed and have the opportunity to participate in developing, commenting, and approving water policy.

III. Water without annexation

A. Introduction: Prescott recently adopted a water policy permitting supplying water and sewer services outside the city limits without annexation through an Intergovernmental Agreement. CWAG supports water without annexation only in limited special circumstances such as improving water quality in the creeks and completing the Granite Dells land-for-water trade. CWAG opposes permitting water service outside the city without annexation to support development, especially for “North Prescott” (undeveloped Yavapai County lands north of the airport) because, among other reasons, it generally results in:

- Increasing the groundwater overdraft,
- Bypassing the City Charter provisions added by the Reasonable Growth Initiative,
- Subsidizing private developers while generating no benefit to the citizens of Prescott,
- Abdicating City planning options for roads, open space, and wildlife corridors,
- Creating urban sprawl and promoting development on lands lacking water rights.

B. Questions:

1. Explain why you support or oppose the current water policy permitting water service without annexation for “North Prescott.”
2. Do you support limiting the current water-without-annexation policy to special cases, such as completing the AED land-for-water deal and improving water quality in the creeks?

C. CWAG Answer: In general, CWAG vehemently opposes providing water service to new developments without annexing the development. However, CWAG does support providing water without annexation in specific situations with major public benefit such as improving water quality in the creeks and completing the Granite Dells land-for-water trade. Providing water service without annexation to support development evades Prop 400.

IV. Responsible decisions: Legality vs wisdom, Paper water vs Sustainable water.

A. Introduction: State water laws were written to support economic growth - not to sustainably manage groundwater or protect rivers and springs. After 20 years of ADWR management plans, our annual overdraft has more than quadrupled. Despite our growing groundwater deficit, Prescott found a loophole in water law allowing them to commit nearly 10,000 ac of groundwater to support new subdivisions - enough legal paper water for over 50,000 additional houses. Even though the 4th Management Plan recommended against it, Prescott has chosen to increase groundwater pumping to support unsustainable growth - without replenishing the aquifer. This is "paper water" - authorized under current law but unsustainable. Local officials claim that they are only doing what the law allows, but is this ethical and wise?

B. Question:

1. Many citizens are worried about the effect of thousands of new homes on our water supply. Do you believe that we have a significant long-term water-supply issue?
2. Despite a growing and unsustainable overdraft, should Prescott continue to use "paper water" allocations allowed under state law?
3. What actions might you promote and support to assure that citizens of the Prescott Active Management Area will have a sustainable water supply for themselves, their children, and future generations?

C. CWAG Answers:

1. Based on scientific studies, CWAG has determined that we are pumping too much groundwater. Eventually, we will face severe water shortages. Every new home consumes precious groundwater. The current city policy of adding thousands of new homes to triple Prescott's population will shorten the time until shortages become reality.
2. Although Prescott is acting legally under state water law, they are allocating "paper water" (legal but not sustainable) to new development. This will increase the overdraft and move away from safe yield.
3. CWAG advocates that officials throughout the Prescott Active Management Area should plan to achieve safe yield by implementing regional conservation planning and programs. More information is available on cwagaz.org.

V. Water Conservation Planning and Innovation.

A. Introduction: Prescott's current water conservation efforts include tiered water rates, an incentive program for existing homes, and, for new construction, requirements for water efficient fixtures and drought-tolerant landscaping. Collectively, these measures constitute the best water conservation measures in the PrAMA. However, these ad-hoc measures are not part of a comprehensive plan with goals, analyses, and milestones looking at least 10 years into the future. For example, Albuquerque, Tucson, and many other cities have had great success with conservation planning.

B. Questions:

1. Should an AMA conservation plan with targets, milestones, and conservation measures for reducing water use be developed regionally, in cooperation with other cities and Yavapai County?
2. If elected as a Prescott council member or mayor, what will you do to initiate and support a concerted effort among our four municipalities, private water suppliers, domestic well owners, and Yavapai County to assure a viable water supply for future generations?
3. Should the AMA conservation plan include solutions such as requiring developer support for regional conservation programs, or requiring new subdivisions to recharge as much water as they use (groundwater neutral development)? What other ideas would you suggest for the plan?

C. CWAG Answers:

1. CWAG believes that a regional conservation plan is a useful first step to developing a comprehensive safe yield plan.
2. Because Prescott is a regional leader in water conservation measures (with lots of room remaining for improvement), the City is positioned to initiate and lead a regional effort to improve water conservation in the Prescott Active Management Area (PrAMA). All citizens share the same pool of groundwater, so regional action is required and appropriate.
3. There are many existing and proven techniques for improving water conservation and augmentation, plus there are new technologies that can be studied and used to make new subdivisions groundwater neutral. There are win/win solutions available that we should use. More information is available on cwagaz.org.

VI. Verde River/Pipeline

A. Introduction: In a 2010 litigation settlement agreement, Prescott and Prescott Valley promised to support Wild and Scenic River designation for the upper Verde River, to mitigate any impact to the minimum flow of the Verde River caused by their pumping in the Big Chino Sub-Basin, and agreed to develop another groundwater model for the Big Chino in partnership with SRP. The model development process has occurred behind closed doors, but is apparently scheduled to be released in early 2022. No information on mitigation has been released.

B. Questions: (yes or no, rapid response)

1. Will you publicly reaffirm and commit to support Congressional designation of the Upper Verde Wild and Scenic River?
2. If the Big Chino pipeline is built to transfer Big Chino groundwater to Prescott and Prescott Valley, will you publicly reaffirm the 2010 agreement and commit to protect the base flow of the Verde River?
3. Will you commit to release an executable digital copy of the Big Chino groundwater model, including data files, as a public record for public comment, inspection, use, and evaluation?

C. CWAG Answers:

1. CWAG expects all candidates would agree that the City must follow all the provisions of the 2010 SRP litigation settlement. Two important points in the agreement provide that Prescott will support designation of the upper Verde Wild and Scenic River and that they will assure that the Big Chino Pipeline project will not degrade the base flow of the Verde River. In proof, Prescott must release the digital files of the Big Chino Model for public inspection.

VII. Water Quality: Arsenic

A. Introduction: Arsenic occurs naturally in our groundwater. Arsenic is associated with a number of adverse health effects and is known to cause several types of cancers. Public health agencies consider that arsenic poses a risk of cancer at any level greater than zero; the lower the level of arsenic, the lower the risk of cancer. The Environmental Protection Agency revised the maximum contaminant level for drinking water from 50 parts per billion (ppb) to a more stringent value of 10 ppb. Recognizing that 10 ppb would not provide the level of protection that other standards provide, EPA set the goal as 0 ppb. Prescott blends groundwater from high arsenic wells with water from low arsenic wells to deliver water at 9.8 ppb, barely under the maximum permitted level and well over the goal.

B. Question:

1. In your view, does the current blending strategy adequately protect public health? Prescott's blending is legal, but is it wise?
2. Federal financial assistance for further arsenic reduction is available. Would you support seeking federal assistance to further reduce arsenic levels?

C. CWAG Answer:

1. CWAG believes that it is not enough to simply follow the law by managing Arsenic levels to barely slip under the maximum allowed levels. The City has a moral and legal responsibility to protect public health. The City should explore Federal assistance to reduce Arsenic to less than 3 ppb, and ideally to the EPA goal of 0 ppb.