

A Critique of the Report

“The Economic Impact of Potential Water Shortages on San Antonio’s Economy”

(see the study: http://www.edwardsaquifer.net/pdf/Chamber_Report_on_Water_2014.pdf)

The San Antonio Chamber of Commerce contracted TXP, an Austin-based consulting firm, whose founder and president is Mr. Jon Hockenyos, to do an economic analysis of the potential impacts of failing to insure adequate water supply in San Antonio. The report, “The Economic Impact of Potential Water Shortages on San Antonio’s Economy,” begs for a critique.

The most important takeaway is that Mr. Hockenyos’ personal business interests include real estate and infrastructure/water development. This tells us he has a vested interest in assuring that decision-makers support real estate and water development projects and that they are seen to advantage and prosper. To quote from the TXP website, “In his role as President of the firm, Mr. Hockenyos is involved in managing the day-to-day operations of the organization, performing technical analysis, and developing strategies for clients. In addition, he makes numerous public presentations and speeches. Mr. Hockenyos has served as a resource witness on a variety of issues in front of city councils, state legislatures, and the U.S. Congress....Mr. Hockenyos’ personal business interests also include restaurants, real estate, and **infrastructure/water development** [my emphasis].” <http://www.txp.com/team/jon-hockenyos>. This seriously impacts the objectivity and reliability of the report.

The structure and assumptions of the report are also questionable. It is a generic study with a conventional economic approach. It ignores alternative, sustainable economic solutions and benefits.

Economics is commonly called “the dismal science” because throughout its history economics is associated with human misery. Also adding to its “dismal” nature is that core foundational beliefs of economics are not concilient with natural laws—meaning economic methods aren’t shared by those of natural sciences like biology, ecology, and physics. Ecological economics is slowly gaining ground against dismal economic practices.

San Antonio’s sustainability goals can only be met with an ecological economy. If this study had been contracted to a consultant expert in green economics, it might have shed light on sustainable adaptations to water limitations. There would have been a completely different outcome. It could conclude a competitive advantage of an unconventional nature for the Alamo region.

On the day SAWS board approved the Vista Ridge contract, trustee Pat Merritt, a retired local educator, said she valued the opinions of four people who spoke against it, but the utility “could never please everybody” about the decision. “We shouldn’t be afraid of change. Sometimes it’s painful, but it’s necessary,” Merritt said (quote by Huddleston, SAEN, Sept. 30, 2014, p. A-3).

Well, the Vista Ridge project is not change, it is more of the same—businesses profiting and the public and future generations paying a dismal price. The painful and necessary change is to stop falling for methods that conflict with science by committing to “sustainable” economic solutions, as outlined in San Antonio’s adopted Mission Verde policy.

By Margaret Day, Alamo Group of the Sierra Club Executive Committee Chair, Oct. 5, 2014