

Council moves to protect city's water interests

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Another volley was fired Tuesday in the battle for underground water in the Hickory aquifer, this time in San Angelo's city council chambers.

Council members unanimously authorized attorney Tom C. Massey and City Manager Tom Adams to take whatever legal action necessary to protect the city's right to draw water from city-owned wells over the underground aquifer. The decision came after a 15-minute closed-door session.

The city drilled nine wells over the aquifer some 20 years ago. All of those wells are capped. But San Angelo has long-range plans to drill more wells over the aquifer, which is spread under all or part of Concho, Menard, Kimble, Mason, McCulloch and San Saba counties.

The council's action followed last week's decision by the Hickory Underground Water Conservation District allowing San Angelo to apply to pump 2,750 acre-feet of water a year from wells the city owns or may drill.

The city of Brady immediately filed an appeal with the 198th District Court. Brady officials have said San Angelo's request is excessive and threatens Brady's sole source of water.

San Angelo officials had applied with the water district to pump 15,000 acre-feet of water a year from the aquifer. The city probably won't exercise the permit for at least 20 years, and then only as an emergency water source, San Angelo leaders said.

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Adams said the district's decision forcing San Angelo to reapply for a permit effectively denies the city access to its water.

"The city will take the steps deemed necessary to protect what we consider our emergency water supply," he said.

Mayor Dick Funk said the city can't afford to wait another 20 years to acquire a permit to pump water from the aquifer.

"We consider this an emergency backup, and we cannot afford to wait until we need it," Funk said. "We just need to clarify this issue, and since there is a disagreement, that's what the court system is for. We've authorized the use of that system to clarify this here and now so we don't have any question in the future."

Councilman Tommy Hiebert said he expects city staff and outside attorneys to confer about steps the city may take.