

VOICE OF SAN DIEGO

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July 27, 2010

Council Supports Recycled Sewage Demonstration Plant

San Diego's City Council voted 6-2 to award a \$6.6 million contract to build a recycled sewage demonstration plant today, marking a legislative shift in favor of a new water supply that's long been politicized and, at times, demonized.

For the almost two years the current council members have been in office, a tentative, shifting majority have supported the concept of [recycling sewage](#) and using the water to boost drinking supplies. Different council members have cast the deciding fifth vote to support aspects of a multi-year effort to demonstrate that sewage can safely be purified into drinking water -- a process once derided as "toilet-to-tap."

On Tuesday, though, City Councilman Tony Young said he was casting his historic opposition aside. After learning more about the new source, Young said he would fully support it now and in the future -- a key shift for the project's advocates. (Carl DeMaio and Sherri Lightner dissented.)

City Councilman Kevin Faulconer cast a more tentative vote in favor of the demonstration plant, after noting that its 1 million gallon daily output won't be dumped in city reservoirs. The plant will be used in community outreach efforts as well as to show state regulators that drinking water can safely be filtered out of sewage.

Faulconer said he was concerned about the cost of recycling sewage -- but at the same time said he supported fully expanding the city's purple pipe system, which uses treated sewage for irrigation and costs more. [City estimates](#) and [other nonpartisan analysis](#) shows that water from purple pipes is more expensive than recycling sewage, because the city would have to build a costly second pipe system alongside drinking water pipes.

Once construction is complete, the demonstration plant is scheduled to operate for a year.