

SAN DIEGO UNION TRIBUNE

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Contract for water plant OK'd

SAN DIEGO — The San Diego City Council on Tuesday awarded a \$6.6 million contract to build a test facility that will treat wastewater and turn it into safe drinking water.

The contract went to global engineering firm Camp Dresser and McKee to design, test and operate the small-scale plant in order to deem whether a similar system should be used on a greater scale.

The council voted 6-2 in support of the project — an ideological shift from discussions over the past two decades about turning wastewater into drinking water.

“This is a big deal for us,” said council President Ben Hueso. “There used to be enormous opposition to this.”

Opponents of the treatment process in the past derided it as “toilet to tap.” However, there was not a single member of the public who spoke out against it at the council meeting Tuesday.

Rather, nearly a dozen speakers representing groups ranging from the [Sierra Club](#) and Surfrider Foundation to the San Diego County Taxpayers Association and the San Diego Building Industry Association came to show their support.

Councilmen Tony Young and Kevin Faulconer have previously been hesitant to support similar water treatment systems, yet both voted to move forward with the test project.

“I want to make it clear that I support the pilot project only at this time. I still remain to be convinced that this is a safe source of drinking water for San Diegans, but I will move forward with the pilot project to get those answers today,” Faulconer said.

The water treated at the pilot facility will be used in part of the city’s graywater system and will not be added to the drinking water. The test facility will be built at the North City Water Reclamation Plant.

Councilwoman Sherri Lightner and Councilman Carl DeMaio voted against the project.

“I can’t support this demonstration project unless it is part of a comprehensive plan, unless it is part of a sustainable water future, which would include graywater, nonpotable recycled water, desalination, storage and conservation projects that already are tested and proven options,” Lightner said.

Other municipalities including Orange County and El Paso, [Texas](#), use wastewater treatment plants to augment their drinking water supplies.

The contract for the test facility was part of an \$11.8 million project the city approved in 2007. A water rate increase was implemented in January 2009 to pay for the project.

Construction will begin by fall, and the plant will be in operation by April 2011.

A study with the results of the test will be completed once the plant has been operational for a year.

According to a 2005 water reuse study, the treatment plant would produce approximately 16 million gallons a day.

An average household in San Diego uses about 350 gallons of water a day, according to the city.

The facility will be open for public tours and school field trips.