

# WORKING TOGETHER FOR COMMON GOOD

Last November, the citizens of Lake Havasu City faced a difficult decision. Nitrates threatened their groundwater. ADEQ politely put them on notice. Although their drinking water was still clean – at least where tested – four monitoring wells found increasing nitrate levels, threatening the watershed and the lake itself. Something had to be done to fix the problem before the state imposed potential solutions on the community.

Earlier in the year, Havasu citizens had spoken out against a small diameter sewer system introduced by engineering consultant Burns & McDonnell. Residents felt there wasn't enough evidence this kind of system would work in a community their size. After all, Lake Havasu City is the largest city in the nation on septic tanks.

The City was faced with expanding its conventional sewer system to include all residences to meet ADEQ requirements. A bond election to authorize debt was called to fund the design and construction of the system and add a third treatment plant to reclaim water. Because many citizens were confused about the need for sewers in general (small diameter or conventional), some voters were opposed from the start. Others felt they were being duped after being told, when they bought their homes, septic tanks were all they needed. Also, the price tag attached to this system was estimated at \$463 million.

When it called for the election, the City provided mandated voter information packages but was unable to take a position. A group of tuned-in citizens saw this election was going to fail – and badly. A core group of volunteers perked up when ADEQ Director Jacqueline Schafer spoke to the population on October 2 about potential enforcement actions, which included revoking all existing and future general permits for on-site wastewater systems. Striving to remain positive, the Director also applauded the initiative taken by the community to raise awareness and secure financial support.

Using initial funding from the Lake Havasu Association of REALTORS®, these enlightened citizens formed Citizens for Clean Water. Director Schafer offered assistance from ADEQ to help the community as much as possible to meet their challenge. Sue Keith was brought in from ADEQ's Southern Regional Office, having provided critical assistance on the Bisbee bond election a few months prior. Peter Foster, P.E. from ADEQ's Mohave County office was already on the team. Susan Zeloznicki of Susan Z Communications joined up 32 days before the election – after another consultant told the Citizens committee the election couldn't be won.

ADEQ kept its word, offering advice, attending meetings, speaking, and clarifying any technical matter that came up. They were always available to answer questions. The ADEQ team (spread all over the state) and Zeloznicki conferred once a week, via conference call, to see if there was any way ADEQ could help. ADEQ issued special press releases and information FAQs to clarify points brought up by citizens. Sue Keith traveled eight hours each way from her office in Fort Huachuca just to attend meetings and help Havasu residents understand their environmental issues.

All sorts of citizens banded together, including retirees, elected officials, business owners and leaders, and more REALTORS®. Three weeks before the election, the Colorado River Building Industry Association joined the group. Citizens for Clean Water continued raising funds even after the election to meet the extensive and well orchestrated campaign expenses.

John Gall, a REALTOR®, chaired the committee and was grateful for the outside help. Sue Keith and Susan Zeloznicki enlisted Suzanne Price from WIFA (Water Infrastructure Finance Authority) to help. One October day, this "gang of Susan's" drove together to Lake "Hav-a-Sue" and talked to anyone who would listen, including business leaders, health care officials, service staff, and retirees. Energy flowed and more volunteers started to surface in the community.

Not a minute too soon – formal opposition, with money to spend, hit town. To this point, the Citizens for Clean Water took the high path, providing the truth and detailed facts, and making sure every voting citizen understood the true impact of not passing the bond vs. the financial impact to each homeowner if it passed. Then, a Nevada-based company started passing out information and running radio ads talking up an alternative system. Their ads said their system could remove the nitrates and no one would have to hook up to a sewer line. The only thing wrong was this device did not have approval or even reliable proof they could meet the regulation limit of less than 15 ppm nitrate. The radio ads were compelling and voters started to waiver.

Zeloznicki and the Committee hit harder, increasing media exposure and editorial space, and getting more citizens out walking the streets and talking to neighbors. A group of more than 50 volunteers spent evenings calling registered voters, answering questions, and telling them where they could vote. Everyone maintained a consistent message focusing on the facts and not letting this opposition take away their future.

Intense back and forth radio ads from both sides ran even on Election Day. But, the team working to protect the city's groundwater won out – with 75% of the vote. The night of the election, John Gall stated, "We are absolutely ecstatic, happy that citizens sifted through the misinformation and voted to protect our groundwater and economic future."

As this goes to press, the City is looking at starting construction on the first new sewer line in November. John Gall is now running for Mayor, hoping to recapture this kind of teamwork to win that election.

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**Don't think the  
November 6  
Sewer Vote  
is serious?**

**Think Again.**

LAKE HAVASU'S WATER SUPPLY is in danger, and the state is ready to impose a mandatory sewer system on everyone with a septic system.

On November 6, you can vote Yes to authorize the city to borrow money. If we vote yes now, we are eligible for grants to pay for the hookups and low interest loans to pay back debt.

Or you can vote no, or do nothing, and be faced with much more expensive alternatives very soon.

But either way you vote, there will be mandatory sewer changes.

**Do you want to pay less? Vote yes.**

For more information, pick up the BQ from the Lake Havasu Association of REALTORS®, or call 955-0423, or visit [www.discoverhavasu.com](http://www.discoverhavasu.com)

**Vote Yes.**

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