G. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

1. Summarize Public Participation Process

A process of data gathering and public input was carried out to ensure that public and environmental concerns were identified and impacts minimized. The public participation process is critical to ensure maximum input by community members in determining those concerns and potential impacts. The Resource Center for Raza Planning (RCRP), a research and policy center within the School of Architecture and Planning at the University of New Mexico, conducted the public participation process.

The public process provided a mechanism to ensure that citizens were informed about the project and had an opportunity to comment on the perceived impacts of this project on their community. The water expansion project team was committed to a public participation process that would successfully provide clarification of community values, address concerns and questions of community members and provide an exchange of technical information. Perspectives of community members were ascertained through a scientific random sample survey and several months of public and Community Advisory Committee (CAC) meetings.

Of particular interest was the community sentiment on the appropriate level of service (Urban, Sub-urban, Rural/Domestic, and No Build) of this water system in their community. A higher percentage of survey respondents viewed the "suburban" level of service as the most appropriate alternative. (Appendix B includes a complete record of the public involvement process).

a. Goals of the Public Participation Process: The public participation process for the South Valley Water Expansion Project included the following goals:

- Articulate values regarding water use
- Solicit and document public concerns and issues
- Establish forums to provide education and technical information
- Analyze the community input to suggest criteria for system design
- Provide liaison and coordination with a bi-directional NEPA process
- Assure ongoing mechanisms for public input throughout the various phases of the project, including implementation and connection to the system
- Suggest connection incentives

b. Methods for Maximum Outreach, Participation and Input: It was a priority to maximize the greatest amount of outreach to all of those impacted by the project. This was especially important for a community such as the South Valley that has a large minority, low-income population. RCRP and the project team used a variety of techniques in order to provide maximum outreach to the public. These techniques included:

- Establishing a Community Advisory Committee (CAC) that is open to interested parties
- Identifying and recruit participants into a CAC including individuals and representatives from neighborhood associations and organizations

- Clarifying ground rules to the CAC particularly related to full consideration of all water service alternatives without elimination, to assure compatibility with the NEPA process
- Developing a process to ascertain resident's views including a random sample survey
- Providing forums for information exchange including newsletters and regularly scheduled CAC meetings attended by project staff and engineers
- Holding community wide public meetings
- Providing Spanish translations for all public forums and information exchange documents
- Maintaining communication with relevant parties
- Receiving direction from counsel regarding the NEPA process

Through the methods of outreach outlined above, the project team was able to communicate effectively with the residents who would be impacted by the South Valley project. The project team communicated with the residents through the following mechanisms:

- Mail and Newsletters
- Telephone Calls
- Web Site
- Meetings and Presentations
- Survey
- Door-to-Door Communication
- Public Meetings and Hearings
- Visioning Exercises
- Citizen Advisory Committee Meetings

c. Public Participation Process: Bernalillo County, as part of fulfilling the mandates of the NEPA process, was interested in evaluating the appropriateness of four options with regard to the following scale of service:

- No Action
- Rural/domestic
- Suburban
- Urban

The Albuquerque Metropolitan Area Water and Wastewater Board had previously recommended the "suburban" level of service to ensure adequate protection of public health and safety. The public participation process allowed the public to weigh the various options against several factors, including those deemed significant by residents who would be directly impacted by the project.

As a way to reach these residents, RCRP conducted outreach efforts to invite interested residents to public meetings. This included newsletters with meeting time and dates, flyers, and phone calls prior to every meeting. Both public meetings and CAC meetings were well attended. Ongoing sign-up sheets allowed RCRP to maintain a list of individuals interested in the project that could then be informed of subsequent meetings.

CAC meetings were organized to discuss various topics (e.g., Water Quality, Fire Protection, Land Use, etc.) based on issues raised by the public. The meetings allowed the project team to provide information and obtain questions and concerns of residents. Each meeting began with a presentation from a member of the project team and continued with either discussion or a question and answer session.

Both the CAC and public meetings provided valuable technical information, often accompanied by a handout, to the public and allowed for enriching discussions that provided the project team with valuable information from the community. For each CAC meeting, community members were able to express their concerns regarding the proposed project and the project staff recorded the issues and concerns.

All of the public and CAC meetings were recorded and documented in a variety of ways including video recordings. Staff members took comprehensive notes and recorded on an easel. Other forms of recording took the shape of community members writing down their thoughts on note cards. From this documentation, RCRP transcribed the meetings into minutes and other forms of written documentation such as a Question and Answer Matrix (Q & A Matrix) and data for a Project Criteria Matrix.

One of the goals of the public participation process was to gather the relevant concerns of the community on the project. During these public and CAC meetings, many residents expressed their concerns to the project team in the form of questions and statements. These questions and statements were then transformed into a Q & A Matrix made available to the community. The Q & A Matrix was provided to any member of the public who may not have attended previous meetings. The most important reason for developing the Matrix was to provide the team a better understanding of the issues and concerns of the community.

In order to develop the Q & A Matrix, RCRP carefully studied the notes and videotape from the Public and CAC meetings. From carefully listening and going through the notes and tapes, the project team extracted all of the questions and statements that the community provided and categorized them. The categories of concerns and issues identified in the Q & A Matrix for the water expansion project were:

- Water Quality and Project Need
- Land Use
- Project Design
- Wells/Water Rights
- Construction
- Costs
- General

These same categories were also used in developing the Project Criteria Matrix for the CAC. The Project Criteria Matrix was used as an analytical tool to facilitate the CAC members thinking through how the issues they identified were potentially impacted by each level of service. This analysis helped provide the basis for the CAC recommendations regarding level of service as well as other related recommendations.

d. Random Sample Survey: The project team supplemented public meetings and CAC meetings with a survey that determined public opinion on the proposed water system including opinions on the most appropriate level of service and whether fire protection was an important factor in a water system. The survey also identified the perceived impacts by far South Valley residents of the proposed water system on their quality of life and whether residents desired a water system that allowed for agriculture, subdivision or industrial development.

The survey assessed the characteristics that the residents felt were important in designing a water system. In addition, the survey provides information on the condition of residents' wells and water and whether cost is a factor for connecting to the system.

The RCRP conducted a random sample survey to inform and supplement the public participation process. The survey consisted of conducting 95 door-to-door interviews that provided opinions and sentiments of residents within the boundaries of the South Valley Water Project.

The survey allowed the RCRP staff to ascertain the issues important to local residents, including:

- The preservation of a semi-rural lifestyle
- Cost of the project to individual households
- Maintaining operation of current wells
- Good water quality
- Residential fire protection
- Protecting the community from unwanted urban growth and development

Based on these issues and concerns, survey respondents felt that the level of service best suited for the South Valley community was the Suburban Level of Service. Though a large percentage of residents felt that the domestic/rural level of service was most appropriate with 96% of respondents wanting agriculture to be preserved, it was ultimately the ability to provide fire protection that tipped the scales towards the suburban level of service as the preferred alternative. The urban level of service was deemed undesirable and likely to produce the most negative impacts on the cultural, economic, and social resources of the community in the project boundaries. Residents did not support the development of a system that allowed for either subdivision or industrial development.

The results of the survey were compatible with and reinforced the advice and opinions of the CAC, which met over a period of several months.

e. Resident's Issues and Questions: Through the analysis of public meetings, CAC meetings, interviews, and the survey, the study team found that the residents of the South Valley felt the major issues of this project revolved around:

- Project need (e.g. well water quality/contamination)
- Land Use
- Wells/Water Rights
- Project Design
- Construction

A brief discussion outlining the concerns of the residents on these issues is provided below.

f. Land Use: Residents of the South Valley are concerned about the land use in the area. Survey results show that 96% of the residents want to see some or more preservation of the semi-rural quality encouraged in the South Valley. Also, the residents that indicated their concerns over land use raised many questions such as:

- Will this project affect zoning?
- Why should we put in infrastructure that encourages annexation?
- Why should we provide a way for developers to obtain land?
- How do we make sure that Southwest Area Plan (SWAP) is enforced?

g. Wells and Water Rights: Wells and water rights were another issue for the residents of the South Valley. 94% of the respondents interviewed had their own private domestic well, were part of a well share or were on a community well system. Although many of the residents surveyed rated their well water as good to fair, those that were concerned about their wells and water rights were concerned about the ability to keep and maintain their water use from the wells. Residents asked questions such as:

- Can we still use personal wells for irrigation?
- Will the City of Albuquerque monitor our wells?
- Will there be a moratorium on new wells?
- Will we be able to drill new irrigation wells after the water infrastructure is in place?

h. Project Design and Construction: There were also many questions and issues that revolved around the project's design and construction. In our survey results we found that the most important characteristics of a water system for the respondents were:

- Improved water quality
- Residential fire protection
- Institutional fire protection
- Commercial fire protection
- Residential household use
- Flexibility to allow for small business commercial development along major corridors

The characteristics that respondents felt were not important in designing a water system were:

- Flexibility to allow for big box business commercial development along major corridors
- Flexibility to allow for residential subdivisions
- Flexibility to allow for industrial development

These responses correspond with the level of service that most residents felt was appropriate for the South Valley. We asked the respondents to rate the levels of service (Urban, Suburban, Rural/Domestic, and No Build) for its appropriateness for the overall community. The results are as follows:

- 65% of the respondents felt that the Suburban level of service was very appropriate or somewhat appropriate for the overall community.
- 52% felt the rural/domestic level of service was very appropriate or somewhat appropriate
- 37% felt that the urban was very appropriate or somewhat appropriate
- 28% felt that the No Build option was very appropriate or somewhat appropriate for the overall community.

As far as the design and construction of the water project, many residents were concerned about drilling a well to serve the people of the valley. Residents asked questions such as:

- Where will the water come from?
- Will the City be drilling more wells in the South Valley?

Many residents were concerned about the lengthy project implementation schedule. Some of the respondents indicated that they wanted the project; however, if they had to dig a new well before the project was completed they could not afford to connect to the water system. Those residents asked questions such as:

- Who will get the water first?
- What would be the sequence for the water expansion?
- Can we speed up the process?

Many residents from the CAC and Public Meetings were concerned about the impacts of construction. Many of the comments and questions asked pertaining to construction included:

- Will you consult with people on the project construction to minimize the impacts of it?
- Will concrete or asphalt located in an easement and damaged during construction be repaired?

i. Connection Costs: We found that one of the largest issues facing the residents and this project was that of cost and affordability to connect to the system and user fees. The survey presented questions around the initial connection cost and the monthly payments.

45% of the respondents felt that the monthly cost of water would be an issue in their decision to connect, whereas 48% felt that the monthly costs would not be a factor in their decision to connect. However, 58% of the respondents felt that the initial investment would be a factor in their decision to connect while 33% felt that it would not be a factor.

The Questionnaire also asked the respondent to list up to three of their top concerns regarding this project in an open-ended question. The biggest concern was that of personal cost. Although, a few of the respondents indicated that they would like this project, many of the residents felt like they were not going to be able to afford the initial connection fee of the project. The Project Team provided residents with information about the PIPE Program, which provides assistance to low-income households to access the utility service.

j. Summary: The public participation process was extensive and provided numerous opportunities to access the opinions of local residents and to provide information regarding the project. CAC members attended meetings on a regular basis and took ownership in the process. Though many began the process somewhat skeptically, by the end, residents felt that their concerns were heard and that they had been provided sufficient information.

However, follow up regarding the project is critical in earning and maintaining the trust of the South Valley residents. There was no support in either the public meetings or the CAC meetings for the urban level of service and the survey supports this sentiment. The survey confirms that residents do not desire a system that provides flexibility for the development of dense urban growth, industrial activity or subdivisions. Similarly, all forms of input reinforced the notion that residents value the semi-rural agricultural climate that exists in the project area.

Residents were more likely to support the water system when they were ensured that they would not lose the right to use their wells or that they would not be required to connect to the system. 57% indicated that they would connect to the water system and the percentage that would connect to the system increases for those who currently have shallow wells. The percentage for connection also increases for residents if they can receive financial assistance. Ultimately, those who were skeptical of the water project became more supportive when they felt their rights were protected and when they recognized that those who needed the better water quality and fire protection could be served.

Through their active participation in the CAC, residents developed a list of recommendations that they believe should be considered by the Bernalillo County Board of Commissioners, the Water Authority, Planning and Zoning agencies and other relevant parties. The list of recommendations was developed in a group process and the participant's crafted the specific language for their recommendations. These recommendations are listed below.

k. Community Advisory Committee Recommendations:

The following reflects the recommendations provided by the South Valley Water Expansion Project Community Advisory Committee. Though some recommendations were not directly specific to the water project, they are not unrelated. In essence, residents approached the water project in the context of other issues they are facing. The recommendations reflect their concerns and desires.

- Recommendation 1: All government entities shall enforce zoning and building codes.
- Recommendation 2: All government administrators and elected officials shall treat the South West Area Plan as policy.
- Recommendation 3: The water system shall be designed and built to conform to current land uses, zoning and the South West Area Plan.
- Recommendation 4: The County Commission shall go on record in support of the non-mandatory connection.

- Recommendation 5: County residents shall be involved in setting policies in water and wastewater utilities.

- Recommendation 6: Do not provide service to properties with illegal buildings or violation zonings including accessory living quarters.

- Recommendation 7: During design and construction, the county and all contractors shall locate service lines in accordance with the explicit desires of the property owners to maximize the best use of the property.

- Recommendation 8: The County and contractors shall obtain written agreement from the property owners as to the location of the stub out during the design phase.

- Recommendation 9: CAC recommends the Suburban level of service as appropriate for the South Valley Water Expansion Project in accordance with existing zoning and the South West Area Plan.

- Recommendation 10: Encourage preservation of agriculture and rural character of the South Valley by maintaining acequias for agriculture and establishing greenbelts, conservation easements and public acquisition of land for the use of agriculture.

2. Public Hearing

A public hearing was held for the EID and PER on October 23, 2003, at the Polk Middle School cafeteria, 2220 Raymac Road SW. The hearing was advertised in the Albuquerque Journal newspaper on October 8 and 19, 2003, and written notification of the hearing was sent to the CAC members and over 1,000 area residents on the project mailing list. The hearing advertisement and notification indicated that the EID would be available for public review between October 8 and November 10, 2003, at the following locations:

- South Valley Library, 3908 Isleta Boulevard SW (505) 877-5170

- Los Padilla Community Center, 2117 Los Padillas Road SW (505) 877-1884

- Bernalillo County Public Works, 2400 Broadway SE (505) 848-1507

- Taschek Environmental Consulting, 8901 Adams NE (505) 821-4700

The hearing began at 6:30 PM with an "open house," where members of the public were invited to review plans and displays and discuss the project informally with County and consultant staff.

At 7:00 PM, Mary Murnane, project manager for Bernalillo County, opened the formal presentation by welcoming members of the public and introducing the project team. She explained the hearing purpose and process, and provided an overview of the Preliminary Engineering Report, including the project history, purpose and need, alternatives considered, and recommended design concept.

John Taschek of Taschek Environmental Consulting described the environmental analysis process and the highlights of the EID. He indicated that additional studies of topics such as cultural resources and endangered species would be conducted in more detail as the project is designed and constructed in future phases. He stated that an important part of the process is interagency input, to ensure that all applicable laws and regulations are followed, and public involvement, to ensure that issues important to the community are addressed. He described the process that will be followed for the NMED to convert the EID to an environmental assessment, which will permit EPA funding to become available for the project.

Mary Murnane then discussed the public involvement process up to this point, including the CAC, public meetings, community survey, and other forms of input. She described the anticipated availability of funding and the factors that would be considered in phasing construction of the project. Ms. Murnane then closed the presentation at approximately 7:40 PM, and invited the members of the audience to make comments or asked questions.

The questions and comments that were received are summarized below:

- Was a presentation of the CAC's recommendations made to the County Commission?
- What will be the charges for hook-up service?
- Will these costs be in addition to the sewer system charges?
- Will there be a discount in the fee if you cap your well?
- Can you guarantee that we will not have to cap our wells?
- If water is brought from across the river, will it be the contaminated water that occurs in that area?
- If you do not hook-up when the system if initially constructed, will the costs be much higher to hook-up later?
- When the water system goes in, will there be future restrictions on drilling new wells or rehabilitating existing wells?
- Will there be future requirements to meter wells?
- Why couldn't the water and sewer go in together, so there would only be one construction cost and impact to the roads?
- How can a person get their well water checked?

There being no other public comments, the hearing was closed at approximately 8:30 PM.

The transcript and hand-out materials from the hearing are included in Appendix B.