**Part 3: Op-ed to Williamson County Herald**

**A Harpeth River Management Plan to Create a *Gateway to Franklin***

William W. Wade, Ph.D.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Final Draft 090114

668 words

The City of Franklin refers to its Integrated Water Resource Plan (IWRP) as its water supply roadmap. It has useful information, but does not actually show or evaluate a need for tax-payer funded expanded use of the Harpeth.

Water supply is not Franklin’s problem. 75% of Franklin’s water comes from the Cumberland, delivered by HVUD. Wastewater management is the multi-million dollar challenge. The appropriate analysis would reveal that ongoing plans for expanded use of the Harpeth for water supply likely make no economic sense.

Standard water resource planning evaluates the costs and benefits of *all* uses of the water resource – the Harpeth River. A Harpeth River Management Plan is needed to find the best use of the River among alternatives for *all* the competing uses. The objective is to discover the best return for taxpayers’ expenditures -- not to prioritize the Harpeth as a water supply.

Franklin has a state of the art water supply, HVUD, while the Harpeth is the only good option for wastewater assimilation. These uses conflict. The Harpeth River downstream is a State Scenic River, but not so scenic as it flows through Franklin. Its highest and *untapped* best use is likely enhancement to transform the river into an accessible, scenic community resource that adds to our quality of life and local economy. Increased instream flows benefit wastewater disposal. The eight year record has not estimated these economic values.

Thousands of words in hundreds of monographs explain the standard technical analyses considered by experts to develop an IWRP. But, scientific and engineering studies are only the start. Policy evaluation entails economic analysis that reveals the benefits and costs of using the Harpeth for *all* competing uses, not just water supply.

After the original 2006 Franklin study of water supply alternatives, the State adopted a policy to encourage Regional Water Supply Planning. The objective is to keep water prices low by directing more efficient sharing of large water bodies -- like the Cumberland -- and existing infrastructure -- like HVUD’s. For Franklin, this would direct water supply decisions that emphasize use of the Cumberland. Franklin then could prioritize the scenic Harpeth River to further diversify its economy and enhance city livability. Economic analysis of this is nowhere in the eight year record.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| City officials cannot make defensible policy decisions in 2014 that rely on engineering cost studies and overlook the economic costs and benefits of *all* services of the Harpeth River. A Harpeth River Management Plan to achieve best use of *all* services provided by the river is the objective. Franklin’s future water supply source is but one element of the puzzle. State of the art economic evaluation of water resource management must include *all* values that comprise modern resource management – and matter to residents. |  |

Franklin’s Harpeth River Resource Plan would analyze four elements that conform to the state of the art:

* Increased instream flows are essential for wastewater dilution while 100% reliance on HVUD for water supplies is a reasonable and reliable alternative.
* Improved water quality is valuable to Franklin residents and business for both recreation and aesthetic enhancement of the River.
* Improved view sheds to the River will enhance scenic values and economic development and increase government property and sales tax revenues.
* Financial costs for all alternatives must include the capital and operating costs for *all* inputs for each alternative. Yet, financial cost differences alone are not the determinative decision criterion given the first three bullets.

For a city that prides itself with careful management of the taxpayers’ money, Franklin has a better use for the millions of tax dollars targeted for the expensive drinking water plant. Cumberland supply is readily available; HVUD has made the capital investments to deliver high quality drinking water reliably. Franklin taxpayers have higher priority needs than an expensive new Water Treatment Plant. The Harpeth and the next generation of Franklin's river users deserve the Mayor’s next "happy stroll thru town" to include a scenic view of the Harpeth at the *Gateway to Downtown*.

-30-

1. The author is a water resource economist who has worked for water agencies and interested stakeholders on water policy and litigation across the country since 1986. He has followed and presented research to the City about Harpeth water withdrawals since 2006. This is the last of a three part series, available on request. <wade@energyandwatereconomics.com> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)