**Part 2: Franklin’s changes demand new look at Harpeth River**

William W. Wade, Ph.D. The Tennessean, August 4, 2014

Franklin residents value the natural environment. The Harpeth River flows right through the center of town, yet City Hall has not prioritized its enhancement to improve our quality of life. In fact, City Hall has resurfaced an 8-year-old plan to take more water from the river to solve a nonexistent water supply problem.

Stand on the bridge at the Franklin Pike entrance to downtown. Looking upstream or downstream is not much of a view. That’s a wasted opportunity. That area could become a Gateway to Downtown framed by scenic Harpeth River vistas.

Franklin’s “Visions for 2033: Objectives for Developing a Strategic Plan” is an excellent document — with a glaring gap. One of its objectives is titled “Quality of Life Experiences.” Kudos to former Mayor John Schroer and current Mayor Ken Moore for completing the Mack Hatcher expansion — a key element of our quality of life. But the gap is the lack of planned improvements to the Harpeth River. City Hall’s goal to increase the water intake from the Harpeth ignores the changing face of Franklin and is out of step with needed Harpeth River resource management.

Franklin’s residents in 2014 are different from much of the rest of the state, especially the surrounding counties. Our needs and values have changed from just 25 years ago. Franklin’s population was about 20,000 in 1990. Since then population has grown to almost 70,000. Median household 2011 income was $75,300, almost twice the state income of $41,700. Several Franklin ZIP codes place among the top 10 for income in the state. About 53 percent of Franklin residents older than 25 have college degrees or higher, compared with 23 percent for the state. Clearly, Franklin’s vibrant Main Street reveals that the services and amenities expected by its residents differ from those of residents in nearby rural counties.

“The city of Franklin is a great place to live. We enjoy a great quality of life in Franklin and are working to build upon this every day,” according to City Manager Eric Stuckey. Mr. Stuckey is right: Franklin is a great place to live, and the better-educated, higher-income people who have moved here expect a quality of life enhanced by goods, services and environmental amenities.

The roughly 50,000 new people since 1990 have higher expectations for, among other things, environmental amenities. These values arise not only from education levels and higher income, but from wider worldviews they brought with them. Economic research shows that cities with demographics comparable to Franklin’s prize high-quality environmental resources. The highest values of the Harpeth River running through downtown Franklin are tied not to its water supply but to its potential amenities and recreational opportunities.

Besides wastewater disposal, an essential current and future use of the river is environmental enhancement of people’s lives. Yet, the Harpeth is the same small river it was in 1952, largely ignored and untapped as a valuable asset for our economic future. City Hall has acknowledged the river’s contribution to our quality of life in a limited way by building parks along the river south and north of downtown. But then they dropped the plan to design a river walk to connect the southern park to downtown. Meanwhile, City Hall continues to design a larger water treatment plant.

The city’s ongoing campaign to withdraw more water from the river is a step backward that would worsen the river’s water quality. In eight years, no economic evaluation of the city’s water intake expansion has taken account of the benefits to local residents, businesses and government revenues of enhancing the water quality of the river instead of reducing flows. An 8-year-old bad idea is a worse idea today, unrecognized by City Hall.

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