

# Moscow won't get to supply water to mall in Washington

By William L. Spence of the Tribune

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BOISE - Moscow won't be providing municipal water service to shopping malls or other developments any time soon, unless they're located on Idaho's side of the state line.

On Tuesday, the House Resources Committee killed a bill that would have allowed the city to supply water to The Hawkins Companies, a Boise firm that wants to build a 714,000-square-foot shopping mall between Moscow and Pullman.

The controversial project would be located along Highway 270, on Moscow's western city limits, but on the Washington side of the state line.

The vote to hold the bill in committee was unanimous. There was no discussion.

The bill would have allowed Moscow and other municipalities to provide water to adjoining properties, even if they were located across state lines.

The Moscow City Council wanted to provide water to the mall, ostensibly to avoid greater use of the regional aquifer. If it's unable to do so - as now seems likely - the developer will be free to use two onsite wells, and to sell any additional water to other new developments in the area.

"This vote today helps Whitman County develop the Hawkins project and other projects," said Councilor Walter Steed, who was on hand for Tuesday's vote. "I truly believe Moscow providing water to Hawkins would limit the use of water."

The results were in sharp contrast to the Senate, where no opposition was expressed during the committee hearing and where the bill eventually sailed through on a 35-0 vote.

Rep. George Eskridge, R-Dover, said the Senate hearing seemed to raise awareness of the bill. It generated a lot of interest - and plenty of negative comments - after the bill moved on to the House.

Eskridge said he was concerned a community like Post Falls, which is also on the state line, could take water from the Rathdrum aquifer and sell it to adjoining

developments in the Spokane Valley. That might hurt other Idaho communities that rely on the aquifer for water.

"Water and energy are the life-blood of Idaho's economy, so we need to be careful how we use those resources," he said. "Letting water go outside our borders is something we need to look at very carefully."

Rep. Liz Chavez, D-Lewiston, said the debate over providing water to the Hawkins development was a local issue that should be handled locally, rather than by the Legislature.

There seemed to be greater support for the bill last week, when the House committee conducted a public hearing on the issue. However, a number of private conversations during the intervening week apparently swayed the outcome.

"That's how the process works," said Chavez, who instigated some of those conversations.

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