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March 19, 2026

TO: Council Members
FROM: Scott R. Koons, AICP, Executive Director 
SUBJECT: Water First North Florida Aquifer Recharge Project Resolution No. 2026-14

RECOMMENDATION

Adopt Resolution No. 2026-14 opposing the Water First North Florida Aquifer Recharge Project and recommend the implementation of the alternative water desalinization project, and send a copy of the adopted resolution to the Governor, the President of the Florida Senate, the Speaker of the Florida House of Representatives, the north central Florida Legislative Delegation, the Suwannee River Water Management District, the St. Johns River Water Management District and the Jacksonville Electric Authority.

BACKGROUND

The Suwannee River Water Management District and St. Johns River Water Management District have announced a regional initiative, the Water First North Florida Aquifer Recharge Project, designed to return more than 40 million gallons of water per day to the Floridan Aquifer system to maintain minimum flows and levels in the Lower Santa Fe River Basin and the Ichetucknee River Basin.

The Water First North Florida partnership proposes to take reclaimed wastewater and further purify it through a natural wetland filtration system to recharge into the aquifer. The proposed wetland filtration system would be located in Duval County. The filtrated wastewater would be transmitted via a pipeline to a recharge site located in either Baker County, Bradford County, Columbia County, Hamilton County or Union County in the north central Florida region.

Both Districts jointly approved the project after determining it was the most cost-effective and environmentally beneficial solution to meet area water needs. Staffs evaluated more than 100 potential projects.

The estimated cost of the project is \$1.0 billion. The Jacksonville Electric Authority has pledged \$400 million and the St. Johns River Water Management District has pledged \$150 million for the project. An alternative desalinization project is estimated to cost between \$2.0 billion and \$3.0 billion.

According to the Districts, the initiative will deliver multiple long-term water benefits to the region.

- Restoring flows and protecting the health of rivers and springs;
- Recharging the aquifer to ensure a sustainable water supply for residents and visitors;
- Supporting agriculture, small businesses, tourism and future growth;
- Restoring wetlands that support wildlife habitat and enhance recreation; and
- Providing the greatest environmental return at the lowest cost compared with other alternatives.

If you have any questions concerning this matter, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Attachment

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