

Tulsa dam plan dead in the water

- by: Rick Maranon Updated: Mar 15, 2016 - 7:58 PM



0

TULSA, Okla. —

Quick Facts:

- A plan to build a low water dam on the Arkansas River in the south Tulsa-Jenks area is dead.
- The Muscogee Creek Nation said they do not have the funds to establish the multi-million dollar maintenance endowment city leaders were hoping for.
- Tulsa city leaders continued to campaign for the two dam system in order to collect the money and possibly use it for other projects throughout the City of Tulsa.

A plan presented to voters in Tulsa and Jenks to build a low water dam on the Arkansas River near the Creek Turnpike is dead before voters in either city could head to the polls and vote on the project.

According to multiple documents, including internal e-mails, Tulsa city leaders knew the south Tulsa-Jenks dam had fallen through, yet Tulsa city leaders not only kicked off their Vision Tulsa campaign in late February as if nothing had happened, they continue to campaign for the two-dam system while working on alternative plans for the river at city hall.

On February 15, Tulsa city leaders received a letter from Muscogee Creek Nation Principal Chief James Floyd and Tribal Council Speak Lucian Tiger, III stating, "... the Muscogee (Creek) Nation is unable to commit resources to participate in the development of the low water dam project..."

The letter goes on to state "the Nation is unable to be identified as a possible source of funding for these efforts for the Vision 2025 project."

In January, FOX23 reported that city officials were hoping to set up a maintenance endowment through the Creek Nation to fund the long term repairs needed to maintain two low water dams in the Arkansas River.

Tulsa City Councilor and Arkansas River Infrastructure Task Force Chairman G.T. Bynum told FOX23, "We have a key partner now picking up the costs" when Tulsa city councilors removed their own maintenance endowment from the Vision Tulsa plan.

FOX23 has reported numerous time within the past year that current and past city officials have stated the current state of the Zink Dam in Tulsa is the result of a lack of proper maintenance funding, and they wanted to set up an endowment so the current disrepair of the dam wouldn't happen again.

City officials long assumed that the Creek Nation would be more than willing to pick up the tab because of their properties along the river involving Riverspirit Casino and the Flying Tee.

But after FOX23 reported that the Creek Nation was going to set up an endowment, members of the Creek Nation began to contact FOX23 saying they were not aware of the multi-million dollar commitment Tulsa officials had allegedly assumed they would be fine with.

The tribe's own internal news agency quoted Creek Nation representatives to Tulsa as saying they were not informed of the plan to set up the endowment and partner with Jenks and Tulsa on the dams.

Multiple sources close to the Vision Tulsa project who have been asked not to be identified have simply said city leaders assumed the tribe would be on board without consulting them of their plans before they presented them to voters as a done deal set in stone.

The first officials meeting to discuss an endowment happened on February 11th, and days later, the tribe officially notified city leaders they were out of the Vision low water dam plan.

According to e-mails obtained by FOX23 and videos of city council committee meetings being held throughout the month of February, city officials were aware the south Tulsa- Jenks dam was falling through and began to set up a "contingencies" where voters would approve the two low-water dams, but the money raised from the sales tax, at least on the City of Tulsa side, would go to improving the Zink Dam, setting up a maintenance endowment for the Zink Dam, and then distributing what was left of the two dam plan's funding to various projects throughout the City of Tulsa, some in council districts nowhere near the Arkansas River.

In one e-mail, at least one Tulsa city council appeared to be concerned that the public had not been notified of the south Tulsa-Jenks dam falling through immediately.

On February 23rd, Tulsa City Council Vice Chair Anna America stated in an e-mail to councilors, "I think we need to make that clear to the public ASAP, and not try to be ambiguous at the press conference or in any other comments."

She went on to state in the same e-mail, "I don't want to wait that long to say there won't be a south Tulsa dam if the Creeks say today

they aren't participating in funding this year."

But the request appears to have fallen on deaf ears because two days later on February 25th, Tulsa city leaders launched the Vision Tulsa campaign stating that two low water dams would be built on the Arkansas River if the proposal is approved April 5th.

Voters doing their research appear to have figured out that city councilors are campaigning for two dams even though they can only guarantee one.

On March 3rd, a Tulsa resident concerned about levees can be seen on a TGov video at the regular city council meeting expressing frustration and confusion that city leaders are now focusing on just the Zink Dam, a Zink Dam endowment, and possibly using the rest of the money elsewhere in numerous projects throughout the city, despite continuing to campaign for a second dam that appears to have no maintenance endowment funding source.

In response to FOX23's inquiries and findings, Tulsa Mayor Dewey Bartlett released a joint statement with Tulsa city councilors stating in part, "If the citizens agree that development of the Arkansas River corridor is important to our community and something we need to do, the City of Tulsa looks forward to further discussions with the Muscogee (Creek) Nation. We have the opportunity to forge a historic partnership in this instance."

Bartlett went on to say Jenks and Tulsa need to get approval from voters before moving forward with the project and plans about its future.

Jenks Mayor Kelly Dunkerley also released a statement saying in part that the river is the "gateway to our community" and that the City of Jenks has spent numerous years trying to come up with a plan to have water in their portion of the Arkansas River.

Dunkerley went on to state that Jenks voters should have their say, and Jenks city leaders respect the Creek Nation for taking a look at the plan.

Tulsa's Vision plan is divided into three portions: water in the river, public safety, and economic development projects. It does not appear that there are any current issues with the public safety and economic development portions of the proposal at this time.

Jenks and Tulsa voters head to the polls April 5th. Tulsa city leaders have given the Muscogee Creek Nation until midnight on December 31st to change their mind if the proposal passes.

0