

Board OKs charter

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NASHUA - City leaders approved joining the Merrimack Valley Regional Water District, making Nashua the third community to endorse its charter.

Aldermanic President Brian McCarthy said the aldermanic support is another step toward regional communities controlling a vital resource.

The district's charter "represents the goals of everybody involved," he said.

McCarthy, who shepherded the effort through the Board of Aldermen, cautioned that the community faces a very long road before the regional district can take over the water works of Pennichuck Corp.

"We still have much work to do," he said.

Mayor Bernie Streeter also reaffirmed his support for the regional movement. He said the needs of both Nashua and the communities joining the district will be safeguarded with the newly adopted charter.

The vote by the aldermen might have been the linchpin to create the district. It needs the approval of three communities to be formed.

But it was unclear Tuesday whether the two other communities that already approved the charter - Amherst and Hudson - also voted to join the district. The district is relying on Nashua to acquire the three regulated water works of Pennichuck Corp. through eminent domain then hand the assets to the regional district to own and operate.

Pennichuck is fighting the city's efforts.

The district would include Nashua and about 15 area towns.

And because some 75 percent of Pennichuck's customers live in Nashua, the city's votes on crucial decisions such as capital improvements, water rate and bond issues would carry more weight than those of the other communities.

Leaders in the regional effort applauded Nashua's move.

Marilyn Peterman, the leader of the regional charter committee, said without Nashua's vote, the efforts could not have moved forward.

"This is one part of the equation. It is an essential part. We have coalesced. We can bring a united front to the (Public Utilities Commission) to support Nashua."

And committee researcher Karen White, who has worked on the effort for nearly two years, said the vote was good news. "I can't tell you what a relief it is. I'm

delighted," White said.

The approval in the aldermanic chamber came with little drama for an issue that appeared to be bogged down just weeks ago.

Aldermen started the debate on the charter nearly two months ago. One of the most contentious issues revolved around whether the city water users should have more voices and more votes on the water district's board of directors.

But the governance issue was left untouched. Instead, McCarthy said a city board might be formed to advise the city's representative how to vote.

The Board of Aldermen approved the measure with a voice vote and Alderman-at-Large Paula Johnson seemed to be the only dissenting voice on the issue.

Johnson said her concern was deciding the issue Tuesday, instead of waiting so aldermen could review the document.

Additional communities might soon follow Nashua's approval.

Two communities are scheduled to vote on adopting the charter within the next several weeks. The Bedford Town Council will vote on the issue tonight. And the Londonderry Town Council are expected to consider the issue by the middle of May.

The attorney general of New Hampshire will review the charter to ensure it meets state law.