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Southern Arizona will have to band together across social, geographic and political boundaries if it is to have enough safe water as it continues to grow, community leaders said Friday.

"It can't just be a problem we turn to our elected officials to solve. There has to be a community consensus," said retired University of Arizona President Peter Likins, who led a Tucson Regional Town Hall in May and spoke at Friday's follow-up.

But after more than two decades of involvement in water issues, a former director of the Tucson Active Management Area wondered aloud if the Tucson region will be able to get past the talk and take action.

"Are we going to have the political will to get past the turf wars? What's going to be different about this round? I don't think anyone is stopping us from doing this but ourselves," said Kathy Jacobs, executive director of the Arizona Water Institute.

About 300 people gathered at the Doubletree Hotel to hear what the Town Hall alumni consider our water needs and how to manage it as we grow into the 21st century. It was the first follow-up to the May meeting. A similar meeting is planned next month to discuss literacy.

The key to ensuring a safe and adequate water supply is regional cooperation, echoed almost every panelist in the discussion.

Though Tucson Water serves about 80 percent of the region, there are dozens of governments and water providers that will have to be involved in planning, said Sharon Megdal, director of the UA Water Resources Research Center, who moderated Friday's discussion.

The town hall and Friday's follow-up are small steps in that direction, she said.

"The town hall was a regional town hall, so we're talking about it from a regional perspective," she said.

The two largest entities in the region - Tucson and Pima County - have mandates to protect their own interests, but that doesn't mean they can't work together, said Tucson City Manager Mike Hein.

Cooperation is on the rise between the governments, said Hein, a former county employee and Marana town manager.

Pima County Administrator Chuck Huckelberry agreed that without a regional structure to deal with water issues, water policy across southern Arizona has evolved as a disjointed morass that varies from town to town and water provider to water provider.

"Everyone's been left to fend for themselves, essentially," Huckelberry said.

How regional cooperation plays out remains to be seen.

"We haven't gotten to that detail. What we're talking about is values, not science," Hein said.

The Town Hall identified five key areas on which community **conversation** must focus: education, cooperation, conservation, protecting water sources and finding new sources, Likins said.

Likins asked everyone at Friday's meeting to urge the community to move toward greater cooperation. Hein believes we can achieve regional cooperation on water issues, but we will have to learn and there will be give and take, he said.

"You have to accept enlightenment, and you have to compromise," he said.

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