



# THE SPIGOT

from the NORTH DAKOTA RURAL WATER SYSTEMS ASSOCIATION

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# Forget the Water

## *(If You Want to Kill Your Community)*

By Julie Hein, NDRWSA Source Water Protection Specialist

Ever since the beginning of human settlement, communities have been built on or near water supplies, such as rivers, lakes, springs, or wells. Water is an essential compound needed for organisms to survive. Along with air and space, it is a one of the necessities of life.

According to Doug Griffins, author of “13 Ways to Kill Your Community,” communities do things every day that undermine their success. There is a tendency to trade what they want later for what they want now. The most important thing they forget about is quality water. Why is it then, some communities take water for granted? People do not demand quality water; they expect it. It is supposed to flow, free and clear, from their taps on demand. Quality water is not something to be taken for granted.

There is a direct correlation between the quality of water in a community and the state of that community overall. Poor water quality communities will generally have shabby, dirty streets, boarded up Main Street businesses and old disheveled houses. Communities with good quality water will have new businesses, newer homes and flowers planted along the street.

According to Griffins, whether the community’s water issues are poor quality or just cosmetic, the perception of a poor community will take root and it will become their story. Then, it will become their reality. Perception is sometimes the biggest driver of damage to a community because perception becomes reality. Having quality water is no guarantee of success, but having poor water quality is a sure step to failure.

What most people do not realize is there is a cost to that water flowing from the tap. Remember, it was your forefathers that built your community. They built it to last their lifetime and yours. But communities are not going to remain self-sustaining. It is the current residents that need to invest in good, quality water and infrastructure for future generations. The majority of people spend more on phone and television services than they do on water and other utilities and never think twice about it. But they complain when they have to spend money on something they cannot live without. Water quality or quantity should never be taken for granted.

Griffins reminds people “that water coming out of your tap isn’t going to guarantee your success, but having poor quality water will leave your community to drink from



a poisoned well, and the lack of quantity will leave your community with an insatiable thirst. Either way, forgetting about your water is a sure way to kill your community.”

The people of North Dakota built communities near a water supply for a reason. Water utilities, communities and individuals must re-invest in themselves. Local, state and federal leaders and lenders are available to help. State drinking water programs can provide Drinking Water State Revolving Fund loans with principal forgiveness, or with zero percent or low interest, for what can essentially be a grant with low or no payments to small water systems in disadvantaged communities. The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Rural Development Water and Environmental Programs can also provide loans, grants and technical assistance for small rural drinking water systems. The North Dakota Rural Water Systems Association is a non-profit organization that provides training and technical assistance in areas of operation, management, maintenance, finance, governance, and source water protection directed toward small drinking water and wastewater systems. These investments allow the community members to continue receiving quality water on tap. The water running through the mains just might be your community’s lifeblood.