



ENVIRONMENTAL BOARD MOTION 040407-D1

Date: April 04, 2007

Subject: Discussion and Recommendations on Water Conservation Task Force
Recommendations

Motioned By: Dave Anderson, P. E.

Seconded by: John Dupnik, P. G.

Recommendation

The Environmental Board recommends approval of the water conservation policy as put forth by the Water Conservation Task Force, with several suggestions to be considered by City Council. These suggestions, and the rationale for them, are laid out in the attached document.

Staff Conditions

None.

Board Conditions

None.

Rationale

Address the need to provide and to sustain a reliable water supply into the future.

Vote 6-0-0-2

For: Anderson, Curra, Maxwell, Dupnik, Ahart, and Moncada

Against:

Abstain:

Absent: Jenkins and Beall

Approved By:

Dave Anderson P.E., CFM
Environmental Board Chair

Water Conservation Policy Document
- Environmental Board Recommendations - 2007- 0404

The policies and recommendations proposed in the Draft water conservation strategies policy clearly represent tremendous initiative and effort to address the need to provide and sustain a reliable water supply for the City of Austin well into the future. These efforts should be commended. Please consider the following comments on certain measures recommended by the task force.

General Suggestions:

On pages 4&5, add a section describing provisions from other arid cities like El Paso, Tucson and Phoenix facing water shortages, and the impact and benefits. Possibly prepare a matrix comparing our proposed regulations with theirs.

Describe the current beneficial reuse of treated wastewater and how this program relates to water conservation.

Include a reference to the Statewide Water Plan, its statewide water conservation goal of reducing per capita consumption to 140 GPCD, and describe the significant regional changes in how this number was developed. Focus on the idea that these measures are only the first step.

Indoor Water Conservation:

IN-5:

Recommendation: The City might want to encourage the implementation of low or zero discharge car wash facilities where the majority of the waters are recycled and reused. The technology is available and could result in additional water use reductions.

Outdoor Conservation:

OU-1:

The Task force has outlined the benefits of sound irrigation practices including improving water quality by reducing runoff and the need for lawn-care chemicals. The task force has also indicated that irrigation accounts for more than 50% of Austin's peak-day water use and 35% of annual use. It is generally accepted that landscape irrigation is considered discretionary water use (non-essential for human health and safety) and thus, has the most potential for water savings.

Increase in Frequency = Increase in peak demand: The task force is recommending, that the watering schedules be increased from the current frequency of 1/5-days to 2/week (or 1/3.5-days). Intuitively, it would appear that the increase in frequency would be equivalent to an increase in overall water use for landscape irrigation. This proposed strategy has been given a projected savings of 6.16 MGD. There doesn't seem to be statistics or studies that would support this volume of savings, on the contrary, it would appear that the relaxed watering schedule recommended would actually increase the total volume of peak demand.

Enforcement: It appears that this schedule is proposed to make the schedule easier to remember and easier to enforce. This suggested benefit may be true; however, this benefit may not outweigh the potential increase in overall water use and peak demand that could result from it. The current 1/5-day schedule has been in place long enough for residents to understand and be familiar with it; therefore, a simpler schedule may not be necessary. The “simpler schedule” approach favored by the task force may be accomplished by implementing a 1/7-day schedule, which will be as easy to remember as the recommended 2/week schedule and result in even further peak demand savings and water conservation.

Precedent: Watering schedules implemented by both the LCRA and the City of Austin will have an impact on groundwater users in Northern Hays County and Southern Travis County who are on schedules implemented by water suppliers within the Barton Springs Edwards Aquifer Conservation District and in municipalities such as Kyle, San Marcos, Buda, and Sunset Valley. These users are currently on a schedule consistent with the existing 5-day schedule or an even more conservation oriented 1/7-day schedule. It benefits all if watering schedules were similar enough to eliminate any unnecessary confusion. The establishment of a 2/week schedule will create inconsistency, confusion, and a sense of inequity for the end-users of these municipalities as compared to City of Austin residents who would be allowed to irrigate more frequently.

Recommendation: The proposed increase in frequency seems contrary to the goals of the task force. Maintain the current established 1/5-day schedule as mandatory water use restrictions or implement a 1/7-day schedule to accomplish the type of per capita and peak demand water use reductions being achieved by other entities on this schedule.

OU-4:

Recommendation: The Cost of Service Study currently being contemplated by the Austin Water Utility should investigate the use of impact fees to cover the cost of providing excess water when soil depth exceptions are granted.

OU-5:

Recommendation: To encourage the choice a water-wise landscape option, the landscaping options should at minimum include information identifying the pros and cons related to the cost and maintenance required for each option. Customers should be informed of the potential savings associated with water wise landscaping options. Availability of financial incentives or rebates should also be considered to further encourage this option.

City and Utility Water Conservation:

CI-3:

Recommendation: In addition to the adjustments in the rate structure, a separate rate structure to be implemented only when demand reduction measures are necessary may accomplish further water use reductions when in water rationing or drought situations. Include this potential in the Cost of Service Study currently being contemplated by the Austin Water Utility.

CI-4:

Recommendation: Recommend developing a list of wholesale customers, comparing their regulations and water usage statistics, status on when contracts would be renewed, and the impact of compliance to help the Utility define the problem, if there is one.

CI-5:

Recommendation: Recommend that Council provide a date certain by which Staff should return their findings on this item back to Council.

DRAFT