



MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor and City Council

FROM: Sara L. Hensley, CPRP, Director
Austin Parks and Recreation Department 

DATE: August 31, 2011

SUBJECT: Update on Municipal Cemeteries - Turf and Tree Watering Plan

Central Texas is currently in the midst of a significant drought, and the ability to sustain both turf and trees continues to be a challenge as the drought persists. The Austin Parks and Recreation Department (PARP) has received a number of inquiries and complaints regarding the watering efforts by the City's cemetery contractor, InterCare Corporation (InterCare).

The following is in response to the Urban Forestry Board's written request for PARP to immediately instruct InterCare to water all the trees every two weeks at Oakwood and Oakwood Annex Cemeteries and to formulate a watering plan well in advance of the signing of the new cemetery operator contract.

Overall, the City has five municipal cemeteries on contract; four are irrigated with only Plummers Cemetery not having an irrigation system. The current watering plan is two (2) days per week (Tuesday and Friday) from 8:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m. which complies with the City's Stage I water conservation plan. However, this will be drastically reduced to only one (1) day per week (Tuesday or Friday – based on location address) when we convert to a Stage II plan beginning September 6, 2011.

In response to citizen complaints and watering restrictions, PARP will coordinate with InterCare to adjust the watering schedule to meet a schedule recommended by the PARP Forestry Unit, while also utilizing water conservation practices. This plan will provide a specific prioritized listing of turf and trees that will continue to be watered and monitored by forestry staff or a certified arborist through March 1, 2013. (See attached).

A major component of this plan is to have PARP Forestry staff or a certified arborist identify those trees that are vulnerable and exhibit some signs of stress. The plan is to include effective methods to service these trees, along with ongoing inspections by a city forester or certified arborist, to ensure the survival of these trees. Staff will shift the watering emphasis from turf to enhanced tree watering, and will work with our cemetery advocacy groups to request volunteers to supplement our watering efforts as the public may hand water at any time.

To date, we are on track in spending over \$100,000 in water related expenses this fiscal year at our municipal cemeteries. The proposed Public Cemeteries Watering Plan will allow us to continue our watering efforts and limit waste.

Should have any further questions or concerns, please contact Beverly Mendez, Contract Compliance Manager at 974-6784.

Cc:

Marc A. Ott, City Manager
Bert Lumbreras, Assistant City Manager
Kelly Snook, Assistant Director, PARD
Cora D. Wright, Assistant Director, PARD
Angela Means, Financial Services Division Manager, PARD
Beverly Mendez, Contract Compliance Manager, PARD

Attachment



Public Cemeteries: Watering Plan August 30, 2011

Background: Due to the compounding factors of site use and several years of drought, many trees at Austin's Public Cemeteries have become severely stressed and dozens have died. The lack of available water to the trees' fine absorbing roots remains a critical problem.

Goal: Using best management practices for tree care, the professional judgment of the Parks and Recreation Department (PARC) Forestry staff, volunteers and resources to provide supplemental water to trees in Austin's Public Cemeteries to improve their health

Approach: Austin Parks and Recreation Department (PARC) staff will address this issue by recommending supplemental watering practices to be applied by the contractor and enabling volunteer efforts. The City and its project partners intend to provide supplemental water to the outside portion of critical root zones of selected trees. Trees will be selected by a Certified Arborist based on the following priorities:

- 1) Have some drought stress symptoms such as dead branch tips or discolored leaves covering between 5-25% of the canopy. Healthy trees with no drought symptoms should not be watered, nor should those that will not respond substantially to treatment (more than 25% of the canopy is defoliated or dead)
- 2) Are large mature trees where declining health may increase the risk to public health and safety or site protection
- 3) Are native species
- 4) Are within reach of an existing water source

Application method will be to supply a professionally established quantity to the outer $\frac{1}{2}$ critical root zone (critical root zone is defined by the City of Austin Environmental Criteria Manual as 1 foot radius per inch of tree diameter) with a delivery method such as a soaker hose that allows deep infiltration and soil storage. The inner $\frac{1}{2}$ critical root zone contains many structural roots and fewer fine absorbing roots, therefore should not be watered. General quantity recommendations are contained in the Parks and Recreation Department guideline.

Watering Objectives (based on guidelines established by the Texas Forest Service and Texas A&M AgriLife Extension):

- 1) Water will be distributed to the trees by the best and most practical methods. This may include irrigation, temporary water tanks, watering trucks, or hand watering
- 2) Water amounts will be based on the individual needs of each tree. A PARC professional forester, or certified arborist employed by a partner group, will

inspect trees on a weekly basis to observe soil moisture and tree health. Based on the results of the weekly inspections, the forester or arborist will determine the need for supplemental water

- 3) In determining watering amounts, PARD professional staff or arborist will use the guideline established by the Parks and Recreation Department. This amount will be adjusted based on tree health, precipitation, micro site conditions, and tree response to watering
- 4) Supplemental watering will continue until PARD foresters determine that a sufficient response from the tree has been achieved
- 5) Tree monitoring by staff will commence immediately and will continue through March 1, 2013. At that time, the need to extend the monitoring and the watering plan will be evaluated
- 6) The City will utilize volunteers whenever possible to assist with the watering



The City of Austin is committed to compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act.
If you require special assistance for participation in our programs or for use of our facility, please call 440-5199.

