

AGENDA



Recommendation for Council Action

Austin City Council	Item ID	57251	Agenda Number	3.
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Meeting Date:	5/5/2016	Department:	Austin Water Utility
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Subject

Approve an ordinance amending City Code Chapter 6-4 relating to water use management, and adding offenses.

Amount and Source of Funding

There is no unanticipated fiscal impact.

Fiscal Note

A fiscal note is not required.

Purchasing Language:

Prior Council Action: August 16, 2012 – Council approved an ordinance amending Chapter 6-4 of the City Code related to water use management.

For More Information: Daryl Slusher, 512-972-0218; Denise Avery, 512-972-0104

Council Committee, Boards and Commission Action:
 April 12, 2016-Recommended by the Austin Integrated Water Resource Planning Community Task Force on a 9-0-0-2 vote, with Members Zerrenner and Bartee absent.
 April 13, 2016- Recommended by the Water and Wastewater Commission on a 10-1-0-0 vote with Commissioner Blanding voting against.
 April 19, 2016- Recommended by the Resource Management Commission on a 8-0-0-2 vote with Commissioners Metzger and Santiago absent and one vacancy.

MBE / WBE:

Related Items:

Additional Backup Information

The Austin region recently experienced the worst drought since the Highland Lakes were built in the 1940s, officially eclipsing in severity even the 1950s "Drought of Record." Austin Water responded by implementing the City's Drought Contingency Plan which features a range of water saving measures. By far the largest savings measure was one-day-per-week watering restrictions.

One-day-per-week watering restrictions (part of Stage 2 restrictions) are estimated to have saved more than 115,000 acre-feet of water between 2011 and 2015 as assessed by the Lower Colorado River Authority. These savings were critical in keeping the lakes above the emergency combined storage volume of 600,000 acre-feet during the drought. The lowest point for the lakes during the drought was 637,123 acre-feet on September 19, 2013.

When heavy rains came in May and June 2015 Austin Water recommended, and the City Manager ordered, that the City remain in Stage 2 due to several factors related to the historic drought that began in 2008. For one, we know from history that intense droughts can be temporarily interrupted by heavy rains and then the region goes right back into drought. That was the case during the 1950s drought, which spanned approximately 10 years. Heavy rains about five years in were followed by several more years of drought. A similar phenomena indeed occurred after the rains of May and June 2015 as several dryer than historically normal months followed.

At the same time that the announcement was made that Austin would remain in Stage 2 it was announced that Austin Water was recommending consideration of making one-day-per-week watering permanent. It was also announced that the utility would engage in a public input process to discuss that and other potential changes to the Water Conservation Code and the related Drought Contingency Plan (DCP). Austin Water has now completed that process. A total of seven public meetings were held. This included a kickoff meeting, plus five workshop sessions around the City followed by a wrap-up meeting.

Another part of the public input process was an online survey regarding one-day-per-week watering and other aspects of the Water Conservation Code. There were 1,850 responses to the online survey. Results of the surveys are included in the backup to this item. Pursuant to requests from Council Members at Public Utility Committee meetings, the results regarding one-day-per-week watering and the levels of participation are broken down by district.

Overall, a majority of citizens responding to the survey opposed making one-day-per-week watering restrictions permanent. On a district basis, however, six of ten districts favored permanent one-day-per-week restrictions – five by majorities and one by a plurality.

Staff also heard considerable sentiment in favor of loosening restrictions on home car washing which under current code is allowed only in the Conservation Stage – the base stage in which the lakes are from around two-thirds full to full.

Staff considered all the feedback and is recommending a hybrid plan. As detailed below, staff recommendations include:

- A hybrid watering schedule that allows a one-day a week watering schedule for automatic irrigation systems and two days a week schedule for hose-end users during the Conservation Stage and Stage 1.
- A continuation of any time watering for hand-held watering and drip irrigation systems until Stage 4.
- More flexible car washing at home.
- Limiting variances for irrigating new landscapes to only drought tolerant landscapes.

The proposal, in regards to irrigation, is built around allowing the most efficient irrigation systems the most time to water. For example, as in the current code, drip irrigation systems can water at any time. That remains the same in this new proposal. Likewise, hand held watering with a hose continues to be allowed at any time.

In the Conservation Stage and Stage 1, persons who water one-day a week with an automatic system can also water a second day in a week with a hose-end sprinkler. Hose-end sprinklers will be allowed to water twice per week on designated days during the Conservation Stage and Stage 1. During Stages 2 and 3, a one-day-a-week schedule for automatic and hose-end sprinklers is recommended. Designated days will not change from current code.

Staff recommends allowing at-home car washing in all stages except Emergency Response Stage 4. During the Conservation Stage and Stage 1, home car washing can be done only with a hose with a positive shut-off or with a bucket (single refillable vessel), and in Stages 2 and 3 only with a bucket. Citizens must also use a hose with a positive shut-off or a bucket when washing outdoor surfaces in all stages except Stage 4 – when surface washing is not allowed.

A change is also recommended to the Code related to variances for watering new landscapes. Currently staff considers, and often grants, variances for watering of new landscapes. During the Conservation Stage and Stage 1, variances are considered for both traditional and drought tolerant landscapes. In Stages 2 and 3, variances are only considered for drought tolerant landscapes. Staff is recommending that, henceforth, variances only be considered for drought tolerant landscapes.

Changing the Water Conservation Code also necessitates changes in the City's Drought Contingency Plan. Those changes are included in a separate agenda item.

Additional backup for this item includes:

- The proposed code language with proposed changes in legislative format;
- A chart or table comparing current code and proposed;
- Three maps showing residential water use by Council district, average 2015 water use average, average water use summer 2015, and average August 2015. The maps were produced at the request of Council Member Greg Casar and are being provided to the full Council as part of the backup for this item.
- Compiled results of citizen survey with 1,850 respondents.