

## **Water Forward Task Force Member Written Feedback**

(Received 5/14/2024 --- 5/21/2024)

### **Feedback Received by Bill Moriarty:**

- Completion of the reclaimed water hook up to the new Travis County Courthouse.
- Completion of the Indirect Potable Reuse Project that was previously identified in WF18. I think there needs to be an initial evaluation to see if this project is even feasible anymore given the algae issue and other possible permitting of public relations issues.
- An evaluation of the existing and near-term reclaimed water piping network to identify obvious hook ups, that are not currently connected. This could be facilities with various high non-potable demands such as irrigation and air conditioning chillers. These facilities could then be approached by Austin Water to gauge their interest in hooking up.
- An evaluation of the State Capital Complex for a complete conversion to reclaimed water for non-potable purposes. (Irrigation, air conditioning chillers, ornamentals, future buildings that could be dual plumbed.
- An evaluation of the University of Texas Campus for a complete conversion to reclaimed water for non-potable purposes. (Irrigation, air conditioning chillers, ornamentals, future buildings that could be dual plumbed.
- An evaluation of large non-potable customers (irrigation, chillers) city wide for possible hook up to reclaimed water system.

### **Feedback Received by Paul DiFiore:**

My main concern with our Drought Contingency Plan and Water Conservation Plan is that over the next decades, Austinites will work diligently to conserve water, yet we will fail to manage where our supply goes. As it stands, all our hard-earned gains on water conservation are vulnerable to being instantly wiped away by massive new industrial users coming onto our system. It's a glaring hole in our planning process. And it exists because of an outdated east-west inequity in our city, which allows for projects in the so-called Drinking Water Protection Zone to receive heightened levels of public scrutiny while those in the so-called Desired Development Zone get staff approval with no boards or council oversight.

Consider the anticipated goals in the Water Conservation Plan: by 2029 we are hoping to save 245 million gallons of water each year through the increased use of our reclaimed water system. Likewise we are hoping to save 266 million gallons of water each year through landscape transformation. Each of those monumental efforts—which require massive resources from utility staff and buy-in from tens of thousands of Austin residents—would be more than canceled out by a new industrial user like the next Tesla coming into our system. That's an unacceptable way to plan for the long-term future of our water supply and demand, and it should be addressed in the WF24 update.

Last meeting, we heard two arguments for why AW should maintain its current practices. I disagree with the first argument, and the second, though correct, weighs in favor of changing the service extension request process, not keeping the status quo.

**1. Water sold to industry is no different than water sold to people—they both provide equal value to our community.**

I disagree fundamentally. Here's the difference between a gallon of water consumed by a household, a small business, or even a government building, and that same gallon consumed by Samsung (by far the largest user of water in Austin): one uses it for their livelihood or for public interest activities, the other strictly for profit. The return on every dollar spent on water by an industrial user is far higher. These two distinct forms of water consumption cannot be evaluated or weighed in the same way—nor should their service extension requests be processed the same way.

Yes, people in Austin work at these high-water-consuming facilities, and the companies pay taxes (giant tax incentives and subsidies notwithstanding for the sake of argument), so it can be claimed that we all receive some direct and indirect benefits from their presence here. However, we locals also receive burdens, one of which is the huge strain on our water resources. Meanwhile, the corporations and their distant shareholders see their profit margins increase as they build more and use more of Austin's water.

So, we should think twice before we turn on the tap to new industrial users. The analysis may be complex, but I'm confident we have the expertise to do it. It's our responsibility to consider whether welcoming these facilities is, on balance, in the best interest of the city. Which leads to the next point.

**2. The decision to turn utility service provision into a land use planning tool is best left to legislative bodies, not city administrators.**

I agree completely. Balancing competing priorities so that the public interest ultimately prevails is the job of our elected members of City Council. We've entrusted them, as well as their appointed community members on boards and commissions, to study the issues and make sound policy choices for the benefit of Austin.

That is exactly why it makes no sense to cut our representatives out of major decisions like whether or not to hook up a new industrial user of the city's water. A transparent process of public oversight and input is critical to the healthy functioning of a democratic local government. Right now, we don't have that when it comes to the approval of service extension requests.

Even AW staff themselves admit that determining who should have access to water and who shouldn't is not a choice they want to make. That's fair. Many times, it's an easy call: for the hundreds of relatively minor SERs to residential developments or small businesses, administrative approval is surely appropriate. But for the largest and most impactful industrial projects, which will be few in number, we must have the capacity to pull them out of the pile and subject them to a higher level of scrutiny.

We also need to move past the old dichotomy between the so-called “Drinking Water Protection Zone” and the “Desired Development Zone” which has led to decreased environmental quality on the east side of Austin for so many decades. I’m stunned that our city still maintains policies that contribute to longstanding and tangible inequities in our communities.

My proposal therefore is simple: extend the same level of public oversight that projects west of Austin receive to major projects east of Austin. That includes water planning and service extension requests, especially for large industrial projects, which are fundamentally different than other regular uses. I recommend, as part of the 2024 Water Forward Plan updates, that **Austin Water change its policy regarding service extension requests. The Council should set certain criteria, such as a threshold of annual water consumption, above which any service extension request must be reviewed by the Environmental Commission, the Water and Wastewater Commission, and ultimately approved or denied by the full Council, as is the case currently with SERs west of Austin.**

As we all buckle down in one of the worst droughts in our state’s history, we cannot afford to erase the gains of our conservation efforts because we unnecessarily abdicate control over water planning. The people of Austin and our representatives on the Council must have a say in these critical decisions.

Respectfully,  
Paul DiFiore

#### **Feedback Received by Sarah Faust:**

- Aspiring to less than 1% reduction over 5 years is dangerous as our summers get hotter and our water supply is not replenished.
- Staff needs to report back why we did not meet the 2019 goals and why are baseline GPCD is rising;
  - a. If the answer is we didn’t meet the goals because “hot, dry weather” staff needs to determine what new water reduction strategies, programs or education is needed to change customer water use during hot, dry weather.
- Staff needs to report back on what needs to change in the water conservation plan to get back on track to meet the trajectory set in the 2019 goals. The new water plan doesn’t do anything to address the deficiencies in the old plan. i.e., what didn’t work. The new plan needs to identify specific measures and associated projected water savings. Overall, I would like to see these goals reinstated along with an explanation of a very aggressive program that would explain strategy by strategy what it would take to meet those goals, with estimated water savings by strategy.
- AWU immediately needs to launch a high-profile education program on the drought and reducing water use as temperatures rise and we are headed towards repeat or worse drought of record. Most consumers are not aware of the current drought stages and associated restrictions. Understanding that it is very hard to gauge the effectiveness of outreach customers, and the response to comments provides that the outreach has not been reduced, we need to evaluate if the awareness has been reduced and we need to reevaluate the effectiveness of outreach. I have been inquiring with a lot of people I interact with what their knowledge is of

Austin Water's residential outdoor watering restrictions. Do you know what days and times you can water? Do you know what drought stage we are in? People that I consider to be very tuned in to the environment and government do not know the answers to these questions. The information below is very specific but I provide it just to offer some suggestions because for a lot of people that I have asked the messages about outdoor watering are just not getting through. The main graphic AW uses to explain watering schedules shows Residential, Commercial, and Public Schools watering days together in one graphic. It would be great to also focus messaging on Residential and Commercial separately. Maybe a version with just residential and one with just commercial to make it really easy to decipher. Also present the message in the reverse form. Residential: No watering Monday, Tuesday, or Friday. Consider if the people in charge of "Public Schools" watering, could be reached through another more direct channel than the same graphic as all residential customers.

- WCP - Voluntary reclaimed water rebate - this program merits further analysis to determine if increasing the rebate offer would increase the number of hookups to reduce demand for potable water. The response to the question I asked reiterated that it offsets costs and the rebate is based on the number of zones or cooling tonnage, which is helpful but it doesn't tell me what the rebate would be relative to the cost to the customer to hook up. Is it 10% of the cost, 50% of the cost?
- DCP - I would like a discussion of the drought rates, and whether there is a minimum household use amount that could be exempted from the drought rate. I understand this is complicated because of multi-generational households (or now that City Council has changed the code regarding unrelated adults that can live in a house together), but I think as a matter of equity we should look into this. Also, can you tell us what the commercial drought rates are? Is it the same?
- I reiterate and support the comments from Paul DiFiore regarding SERs.
- I reiterate and support the comments from Bill Moriarty regarding centralized reuse.

#### **Feedback Received by Madelline Mathis:**

\*\*Additional comments from WMS Initial List Provided:

- Customer Side Data-Driven Water Use Management: Would like houses of similar size and lawns of similar size have automatic comparisons. Even if bill is set to autopay have quarterly email or mail sent showing water uses in comparison to others and tips on how to reduce and become more efficient.
- Water Efficient and Native Landscapes: Training and education programs for local landscapers and garden nurseries. Native landscaping design drawings that can be advertised at garden nurseries, in libraries, and other city buildings like capital and city hall.
- Onsite Reuse: Yes, happy that the initial stage ordinances have been implemented but would like to see ordinances put in place for mid-size buildings and smaller buildings as well. Would like to see low-income housing have the long-term cost benefits that residents would have from it. Maybe initial cost for developer to do so in low-income housing could have cost-sharing or other incentive implemented. Net-Zero goal for all benefits.

- Commercial, Institutional, and Industrial Ordinances: Yes! Is there any newer more efficient standards we could have them upgraded to? Could they be required to use the centralized reclaim water for this?
- Waterwise commercial water reduction program case study. Also good website for what other cities worldwide are doing to conserve water. <https://iwa-network.org/city/perth/>
- ASR [Arsenic mobility and impact on recovered water quality during aquifer storage and recovery using reclaimed water in a carbonate aquifer - ScienceDirect](#)
- Resources for treatment types and running cost analysis relating to the various treatments available are linked below.
  - [Drinking Water Treatability Database \(TDB\) | US EPA](#)
  - Interactive literature review database that contains 123 regulated and unregulated contaminants and covers 35 treatment processes commonly employed or known to be effective (thousands of sources assembled on one site)
  - [Environmental Technologies Design Option Tool \(ETDOT\) | US EPA](#)
  - ETDOT is a series of treatment models, data sets, and parameter estimation tools developed by National Center for Clean Industrial and Treatment Technologies at Michigan Technological University (MTU)
  - The models were sold as a package for many years
  - In 2019, EPA signed an agreement with MTU to make this suite of water and air treatment models available to the public at no cost
- Fog collection [Fog Collection Project | California State University Monterey Bay \(csumb.edu\)](#)