



**CITY OF LOS ALTOS  
CITY COUNCIL MEETING  
June 23, 2015**

**DISCUSSION ITEM**

**Agenda Item # 13**

**SUBJECT:** Receive an update on City of Los Altos agency water conservation efforts and approve Level 3 water reduction measures and prioritization

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**BACKGROUND**

Due to the unprecedented drought conditions, Governor Jerry Brown implemented mandatory water reduction requirements throughout the State of California. In response to this mandate, the City of Los Altos has developed a three-level water conservation plan to meet the current 32% water reduction requirement and prepare for potential more stringent future mandates. The identified water conservation measures are aimed to meet the current reduction goal while considering the safety of athletic field users and long-term sustainability of landscape areas. The intent is to reach the required goal through a reduction in overall water consumption without having to completely eliminate water use in all service areas if possible and to only activate the more aggressive water reduction measures, such as to completely stop watering large turf areas if necessary.

**EXISTING POLICY**

Resolution No. 2014-23 Water Conservation Measures

**PREVIOUS COUNCIL CONSIDERATION**

June 23, 2009; June 24, 2014; and May 26, 2015

**DISCUSSION**

The City of Los Altos has over 80 service connections with California Water Services Company (Cal Water) to provide water services to all City-owned civic facilities, all the parks and play fields, and landscape medians throughout the City. The City agency water usage represents approximately 1.6% of the overall water usage in the City of Los Altos.

In order to achieve the 32% water reduction goal, City staff has created a three-level approach to water conservation. The three levels begin with the most immediate action the City has and will continue to take to increase conservation. Measures included in Level One can be accomplished with little or no cost to the City. Level Two measures require capital investment. The funding request for these improvements will be considered by the City Council as part of the Fiscal Year 2015/16 Capital Improvement Program. It is anticipated implementation will take place after funds become available in July 2015. Level Three will require further consideration and City Council approval.

**Level One**

- Across-the-board reductions in the frequency and duration of watering of all publicly-owned landscaped surfaces including parks, fields and roadway medians. Watering frequency will be reduced from 3-5 days per week to 2 days per week while the watering duration will be reduced from 45 minutes to 15 to 25 minutes for the fields and from 5 minutes to 2 to 3 minutes for trees and shrubs.

- Adjust sprinkler range and coverage to ensure no runoff occurs.
- Monitor rainfall events and shut down watering of major fields during and immediately after rain events.
- Reduce watering of the Civic Center Orchard by approximately 75%.
- Discontinue use of water features at Grant Park and Marymeade Park.
- Test new technology, such as bio char, an organic soil amendment that is intended to improve water holding capacity, plant quality and landscape resilience.
- Reduce city-owned tennis courts washing from monthly to as needed basis
- Implemented several water saving measures at all City-owned facilities including:
  - Installation of faucet aerators which dispense only 0.5 gallons per minute rather than the regular 2 gallons per minute
  - Restroom flush valves are receiving water saving flush kits
  - Prioritizing reports of water leaks so they are fixed expeditiously

### **Level Two**

- Public Works converted a portion of the over-head irrigation systems to drip-irrigation systems primarily in the medians in 2014 to improve water efficiency. This conversion effort will continue where appropriate. The cost to implement this water saving measure is approximately \$50,000 and is requested as part of a new Capital Improvement Program Project for Fiscal Year 2015/16.

### **Level Three**

Level Three calls for measures that have the most significant negative impacts to the City's infrastructure and park service levels. A team of City staff from the Public Works Department and the Recreation & Community Services Department has developed a proposed 4-tier implementation strategy for Level Three measures. The intent is to only activate the Level Three Measures if necessary, and once activated, the measures will be implemented in an order that would minimize long-term negative impacts to park service levels.

It should be noted that the 4-tier implementation strategy was developed prior to the release of Cal Water's new prohibited uses of water and it was consistent with Governor Brown's Executive Order. The City recently became aware that using potable water on street medians is prohibited by Cal Water which is more restrictive than the Governor's Order. Staff has significant concerns about this new requirement as there are many trees in the medians. The complete cessation of water usage on street medians will post significant negative impacts to median trees and potentially create safety hazards to the general public. Staff is in discussion with Cal Water regarding this new requirement and will provide Council updates as information becomes available.

#### **Tier I** – *medians and small islands with mature plants, implementation based on Levels One and Two results*

- Shut off water on Foothill Expressway shoulders from Homestead to El Monte (Area with various volunteer shrubs)
- Shut off water for three small islands with turf at Springer / El Monte (Bubblers will be added to the existing trees)

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- Shut off water for a small grass area at Rosita Park (decorative landscape area)
- Shut off water for three small islands (10' x3') with small rose bush at El Monte Road near Santa Barbara Drive (mulch will be added as ground covers)
- Eliminate water on established junipers at Cypress Drive median
- Shut off irrigation at Hillview Community Center hallway

**Tier II** – *ornamental grass areas with limited use, implementation based on Tier I results*

- Brown out large grass area with fruitless pear trees and one redwood tree in Montclair Triangle, install mulch and water bubblers for trees only
- Convert Hillview social hall turf area to decomposed granite pathway

**Tier III** – *all nonnative, ornamental turf and plant areas, implementation based on Tiers I and II results*

- Shut off water for areas with ivy in all parks (mulch will be added as ground cover)
- Browning out all grass areas in all parks (Except for actual playing fields)

**Tier IV** – *playing fields, implementation based on results of all water reduction measures and Council approval*

- Browning out all playing fields

The City will work closely with Cal Water to monitor the City's water conservation progress by reviewing water bills for all City accounts on a monthly basis. Information gathered from ongoing monitoring will be used to gauge the effectiveness of the water conservation measures already implemented. It will also be used to inform future decision-making, such as implementation timelines for Level Three measures.

Staff presented the Level Three measures to the Environmental Commission and the Parks and Recreation Commission in May 2015. Both Commissions supported the measures and the implementation strategy. The Environmental Commission recommended that staff better explain the basis for each tier and better quantify the water saving from each tier. The Environmental Commission also challenged staff to consider measures beyond the currently plan, including utilizing recycled water, capturing and reusing grey water, and replacing existing turf areas with drought resistant plants. The Parks and Recreation Commission provided valuable input on public outreach and committed to advocate for water conservation in the community.

It is important to share what the City is doing to reduce water consumption with the community. The City will rely on the following measures to help get the word out about water conservation and provide update on our progress:

- City website
- City e-News and Announcements
- City social media channels
- City cable access channel KMVT
- Press releases
- Communications with community, business and school groups
- Flyers that can be posted and distributed

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- Signs and banners that can be placed in parks and other public spaces
- The City will explore the possibility of partnering with CalWater to host an information table at the Los Altos Arts & Wine festival in July 2015

### **PUBLIC CONTACT**

Posting of the meeting agenda serves as notice to the general public.

### **FISCAL/RESOURCE IMPACT**

Implementation of Level One measures will have little or no cost to the City. Level Two measures require an additional \$50,000 for implementation. Implementation of Level Three measures will not require immediate funding. However, it should be noted that Level Three measures have longer term negative impacts to the City's parks and recreation assets. Repair or replacement of these assets might potentially be costly depending on water reduction implementation level and duration.

### **ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW**

Not applicable

### **RECOMMENDATION**

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### **ALTERNATIVES**

Provide additional direction regarding water conservation efforts.

Prepared by: Susanna Chan, Public Works Director

**ATTACHMENT:** None

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