

MEMORANDUM

TO: Roger L. Stancil, Town Manager

FROM: Lance Norris, Public Works Director
Mike Taylor, Design Specialist

SUBJECT: Water Conservation Ordinance for the Orange Water and Sewer Authority Service Area

DATE: June 8, 2009

PURPOSE

The purpose of this item is to amend the existing water conservation regulations. Enactment of the attached ordinance would replace existing sections of the Town Code of Ordinances covering conservation of water within the service area of the Orange Water and Sewer Authority (OWASA) which includes the Town of Chapel Hill.

BACKGROUND

“Water Shortage Regulations” were first adopted into the Town Code of Ordinances by the Town Council in 1984. These regulations were implemented at the request of the Orange Water and Sewer Authority to maintain reasonable water reserves during times of drought. In 2003 OWASA requested the Town amend the “Water Shortage Regulations” to reflect the water supply conditions and conservation philosophy at the time. The requested 2003 changes to the regulations were adopted by the Council. These current “WATER CONSERVATION STANDARDS AND REGULATIONS” are in Chapter 11, Article X of the Town Code of Ordinances.

The OWASA Board of Directors now requests that Orange County, the Town of Carrboro, and the Town of Chapel Hill revise their respective water conservation ordinances to be compatible with changes to the current OWASA Water Conservation Standards that were approved by the OWASA Board of Directors on March 26, 2009. (Please see the attached letter, summary of revised OWASA Water Conservation Standards, and resolution adopted by the OWASA Board of Directors)

DISCUSSION

With the experience gained during the recent 2007-2008 drought and after soliciting input from the public and elected officials the OWASA Board has adopted new water conservation standards. These new standards take into account the distinctive potable water use patterns in the OWASA service area and thereby provide more flexibility for the use of drinking water than the previous standards, but retain vital conservation requirements to maintain adequate water supplies for the community.

Because outdoor water use in the area is approximately 7 percent of the total annual demand (Twenty percent outdoor use is common for other utilities.) and also because OWASA customers have shown a significant and continuing reduction with indoor water uses, even without regulation for indoor uses, OWASA officials believe modification to the conservation standards is appropriate. This determination is supported by the apparently significant impact that the water conservation rate structure and water rate surcharges implemented during water shortages have had on the consumption of water by OWASA customers.

Additionally, based on an evaluation of the current regulations and the impact on public use facilities, potential hardships for the public and for some businesses during the most recent drought, OWASA believes the revisions to their water conservation standards will provide “a mix of *actual* conservation benefits, customer information/education as well as a sense of individual and community empowerment...”

Key Revisions to the Standards: Below is a list of revisions to the standards. These changes are explained in more detail in the attached overview provided by OWASA.

1. Because it was determined that there was little benefit provided by this stage the “Water Supply Advisory” stage has been eliminated.
2. High “cut-off” limits on use have been removed. The rate structure during water shortages makes this provision unnecessary.
3. Allowances have been made for irrigation of public purpose turf fields and botanical sites.
4. Spray irrigation for non-turf vegetation has been relaxed. Non-spray irrigation is allowed anytime except during a Water Supply Emergency. Spray irrigation hours for turf have been slightly extended.
5. Filling and topping-off ornamental ponds, fountains, birdbaths, etc. have been relaxed. These activities are now allowed during Stage 1.
6. Washing building exteriors prior to painting is permitted during Stages 1&2 and general cleaning of building exteriors is allowed during Stage 1.
7. Swimming pools may be filled, refilled, or topped-off during any Stage except during a Water Supply Emergency.
8. New water lines may be flushed or pressure tested except during a Water Supply Emergency. Flushing or testing may be allowed during a Water Supply Emergency only if the water is captured and returned to the system.
9. Encouragement of conservation measures have been moved to a new section under “Year-Round Policy and Practice”.

The proposed revisions to the water conservation standards are based on “lessons learned” and have been provided for public review and comment. These new standards would go into effect immediately if adopted by the governing boards for Orange County, Town of Carrboro, and the Town of Chapel Hill.

As part of the revision of these regulations, the Ordinance moves these provisions from the chapter on miscellaneous regulations to the chapter with other water and sewer regulations.

MANAGERS RECOMMENDATION

That the Council adopt the attached Water Conservation Standards and Regulations ordinance to replace the existing Chapter 11 Article X with a new Chapter 23 Article IV in the Town Code of Ordinances.

ATTACHMENTS

1. OWASA Water Conservation Standards April 2009