

September 11, 2006

Mr. Bill Roberts
Texas Water Development Board
P. O. Box 13231
Austin, Texas 78711-3231

RE: Draft Plan - Water for Texas - 2007

Dear Mr. Roberts:

I have read the 2007 above draft water plan and would like to comment on it. I am only one water user and don't use water commercially or for agriculture, however, I believe that most water users in Texas are people such as myself. I live in Dallas, which has experienced drought, but not as severely as other areas in the State.

Though I believe the plan is well structured and addresses, as it must, the various needs of each region, I feel that urban water conservation is not being stressed enough, particularly in large, urban areas such as Dallas and Houston.

While the plan addresses water needs at the state level, the shift of water consumption from rural areas to the cities (mentioned on page 4 of the plan) should make us aware that the cities are going to have to learn to conserve. Texas should encourage urban water conservation by individuals, business and particularly developers, who do not always have to live in the environments they create. The three actions I believe would have the most impact are:

1. Urban Foresteing. Changes in tree canopy cover have many measurable effects on the environment. For example, as a city's tree cover is destroyed, its temperatures intensify. Urban heat islands generate ozone pollution, make people swelter, drive up utility bills, and push away rain. In turn, increased power plant loads spew additional pollution into the air while landscape watering depletes aquifers. During the summer 2006 drought, I have seen the dramatic difference between tree-covered lawn and lawn exposed to the sun in my own yard. My treeless front yard required weekly watering and the back could go without watering a month or longer. Every drop of city water saved is water that does not have to be routed through the sewers, treated, and pumped back into the city's system, all at a cost.

2. Water Cachment and Xeriscaping. The city of Albuquerque, New Mexico was able to reduce water consumption as a city by 33% in the ten years from 1994 to 2004. This was done thru an aggressive campaign which Texas could imitate. Home owners and builders were encouraged to replace the traditional lawn with low-water plantings.

Though it may sound costly, offering home owners some type of property tax rebate (not a reduction) for installing water cachment systems (rain barrels, cisterns) may be the best incentive to get residents to do so. The drought has created a renewed interest in harvesting rainwater, but the expense of installing large collecting tanks (such as cisterns) keep many people from doing it. A rebate-type incentive for using any type of water reduction program that creates a significant decrease in water usage (easily measured by monthly water bills) would probably be the best

incentive. Tens of thousands of city residents decreasing their water consumption by 25% or more would surely do more to ease our water shortage at less cost than locating and building the infrastructure for new water sources.

3. Green Building. When big box retailers and car lots change locations (often, absurdly, across the highway from a previous location), the acres of concrete they leave behind should be reclaimed in a timely manner (for example, if another business is not moving in, the concrete expanse should be broken up so that rainwater can sink into the soil below and rain run off does not become a problem). Leaving a huge expanse of concrete vacant for a long period to time tempts vandals and criminal activity, increases the temperature of the surrounding area, creates wasteful water runoff and adds to urban blight. This should be the burden of the retailer who leaves the concrete acres behind. Texas claims to be a friend of business, but business in return, should respect the community that supports it. If the retailer has recycled the space, by leasing it to another business, or selling it be developed, they have met their obligation to the community.

Existing and developing construction should be encouraged, and incentives should be offered, for green roof building. Green roofs, especially in areas of building density, such as downtown, would absorb run off and pollution, cool the ambient temperature, discourage vandalism, and encourage bird life in the city.

Cooler cities use less water. They reduce healthcare costs, are less polluted and put less strain on public utilities. They attract people who want to live there, thus increasing the property tax base. They use scarce urban land more efficiently, remove blight, and create more mass transit opportunities. (www.newcities.org)

I realize these are 'localized' strategies for large urban centers, but they need the impetus of a state government committed to cooling our cities and conserving water.

Finally, I realize there is a psychological resistance on the part of many Texans that water conservation (and indeed, any type of conservation) and 'greening' of cities are viewed as 'tree hugging' activities that soften the image of Texans they wish to project. But what could be more ruggedly individual than solving our own problems, helping ourselves, and reducing the need for city and government services?

I hope you will consider adding more 'city cooling' measures to your plan 2007 plan.

Sincerely,

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