



# Waukesha Water Utility

SERVING WAUKESHA SINCE 1886

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## **Waukesha Water Utility adopts conservation plan**

### *Plan includes changes in rates, metering and use of sprinklers*

The Waukesha Water Utility Commission approved a comprehensive plan to conserve and protect water supplies Thursday night.

“We must conserve our water, no matter where it comes from,” said Mayor Carol Lombardi, a member of the commission. “Waukesha is the first city in the Wisconsin to pursue many of the ideas in this water conservation plan.”

The plan includes methods to achieve the city’s goal of reducing per capita water use by 20% by 2020, but also includes suggestions for revising stormwater and development regulations to help replenish water and protect it from pollution. Reductions in water use will be accomplished through a combination of public education, new regulations and possible incentives and rebates, according to the report.

According to the plan, the water utility will work with the state Public Service Commission to become the first water utility in the state to end the practice of lowering water rates as a customer’s use increases. PSC approval may also be needed to recover the costs of conservation programs.

Many of the plan’s other provisions require adoption by the city council or the county board. The plan includes more than 150 pages of resources from other parts of the country.

“A stakeholders group will be formed to help tweak and implement the plan,” Lombardi said. “We want to get the help of educators, home supply stores, plumbers, environmentalists, businesses and many others to meet our water conservation and protection goals.”

Waukesha Water Utility General Manager Dan Duchniak said he believes most Waukesha residents understand the need to use less water. “Our rates of water use – including residential use and overall use – are already less than in many counties in the area,” he said. In the city, Waukesha’s water use has declined 25% since 1988, despite a 17% increase in population.

But Duchniak said individual customers can control their water bills, and sometimes their energy bills, by further reductions in water use. "Customers can help their pocketbooks and the environment at the same time," he said.

The water utility will start a public education campaign this year to limit lawn watering. A proposal to limit outdoor sprinkling and overwatering of lawns was recommended to the city council at the commission's last meeting. The utility is also investigating the phase-out of residential sewer credit meters to discourage outdoor water use. Other use restrictions may also be implemented.

Public education campaigns are being planned, including with the Focus on Energy program. The utility also recently began a campaign to encourage residents, businesses, governments and schools to replace outdated plumbing fixtures. The "Don't Flush Dollar\$ Down the Drain" campaign says a family of four can save \$75 to \$200 per year by replacing pre-1994 toilets. One option for consideration is requiring toilets and other plumbing fixtures to be updated when properties are sold.

The water utility will save water itself by upgrading its water mains to reduce leaks, a major source of water loss for many utilities. The utility will also implement a plan to reduce water use by changing methods of flushing water mains.

The city's conservation plan does not just include efforts to reduce water use, however. Current rules on stormwater and development of subdivisions should be strengthened to ensure greater infiltration and replenishment of groundwater, the plan says. For instance, the use of low-impact development should be required by the city and county. Zoning should ensure that the areas most important to the recharge of groundwater are protected from adverse impacts.

In all, the plan puts 23 activities into short-, medium- and long-term time frames.

Waukesha currently uses water from a deep groundwater aquifer that is tributary to Lake Michigan. It must find a new source of water because the drawdown in the deep aquifer has led to levels of radium above federal standards. Other water quality problems have also occurred.

The lower groundwater levels are due to a combination of factors. Communities throughout southeastern Wisconsin and northeastern Illinois have historically gotten their water from the deep aquifer. Milwaukee, for instance, also used groundwater until it switched to Lake Michigan surface water.

However, the deep aquifer in the region is not recharged by rain and snowmelt as quickly as groundwater in other areas, due to a confining layer of stone above the deep aquifer, called Maquoketa shale, that extends to 20 miles west of Lake Michigan. Regional water use, along with the restricted recharge, has led to a major cone of depression in the deep aquifer.

Waukesha's options for new water supplies are drilling new wells into the shallow aquifer to the west, or obtaining Lake Michigan surface water from the east. "Whether we obtain Lake Michigan surface water or are forced to turn to the shallow aquifer, we must conserve the resource," Lombardi said.

Duchniak said the sustainable supply of shallow groundwater is limited. The shallow aquifer is also important to conserve because it recharges surface waters like lakes, streams and wetlands. To the west of Waukesha, beyond the Maquoketa shale, shallow groundwater also recharges the deep sandstone aquifer.

The plan, developed with consultants from GeoSyntec, has been in development for six to eight months, Duchniak said.

For a copy of the report, go to: <http://www.ci.waukesha.wi.us/WaterUtility/index.html>.