



**City of Santa Barbara**  
Parks and Recreation Department

**Memorandum**

**Item 6**

**DATE:** 7/8/2014  
**TO:** Water Commission  
**FROM:** Nancy L. Rapp, Parks and Recreation Director  
**SUBJECT:** PARKS AND RECREATION 2014-2015 STRATEGIC DROUGHT RESPONSE PLAN

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**

The Santa Barbara City Council declared a Stage One Drought on February 11, 2014. With only limited rainfall since then, a Stage Two Drought was declared on May 20, 2014, and Extraordinary Water Conservation Regulations have been adopted. City water users are required to reduce water use by 20%, more with irrigation. If rainfall continues to be below the norm, Santa Barbara could face a Stage Three Drought as early as next spring. To assist the Parks and Recreation Department (Department) in meeting water conservation objectives, staff developed the 2014-2015 Strategic Drought Response Plan to meet the City's water conservation mandate. The Plan is intended as a working tool that will be modified as conditions change.

In developing the Plan, a number of factors were taken into consideration, including short-term and longer-term impacts of reduced irrigation, the need to protect historic and other resources, how the public uses parks and recreation facilities, programmatic changes, infrastructure modifications, and fiscal impacts. The Plan looks at parks, sports fields, trees, public landscape areas, recreation facilities, creek restoration areas, and the golf course. Water conservation strategies, water infrastructure efficiencies, irrigation priorities, public access/operational changes and fiscal concerns are addressed by area.

Parks and recreation facilities are grouped into three irrigation priority categories, 1) No Change, 2) Irrigation Reduced 20-30%, and 3) No Irrigation. A number of significant or historic trees have been identified for supplemental watering. The West Beach Wading Pool will remain closed due to a leak, but the Oak Park Wading Pool will operate as usual. Extremely low flow showerheads (0.62gpm) are being installed in several department facilities and the number of activated showers is being reduced. The Municipal Golf Course has prioritized irrigation for those areas that most affect play. Outreach and public education is being emphasized in all park and recreation facilities to encourage water conservation.

Since the Stage One Drought declaration in February, the Parks and Recreation Department's water use is down by 34% through May compared to the same period last year. While this is good news, with drier and warmer conditions expected in the coming months, staff will be challenged to keep conservation between 20-30%, particularly as turf, shrubs, planter beds and trees are already suffering from three years of extremely dry conditions.

## **DISCUSSION:**

### Background

The 2013-2014 rain year is the fifth driest year on record, and Santa Barbara is currently experiencing the three consecutive driest years on record. The Santa Barbara City Council declared a Stage One Drought on February 11, 2014, asking the community to voluntarily conserve water by 20%. With only limited rainfall since then, a Stage Two Drought was declared on May 20, 2014, and Extraordinary Water Conservation Regulations have been adopted. City water users are required to reduce water use by 20%, more with irrigation. To encourage compliance, higher water rates went into effect on July 1, 2014. If rainfall continues to be below the norm, Santa Barbara could face Stage Three Drought as early as next spring.

### 2014 Strategic Drought Response Plan

The Parks and Recreation Department manages a diverse array of public resources and facilities, including parks, trees, municipal golf course, recreation and community buildings, sports facilities, ballfields, pools and more. To assist the Department in meeting water conservation objectives staff developed the 2014 Strategic Drought Response Plan. The Plan is intended as a working tool that will be modified as progress and conditions change. Water conservation is the key objective. However, as stewards of the community's park and recreation resources, the Department needs to carefully manage how and where water is used to mitigate long-term damage and potential loss of these valued community assets.

In developing the Plan a number of factors were taken into consideration, including:

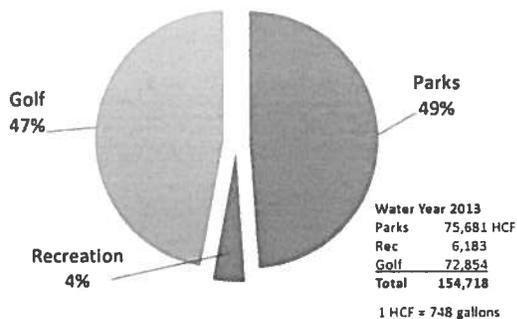
1. Short-term and longer-term impact of reduced water use to turf, plants, and trees
2. Need to protect historic and other resources
3. Priorities for public use of certain parks and recreation facilities
4. Programmatic changes which could conserve water use
5. Modifications to irrigation and plumbing infrastructure to further increase water conservation
6. Financial impacts due to increased cost of water, revenue loss from the changed appearance park and facility rentals areas; and, particularly, loss of play and revenue at the Santa Barbara Municipal Golf Course.

The Plan includes Parks, Sports Fields and Public Landscaped Areas; Trees; Recreation Facilities (including facilities, pools, showers); Creek Restoration Areas; Golf Course; and, Department-wide efforts. For each area, the following are covered in depth: water conservation strategy, water infrastructure efficiencies, irrigation priorities, public access/operational changes and fiscal concerns.

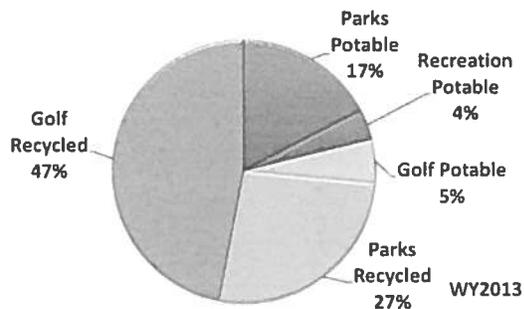
### Overview of Parks and Recreation Water Use

The Department uses both potable and recycled water. Seventy four percent (74%) of all water used is recycled water for irrigation. Potable water (26%) is used in restrooms, showers, kitchens, pools, ponds, drinking fountains and watering young trees. At the golf course, the majority of water use is recycled. The primary use of potable water at the golf course is on the delicate golf greens (small, manicured area immediately surrounding each hole).

Parks & Recreation Water Use



Parks and Recreation Water Mix



Until construction of the Tertiary Treatment Facility Rehabilitation Project is complete in summer 2015, the recycled water system is delivering potable water. Once the plant is functioning, the Department's use of potable water will decrease significantly, providing an equal benefit to the City's potable water resources. Under normal circumstances, 1% of the City's potable water use would be attributed to Parks, Recreation and Golf. With the recycled plant under construction, that potable water use increases to 3.2%.

Some highlights of the Plan include:

1. Parks, Sports Fields and Public Landscaped Areas

The Parks Division is responsible for maintenance of 47 City parks, as well as landscaped areas of 26 sports facilities and recreation buildings, various City facilities such as the libraries and City Hall, as well as 81 medians, islands, and parkways areas throughout the City. Turf, planter beds, and trees are the main categories of plant material that are considered; turf irrigation is the largest water use in the Parks Division. Irrigation priorities have been determined based on how the area is used by the public, safety, types and characterization of horticultural or landscaping elements (i.e., historically important, unique species, etc.), as well as short and long-term impacts of sustained drought conditions. Two tables, Irrigation Priorities for Turf Areas and Irrigation Priorities for Planter Beds show how various park/facility areas are prioritized into three categories: No Change in Irrigation, Irrigation Reduced 20-30%, and Irrigation Off. For example, Alice Keck Park Memorial Garden with its unique horticultural assets and higher visitation, and ballfields which serve community recreation needs, are a higher irrigation priority than most other parks. Other than changes to landscape irrigation, there will be new restrictions on water use for permitted events in parks and decorative water fountains in two parks have been turned off. Maintenance of water ponds in Chase Palm Park and Alice Keck Park Memorial Garden are not affected under Stage Two regulations.

2. Trees

The Parks Division is responsible for maintaining over 32,000 trees, including 23,600 street trees, and 9,295 trees in parks and public property. With three years of drier weather many trees around the area are beginning to show stress. The general strategy will be to limit the loss of this important community resource. New trees are regularly watered the first three years to establish the root system, then watering is tapered off and the tree is sustained through rainfall or localized irrigation in parks or from front lawns. No changes are planned to this operation; however, no new trees will be planted while drought conditions persist. A number of trees have been prioritized to receive supplemental water,

including those that are an important community asset, of a rare species, of high value, or are historic or a notable specimen. Adjustments are being made in pruning practices for tree health and public safety. All trees will continue to receive the care and maintenance necessary for tree health and public safety. Staff is developing outreach tools to encourage residents to help water street trees

### 3. Recreation Facilities

The Recreation Division manages nine recreation and rental facilities, three neighborhood centers, two lawn bowl clubs, four community gardens, four swimming pools and two tennis facilities. Aquatic facilities (pools, showers, locker rooms) are the biggest water user. The emphasis in recreation facilities will be installation of additional low-water use plumbing fixtures and educating and encouraging facility users to conserve water, particularly in showers, kitchens and restrooms.

The only change in pool programming is that West Beach Wading Pool will remain closed this summer season. The pool has a significant leak requiring extensive repairs; also, operation requires daily power washing for health and safety reasons. Oak Park Wading Pool will operate per normal schedule. A pool cover is being purchased for Ortega Park Pool to comply with Stage Two Drought Regulations. The Public Works Director has granted an exemption for Oak Park Wading Pool due to the seasonal nature of the facility, and the pool is drained every year when not in use. Pool decks are routinely cleaned on a daily basis with hoses using high pressure/shut off water nozzles. To comply with Stage Two Drought Regulations the Department is purchasing three battery powered blowers for daily maintenance. On an as needed basis, maintenance staff will spot clean using buckets and brushes or high pressure water nozzles to minimize the amount of water required to meet Health and Safety regulations.

The Recreation Division manages five shower facilities. Extremely low-flow showerheads (0.62gpm) are being installed to reduce water use by 50% and signage will inform patrons that showers should not exceed five minutes. At Los Baños, the Department is proposing to reduce the number of showerheads and install water cut off valves which would allow staff to turn off all non-health code required showers during summer recreation swim when showers are often left running and unattended. At Cabrillo Bathhouse, the number of showerheads will be reduced by 50% and installation of a handle activated shower will create a greater sense of urgency to take a shorter shower. The upper showerheads of the East Beach outside showers will be turned off, leaving the two, foot showers active. Showers at Municipal Tennis Facility, which have infrequent use, are being turned off. No changes are proposed at Carrillo Gym showers due to infrequent use; however, staff will carefully monitor use and implement changes as needed.

The Department maintains 12 tennis courts at the Municipal Tennis Center and two tennis courts at Oak Park. Regular tennis court washing practices on City courts is conducted twice a week with a water efficient water broom using recycled water. To further conserve water, Tennis is purchasing a battery powered blower for daily court maintenance. As needed, the water broom will be used to remove any stubborn residues or materials that create unsafe playing surfaces.

### 4. Creek Restoration Areas

The Creek Restoration Water Quality Improvement Program has completed 12 creek restoration projects. Sites are initially irrigated for two to three years following plant installation and irrigation is completely shut off after three years. After June, only the Mission Creek Restoration Project at Tallant Road will receive occasional watering.

### 5. Golf Course

The Santa Barbara Golf Club, the City's only municipal golf course, is open for play 364 days a year, with over 4,000 people a year playing more than 64,000 rounds. The course operates as an enterprise fund, meaning it is dependent upon revenue generated at the course and does not receive any tax dollars. The challenges facing the golf course to maintain an attractive playing experience while conserving water are not to be underestimated. In the last major drought (1989-90), play declined over 25%, affecting revenues for the City and its concessionaires for several years. The golf course has faced serious financial setbacks over the last few years related to major construction and the recession. Although play has increased somewhat since the lowest point in 2009, it has still not recovered to pre-2009 levels. Staff is very concerned about dry course conditions becoming a deterrent to play, further jeopardizing revenue and financial solvency of the municipal golf course.

The golf course is set in just under 100 acres of land with 20 putting greens, hundreds of trees, and miles of fairway. Careful and specialized management of irrigation will ensure the golf course meets the standards expected of paying customers, while demonstrating effective water conservation to achieve the desired reduction in water use. The Plan identifies which areas of the golf course are a higher priority for water use, with higher priorities being the greens, teaching areas, certain trees, and tee boxes. Lower priority areas include fairways, rough, and other low-traffic or non-playable areas. The Santa Barbara Golf Club has a well-earned reputation for the quality of putting surfaces – maintaining that reputation is the highest priority for the golf course. Given that, it is unlikely that much can be done to reduce the amount of water used on greens without damaging the turf beyond repair. Moreover, the grass on the greens is particularly sensitive to heat and dry conditions due to the need to maintain it at a shorter cut. Since only 10% of the water used at the course is used on greens, it is expected that savings from other areas will negate the need to risk the putting surfaces.

Hand watering is currently practiced on the greens and some trees to save water. When the weather is exceptionally dry and hot, it is necessary to use sprinklers or hand water the greens, which may occur outside of the allowed hours. The Public Works Director has approved an exemption from the Stage Two Drought Regulations to allow for watering the greens outside of allowed hours. Aeration has been stepped up and completed earlier in the year than would be typical, improving the water penetration and effectiveness. Turf maintenance equipment is now being cleaned using air pressure and will be washed with water far less often. The ProShop and Mulligans Restaurant are engaged in promoting water conservation within their respective businesses. Golf carts, routinely cleaned with hose and nozzle, are being washed with cloths. Full cart washes will be limited to once a month.

#### 6. Department-Wide Efforts

Most significant drought responses are discussed by program. However, the Plan also addresses the following:

- New planting projects in parks, facilities and public right of ways will likely be delayed until drought conditions improve.
- The frequency of vehicle washing is being reduced except where there is risk of damage to equipment.
- Outreach and Public Education is a critical component of implementing this Strategic Drought Response. Water conservation signage is being installed at the golf course and park areas, as well as public buildings, shower facilities, and restrooms. Information and the Drought Strategic Response Plan are being placed on the Department website as well.

#### Measuring Outcomes and Progress to Date

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The Department is closely monitoring the 107 Parks and Recreation water accounts with respect to water use and water cost versus budget. While water cost may increase, less water is expected to be used throughout the Department. In the Parks Division and Golf Division, most water meters are being monitored on a daily and/or weekly basis to assist with water conservation planning. Due to varying water priorities, it is expected that there may be a reduction greater than 20% in some areas, while others may have a lower reduction or even an increase in use. Division and department performance is reviewed on a weekly and monthly basis, for progress towards the water conservation target, and monitoring impacts to natural resources and programs. Staff will provide occasional reports to the Parks and Recreation Commission on implementation of the Strategic Drought Response Plan. Staff provides a monthly status report to the Golf Advisory Committee on golf course conditions and water conservation efforts.

Much of the Plan has been implemented over the past several months in response to increasing drought concerns. Since the Stage One Drought declaration in February the Parks and Recreation Department's water use is down by 34% through May compared to this same period last year.

	% of Total Department Water Use	% Water Conservation Achieved Feb-May 2014
Parks Division	49%	34%
Golf Division	47%	34%
Recreation Division	4%	27%
Department Overall	100%	34%

Both the Parks Division and Golf Course have achieved a 34% reduction. Many park areas as well as parts of the golf course are showing brown and dry conditions. The Recreation Division, which is the lowest water user in the Department, is down 27%. While this is good news, with drier and warmer conditions expected in the coming months, staff will be challenged to keep conservation between 20-30%, particularly as turf, shrubs, planter beds and trees are already suffering from three years of extremely dry conditions. Aquatic and shower facilities are heading into their peak seasons. Although the planned water infrastructure improvements will help reduce water use, overall water for these programs is generally higher in the summer months.

Conclusion

The 2014 Strategic Drought Response Plan will guide the Parks and Recreation Department to achieve City water conservation objectives. Water conservation is the key objective as the City, region, and state are facing unprecedented drought conditions. However, as stewards of the community's park and recreation resources, the Department will also need to carefully manage how and where water is used to mitigate long-term damage and potential loss of these valued community assets.

No additional funds have been appropriated to the Parks and Recreation budget for implementation of the Plan. The Parks, Recreation, and Golf Divisions are incurring additional expenses related to water infrastructure improvements. Those costs are being tracked in case State funding becomes available to assist communities with Water Conservation and Drought Response. In Fiscal Year 2015, the increased cost of water, particularly potable water, may have an impact on budgets even though less water volume will likely be used. At the Golf Course, play surpassed last year's performance November 2013 – April 2014. However, with the drier conditions on the course, play has been down since the start of May and year-end revenues are likely to be more than \$40,000 less than originally projected. Staff will

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continue to monitor play and whether any modifications to the Fiscal Year 2015 Golf Budget should be considered.

The Parks and Recreation 2014 Strategic Drought Response Plan is intended to achieve a minimum reduction of 20% water use over the previous year, and will be modified if conditions change. This water conservation target will help extend the City's limited water resources through this challenging Drought. While water conservation is the key objective, the Plan also works to protect the City's parks, trees, natural resources, and recreational spaces from resource loss and long-term drought impacts.

Attachment: Parks and Recreation 2014-2015 Strategic Drought Response Plan,  
June 30, 2014

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