

CITY COUNCIL STUDY SESSION MINUTES

September 17, 2013

The City Council of the City of Norman, Cleveland County, State of Oklahoma, met in a Study Session at 5:30 p.m. in the Municipal Building Conference Room on the 17th day of September, 2013, and notice and agenda of the meeting were posted at the Municipal Building at 201 West Gray, and the Norman Public Library at 225 North Webster 24 hours prior to the beginning of the meeting.

PRESENT: Councilmembers Castleberry, Griffith, Holman,
Jungman, Kovach, Miller, Mayor Rosenthal

ABSENT: Councilmembers Heiple and Williams

DISCUSSION REGARDING THE CURRENT CITY OF NORMAN WATER CONSERVATION PLAN AND POTENTIAL PLAN UPDATES.

Mr. Chris Mattingly, Water Treatment Plant Superintendent, highlighted the City of Norman Water Conservation Plan. He said the City obtains 65% of its water from Lake Thunderbird and the well field supplies 35% of the water. He said the City has an agreement and an emergency water connection with Oklahoma City as well. Staff utilizes the United States Drought Monitor to help make decisions on when to initiate the various stages of conservation measures and Oklahoma is currently abnormally dry. Staff monitors the lake level daily and although the lake is currently over its full mark, the City is not out of the woods because that could change in a month. He said if the City of Norman were to experience a long drought, the lake could be empty in three to six years and it is important to always keep that in mind even though the lake may currently be full. He highlighted historical water demands and said 2006 had the largest water usage in history and that year was considered to have had a short drought period.

Mr. Mattingly said the Bureau of Reclamation recalculated the lake's firm yield as 15,600 acre feet and Staff believes the lake is a 21,600 acre field, which is known as a conjunctive yield. He said Midwest City, Del City, and Norman share Lake Thunderbird and the total use for all three cities is 16,000 to 18,000 acre feet per year. He said relying on the conjunctive yield is unrealistic so the three cities have had to re-determine their allocations on the firm yield. He said Norman was overusing their conjunctive yield and has made an effort to get back within its allocation according to the conjunctive yield, but the City would have to give up 6,000 acre feet to get within the firm yield.

Ms. Kathryn Walker, Assistant City Attorney, highlighted current conservation efforts that includes installing drip irrigation systems in medians; requiring rain sensors and freeze gauges for irrigation systems; requiring low flow plumbing fixtures in new construction; a Meter Testing and Replacement Program for more accurate readings and assistance in detecting leaks; strategically located isolation valves to help reduce water loss; urban pipe flushing of new water mains; limiting free flushing of new water mains; requiring all new or replacement plants and trees on City property to be drought resistant; and implementing a system that allows the Water Reclamation Facility (WRF) to use treated effluent instead of potable water to wash down equipment (500 million gallons per year). She said the City is working with the Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality (ODEQ) to be allowed to spray treated effluent on compost instead of potable water. The City uses an inverted/inclining block rate structure so the less water you use the less you have to pay, which encourages customers to conserve more.

Ms. Walker highlighted the current water rates and said Norman has a \$4.00 base rate. She said Norman occasionally buys water from Oklahoma City (OKC) during the summer and OKC's base rate is currently \$6.56, but that is scheduled to increase to a base rate of \$13.75 plus \$5.23 per thousand gallons on October 1, 2013. She said Norman is not collecting that money from customers so when the City purchases water from OKC, Norman is losing money.

Ms. Walker said OKC has implemented a new progressive water conservation measure so they are always on a mandatory year round odd/even watering system. She said OKC obtains their water from several lakes and when the combined lake levels drop, they amp up their conservation efforts. When lakes are down 50% or more OKC only allows watering two days per week then one day per week and eventually bans all outdoor watering. She said Lake Thunderbird dropped down to around 56% at the worst point of the drought this year and Staff was considering imposing Stage 3 conservation measures, then it rained. She said that was very scary because Norman is solely dependent on Lake Thunderbird.

Ms. Walker said under Norman's current conservation plan, stage restrictions are implemented by the City Manager and Stage 2 and Stage 3 measures require a proclamation to provide notice to the public. She said failure to comply to the conservation measures can result in a citation; however, the City's practice has been to issue warnings first to achieve compliance. She said non-compliance is generally a public education issue. Stage 3 has not been implemented in Norman since the plan was adopted.

Ms. Walker highlighted proposed conservation measures. She said Stage 1 would no longer be voluntary, it would be mandatory odd/even watering year round to include no watering between 9:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m.; increasing public education efforts; reducing non-essential City water usage; and allowing hand watering and soaker hoses every day. She said Stage 2 would be moderate conservation triggered by demand being higher than supply; a reduction in long term source of supply; lake levels dropping to 1,033 feet or 69% of the conservation pool; and a large portion of the distribution system being temporarily out of service. Stage 2 restrictions would include waiting to establish new landscaping; eliminating non-essential City use; reducing splash pad operation by two hours per day; no washing down paved surfaces; no excessive water runoff; landscape watering allowed two days per week; and allowing hand watering and soaker hoses every day. She said Stage 2 restrictions include no washing cars except at commercial car washes and the City Council Oversight Committee is recommending that restriction be moved to Stage 3 and be allowed on the citizen's odd/even day in Stage 2. She said Norman's current Stage 2 plan prohibits watering on Wednesdays and Thursdays, but the Oversight Committee liked OKC's plan of allowing even numbered single family addresses to water on Sunday and Thursday, odd numbered single family addresses to water Saturday and Wednesday, and all others to water Tuesday and Friday. Stage 3 would be severe conservation triggered by demand being higher than supply; a reduction in water pressure; lake levels dropping to 1031 feet or 69% of the conservation pool; if Stage 2 is ineffective; if the Central Oklahoma Master Conservancy District (COMCD) requested more than a 10% reduction; and if a large portion of the distribution system is temporarily out of service. Stage 3 restrictions would include landscape watering on solid waste collection days only; allowing hand watering and soaker hoses every day; turning off City splash pads; no use of potable water to fill lakes and ponds; and no use of potable water for dust control, compaction or wash downs at construction sites.

Ms. Walker said the proposed conservation plan would also include the addition of Stage 4 and Stage 5. Stage 4 would be emergency conservation triggered by lake levels dropping to 1028.5 feet or 50% of the conservation pool. Restrictions would limit hand watering and soaker hoses in gardens and flower beds only and commercial car washes with recycling operations only. The proposed plan would also include the addition of Stage 5 which would be extreme conservation triggered by lake levels dropping to 1025 feet or 37% of the conservation pool. Restrictions would include a ban on all outdoor watering and washing of vehicles. Ms. Walker said OKC has a variance process to help businesses that may not be able to comply to restrictions and Norman could do the same.

Ms. Walker said if Council decides to adopt an odd/even year round plan she would suggest codifying that by ordinance. She said currently, the WCP policy is adopted by resolution, but if the plan is going to be permanent it should be in an ordinance.

Councilmember Castleberry said currently the lake is full and excess water is being drained and he was concerned about the City rationing when there is plenty of water. He said it does not make sense to tell people they need to conserve when water is being drained from the lake because it is too full. Mr. Mattingly said one benefit to an odd/even conservation plan is less stress on the infrastructure because less people are watering on a daily basis. Councilmember Kovach said spending \$500,000 a year for OKC emergency water to pour onto lawns and was a good reason to be conservative. He said it is not a supply problem it is an equipment capacity problem. He said the Corps of Engineers are the ones draining the excess water and the City has no influence on that. Councilmember Griffith said the Corps of Engineer's goal of removing excess water is flood control so if there is a huge rain event the lake is not deluged and the damn is not compromised, which could cause severe flooding in areas. Ms. Walker said the idea of conservation is not only to give equipment some relief and getting citizens into the practice of conserving it is also to ensure Norman does not have to purchase water from anyone else and stays within its allocation.

Mayor Rosenthal said if there is excess water in the lake and the Corps of Engineers decide to drain that, then that means it has been raining, which means lawns do not need to be watered every day. She said if firm yield is imposed as the standard for determining allocation, Norman is way over that usage even in years of lower water demand so this is a way of regularizing citizen's usage that will help the system and prepare Norman for potential changes in the firm yield. She said the plan should be called "Normal Water Conservation" because odd/even watering is basic, normal, and a good practice of water conservation. She said Norman needs to be cognizant of its allocation.

Councilmember Miller said she understands Councilmember Castleberry's concerns and believes that is why it is imperative the City do a good job of explaining conservation efforts to the public. She said the City has to look at long term water supply and the capacity and it makes sense to get citizens in the habit of doing something that is the best thing to do in the long run. She said Norman is going to continue to grow and will need more water.

Councilmember Castleberry said there is a financial impact to the City not selling water. Councilmember Kovach said the City is reviewing a 50 year water plan and when projecting needs for the future the City is looking at building infrastructure to meet peak use, not average daily use. He said the City will be looking at the building capacity for peak usage and if peak usage can be reduced, the City can save the taxpayers millions of dollars. He said many citizens want odd/even conservation measures year round because it makes sense and it does not hurt anything. Councilmember Castleberry asked what the City should say to citizens who ask what right the government has in denying them the right to use water that is plentiful and Mayor Rosenthal said water that is here today could be unavailable in a matter of months. Councilmember Kovach said it is good planning to have certain things in place all the time and government has the obligation to protect the greater population. He said governments have been regulating water use and water quality since the 1600's. Councilmember Castleberry said he would like to know the financial impact of using less water versus paying for over allotment use and purchasing water from OKC.

Councilmember Holman said citizens need to also know that although the lake if full, the City's allocation amount does not change and the City has historically gone over their allocations for decades. Councilmember Jungman said if the City has gone over the firm yield for thirty years, what is the downside to continuing to go over that yield and Mr. Mattingly said that in a three year period Norman could see the Lake Thunderbird empty.

Mayor Rosenthal said conservation is needed and that is why OKC and other communities have adopted an odd/even plan. Councilmember Kovach said citizens need to think about conservation all the time whether it is a wet or dry season.

Ms. Amanda Nairn, Chairman of the Environmental Control Advisory Board (ECAB), said now is the time to start conservation efforts year round because the horrible drought over the past two or three years is still fresh in everyone's mind. She said citizens that normally do not care about water became very concerned. She said the longer the City waits and the more it rains, the less people will want to jump on board with year round conservation. Mayor Rosenthal asked how many rain barrels ECAB has distributed and Ms. Nairn said 800 to 900, but ECAB could have given away many more if they had been available. Mayor Rosenthal asked if ECAB had discussed year round conservation and Ms. Nairn said yes and ECAB had sent a letter to the City in March 2013, encouraging once a week watering, but that was before the rains came. Ms. Nairn felt conservation will happen whether it happens now or six months from now because if the City does not conserve there may eventually be no water to drink. Mayor Rosenthal said ECAB is sponsoring a Water Wise Workshop regarding stormwater on September 26, 2013, from 6:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.

Councilmember Kovach said Staff should begin drafting an ordinance and if the City is serious about water conservation and looking at the future then now is the time to sit down with the development community to discuss gray water reuse and cisterns in new developments.

Councilmember Griffith said an inch and a half of water once a week will keep your lawn green so any more than that is wasteful and education will be the key to making citizens aware of this.

Mayor Rosenthal said it is time for normal conservation efforts to be the rule. She felt there was consensus from Council to move forward and asked Staff to include information in the educational process regarding the financial impact of conservation.

Items submitted for the record

1. Memorandum dated September 12, 2013, from Ken Komiske, Director of Utilities, and Steve Lewis, City Manager, to Honorable Mayor and Councilmembers
2. Oklahoma City Watering Restrictions
3. City of Norman Water Conservation Plan 2011 as amended through February 26, 2013
4. PowerPoint presentation entitled, "Water Conservation Plan Update," dated September 17, 2013

The meeting adjourned at 6:27 p.m.

ATTEST:

City Clerk

Mayor