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## Water rates increase

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Council rescinds drought surcharge, debates conservation

By Troy Brakefield, Staff Writer

The Allen City Council voted to approve an increase in water rates, but did not adopt tougher water conservation efforts during its regular meeting Tuesday night.

Adopting a five-tiered billing system, the council set 25- and 50-percent increases between different water usage levels designed to curb consumption by heavier water users. The 25-percent rate surcharge that had been in effect during the recent drought was rescinded, but new rate increases were approved to keep the water/waste water fund self-sufficient as per state regulations.

Average water consumers that used less than 14,000 gallons a month will not see any increase as the first increase of 25 percent begins at 15,001 gallons.

Measures to maintain water conservation momentum such as continuing the twice-a-week watering of residents' lawns were not adopted after some debate among council members.

In a July 10 council workshop, Community Services Director Steve Massey had told council members that he would like to see them go ahead with measures such as twice-a-week lawn watering to ensure continued water conservation efforts.

But he also told them that if they did, "you might be the only ones doing it" out of the members cities of the North Texas Municipal Water District.

In Tuesday's workshop, he said he was surprised that McKinney leaders did vote to limit lawn irrigation to two times a week during non-drought times.

"My hat is off to Hal Cramer in the public works of McKinney for accomplishing that," Massey said.

Massey said he felt that some of Allen's council members may have voted against continued restrictions because they felt — after the constraints of the last year — that it was unnecessary at this time.

Ross Obermeyer, council member for Place 2, wanted to take a tougher stance.

"We need to get to two times a week as a regular course of action," Obermeyer said. "I see it as the right thing to do."

Likening it to ordinances about tall grass, Obermeyer said he would prefer limited irrigation as law, although enforcement would be limited to those who continuously violated the statute.

City Manager Peter Vargas advocated continued educational efforts as the best way to work with

residents without "punishing them."

Other city leaders wanted to allow citizens to water lawns when they wanted, but curb use through the higher rates.

"Hit them in the pocket book," said Robin Sedlacek, council member for Place 4. "They won't mind two days, but they want to water when they want to."

"To me, it's more like you're dealing with gallons as opposed to days," said Debbie Stout, mayor pro tem.

Vargas told the city leaders they could revisit the issue in the fall. He also said the state goal for the future was going to be 140 gallons per citizen per day.

When the council voted, mandatory watering days were not adopted, although higher rates for above average users were. Obermeyer voted against the measure because he felt it should have deterred water abuse more.

"I'm just disappointed that we missed the opportunity to show people that we were serious about it (water conservation)," Obermeyer said. "Whether you can afford it or not — it's wrong. It's a wasted resource because we don't have that much water. The lakes are full right now, but they won't be forever."

A notice on the Allen city Web site stated watering times will still be prohibited between 10 a.m. and 6 p.m. from June 1 to Sept. 30, and the council encourages twice a week irrigation. The new measures will go into effect Aug. 1.