

# Dallas City Council passes permanent twice-weekly watering restriction

By STEVE THOMPSON

Staff Writer, Dallas Morning News

[sthompson@dallasnews.com](mailto:sthompson@dallasnews.com)

Published: 18 April 2012 11:16 PM

In the wake of one of the worst droughts since the 1950s, the [Dallas City Council](#) voted Wednesday to permanently prohibit residents and businesses from using sprinklers to water lawns and shrubs more than twice a week.

[Mayor Mike Rawlings](#) and most council members applauded the plan as a way to conserve water and extend supplies about 10 years — to perhaps 2045 from the current estimate of 2035.

The mayor said political will for such a move tends to come and go.

“When we talk about water, it is difficult because it’s long term,” Rawlings said. “It’s easy when there’s a drought; we all get behind it. And then when there’s not a drought, we don’t care about it.”

But such conservation measures are critical to the region’s economic future, he said.

“We’re taking the hard choice here, but for our kids and the folks that are going to be dealing with Dallas in 2040, they will thank us for this,” Rawlings said.

The twice-a-week restriction is already in place temporarily because of last year’s drought. Under the new ordinance, residents and businesses are prohibited from using sprinklers more than twice weekly, but they can use soaker hoses and drip lines, or water by hand as often as they like.

The idea is to cut down on the amount of water lost to evaporation during watering. City officials say the measure could reduce outdoor water use up to 16 percent.

“We have gone to a lot of sprinkler systems, we’re a hotter place to live, and it’s an inefficient way to water, really, so a lot of it’s going in the air,” Rawlings said.

Two dissenting votes came from council members Ann Margolin and Sandy Greyson. They voiced concerns that the restriction will hurt area landscaping and bring down quality of life in neighborhoods.

Margolin, who represents northwest Dallas, said the city was jumping into the restriction without enough thought.

“I, too, support the goal of reducing water consumption,” she said. “But I am also concerned about the damage we’re going to do to probably millions of dollars of landscaping throughout the city.”

Greyson said her constituents in Far North Dallas appear adamantly opposed to the idea.

“I don’t always get a lot of input from my district on various issues that we discuss down here at City Hall,” she said. “This one has grabbed their attention in a way that has generated a lot of email and phone conversions.”

City officials point out advice from experts that watering deeply and infrequently can be healthiest for landscaping. According to the Texas AgriLife Extension Service, most lawns should be watered about every four days.

The same might not be true for newly planted sod, shrubs and trees. Officials say the new ordinance allows for variances in cases of new landscaping and other special circumstances.

“We are working on unusual circumstances that we can give assistance to and variances to,” City Manager Mary Suhm said. “Most every one that’s been brought up, we’re willing to talk about. People should call 311, leave their name and number, and the water department will get back with them on it.”

Several council members thanked the mayor for working with other mayors to gain regional support for the plan. Rawlings held a news conference last week to endorse the measure alongside the mayors of Fort Worth, Arlington and Irving.

“Mr. Mayor, you are to be commended for taking a leadership effort in the region,” said council member Vonciel Hill.

Suhm and council members said the measure will help Dallas in its quest to acquire more water sources.

“We must find new reservoirs,” Hill said. “Part of the reason that we’ve had so much trouble is that we are seen within the state context as water hogs. This helps us blunt some of that criticism.”

Rawlings promised to continue his efforts to get other cities, including those that buy water from Dallas, to implement the restriction.

“If we’re going to be selling them water,” he said, “we want them to be right with us on this.”

## AT A GLANCE: New watering restrictions

**Sprinkler use** limited to twice weekly

**Street addresses ending in even numbers:** Sundays and Thursdays

**Street addresses ending in odd numbers:** Saturdays and Wednesdays

**No frequency restriction** on watering with a drip line or handheld hose or bucket

*FAIR USE NOTICE This document contains copyrighted material whose use has not been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. The Texas Living Waters Project, which is a nonprofit undertaking, is making this article available in our efforts to promote comprehensive water planning in Texas. We believe that this constitutes a "fair use" of the copyrighted material as provided for in section 107 of the US Copyright Law. If you wish to use this copyrighted material for purposes of your own that go beyond "fair use", you must obtain permission from the copyright owner.*