

## City to look at expanding water supply

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After days of torrential downpour and streets full of floodwaters, this week would seem an odd time for Mayor Annise Parker to roll out a new water conservation task force.

The group convened for the first time Friday, charged with anticipating Houston's water needs decades from now and coming up with conservation ideas and plans to diversify the city's water supply.

It was just last year, after all, when the region recorded its worst-ever one-year drought and Parker instituted mandatory watering restrictions.

"This task force will be forward-thinking in its approaches to addressing water conservation and water supply diversification," Parker said, "taking into consideration Houston's climate, existing water supply and alternative approaches to ensuring a robust water supply for decades to come."

Ideas include the use of recycled water for irrigation, rainwater harvesting, desalination and use of greywater - that which drains from showers and bathroom sinks.

"Even if Houston is in a good position as far as water supply goes, Houston is going to continue to grow and conservation needs to be a big part of your future water portfolio," said task force member Jennifer Walker, water resources specialist at the Sierra Club's Lone Star chapter. "There's a lot of room for improvement in the region, and I'm really glad that the mayor is on board with exploring options."

The city gets its water from Lake Houston, followed by Lake Conroe and then Lake Livingston in dry times.

That approach alone is unwise in the long term, said Jim Lester of the Houston Advanced Research Center, pointing to population growth projections.

"Every new water project where you have to increase the supply for an area is much more expensive than the last one you did," Lester said. "It makes financial sense to try to work on conservation."

Other alternatives could help, too. Some developers are building subdivisions with two sets of piping, Lester said: one for drinking water and one for water suitable for washing cars and sprinkling lawns. Right now, treated water from Lake Houston is, in most cases, used for everything.

"Why would you take very expensive, treated water and pour it on your grass?" he said.

The task force, which meets in two weeks to discuss improving city codes governing drought response, will report to the City Council. No timeline has been set for that report, mayoral spokeswoman Janice Evans said.

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