

State may set water rules

By Dotti Farrington

While local officials last month talked about a full public reservoir supply and wondered if usual summer restrictions could be eased, state water officials talked about the need for everyone in the state to stop wasting water, especially on lawns and gardens.

Despite current adequate water levels, the state's Water Resources Board said all people in Rhode Island and elsewhere need to be ready for water shortages because of environmental and climatic factors. There is no current drought, but only a limited amount of water, and it needs to be used as sparingly as possible, state officials said, echoing remarks of concerned groups and individuals elsewhere.

Conservation proponents are working on ways to enforce restrictions on public water supplies, but so far can only prevail on voluntary cooperation from those with private well water sources. In terms of restrictions on public water, some practices being developed for violations are the shutting off of individual connections subject to relatively high turn-on fees and giving more consideration to increased water rates as a way to discourage use. One rule for well water owners that is being considered is governing inground water sprinklers, although there have been no reports of passage of such a measure.

Several state agencies oversee the 32 major water suppliers in Rhode Island. So far nine have water conservation policies that include use restrictions. Of those nine, only two, including Jamestown, have mandatory rules that limit outdoor water use during summer months.

Tight rules

Conserving water is reviewed at most, if not all, meetings of the state Water Resources Board. The meetings are composed of oversight agencies and its committees, including on on-going drought management committee. For instance, at a recent public wa-

ter supply committee airing, Kent County Water took a central role to promote equity by both those who have public water and those who have individual private wells. Similar division between people with wells, unrestricted, and with public water, on tight conservation rules, occurs in Jamestown as in many other locales.

Tim Brown of Kent County Water is among those calling for legislation to meet water conservation goals. Legislators are reviewing proposals for laws to curb high water uses and make other changes in response to concerns from many sources, including environmental groups.

The state officials Brown addressed reinforced the message that people have to use less water, especially for lawns. They noted that they are taking a lead role to get better water use practices at all state properties

A 17-group RI Coalition for Water Security wants water use limits to ensure current water supplies will be used to replenish rivers and streams. Among other conservation goals, they want to block the high water use of watering lawns.

While conservation efforts are being pursued in Rhode Island and other locales, some water customers in Jamestown want fewer restrictions, at least this summer, and cite the water spilling over the dam at the town's full reservoir. Some see the dam spill as water waste, but others say it is refilling, or recharging the island's limited water source that supplies both the reservoir and private wells. Some water customers express resentment that high water users are getting free or cheap water at the expense of residents who follow town restrictions on use.

At a state water conference this year, panel leaders repeatedly cited high, excessive lawn and landscaping uses of water as the main, annual seasonal burden on water systems. They cited Jamestown for its level of success to meet severe

water supply limits with aggressive restrictions that it may be relaxing this year. Other conference speakers said that consistent water management practices are needed, and that the practices took long periods of time to promote and get people to follow. They suggested that changing practices for short term fluctuations in conditions could be seen as sending mixed messages about the limits of water supply.

One conference presenter reported that the only three percent of the world's water is fresh water, and that only one percent is actually useable. That one percent is what is used over and again throughout history, the speaker noted.

Outdoor options

Some practices for acceptable water uses that are recommended include:

- Shut-offs activated by rainfall sensors and moisture probes on automatic irrigation systems.
- Limiting use of fertilizers that increase need for water and that can be environmentally harmful.
- Gathering natural runoff and directing it to plants, or saving it for lawn use, including with drip or soaker systems connected to rain barrels.
- Using organic matter such as compost, leaf mold and peat moss that help hold water.
- Mulching that reduces evaporation and holds moisture around plants.
- Planting grass in the fall when temperatures promote growth and watering requirements are significantly less.
- Selecting drought resistant or low water use grasses.
- Planting trees to reduce temperature and maintain moisture.
- Watering less because too much watering encourages shallow roots, disease and weak plants.

Bridge authority votes to sell land to town

By Dotti Farrington

Yesterday, June 20, the Rhode Island Turnpike and Bridge Authority unanimously approved a proposal to sell for \$97,500 the approximately 6,000 square foot parcel the town wants for a highway barn. If the Town Council chooses that location, the town would add the authority land to its own parcel near the Newport Bridge ramp.

David Darlington, chairman of the authority, specified that the price includes legal and environmental costs the authority has incurred to date in its evaluation of the site. The approved agreement is conditional on the town's acceptance, including all additional legal, environ-

mental and related costs to the authority if the Town Council and voters approve the sale. The authority early this month offered the plan at \$100,000 and the town counter proposed \$95,000. The authority agreed to split the difference.

Darlington also stated that last week's report of council postponement of action on barn matters seemed to blame the authority for not acting sooner. Darlington said such responsibility "was the furthest from the truth." He said the authority has done all in its power to move all fast as it could, including offers to call special authority meetings to act on the matter.

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