

## What is Cedar City Corporation doing to help conserve water in Cedar Valley?



**ANSWERED BY:  
TYLER MELLING**  
Cedar City Council Member  
CICWCD Board Member



# Iron County Water Stewards

## *Answering Community Questions*

*Get to Know Your H2O: Central Iron County Water Conservancy District appreciates questions submitted by community members about the Pine Valley Water Supply Project and local water needs. As part of its role as steward of water in Cedar Valley, the District is working with a group of experts, community members and elected officials to help prepare viable solutions for the future and to respond to community questions and concerns about emergent water issues.*

*This week's question from the community is answered by Tyler*

*Melling, Cedar City Council Member and Board Member of the Central Iron County Water Conservancy District.*

### **Question: What is Cedar City Corporation doing to help conserve water in Cedar Valley?**

#### **Answer:**

#### ***Construction Policies***

For new construction, we require developers to bring water rights to the city or pay a fee for the city's cost to buy water rights from other parties. We have had some serious defects in our water policies in the past. Our policy had always assumed that each acre of new development used about 1.5 acre-feet (488,776 gallons) of water each year. After looking at our water meter information, this was not the case at all.

If we had a gallon of water for every time I have heard the word 'moratorium' over the last few years, we wouldn't have any shortage. However, even if a moratorium were constitutional and appropriate, there is no better way to ensure our youth are exported and we lose our community identity. Instead, we need to ensure the fees we charge developers match the costs of obtaining and providing water to avoid subsidizing new construction.

Over the last year, we made a series of adjustments to the fees charged to developers to better match the amount of water used for different types of projects. Our last major change takes effect on June 15 of this year, at the same time as a new conservation option for water-wise developments. The chart on the following page illustrates how those changes to the system have changed the fees for different kinds of housing.

These adjustments ensure new development in our city is no longer receiving water subsidies and that the fees assessed to developers match current water-use practices by our residents. If developers want to conserve water and create more sustainable projects, they can save much more on their water fees.

## **Water Rates**

As part of our study on water usage, we found that our residents use much more water than planned for their homes. Historically, our policies assumed homeowners would use about 0.5 acre-feet (162,925 gallons) of water each year. That's more than enough water to use 8,000 gallons each month indoors and to keep a 3,000 square-foot lawn green all summer long. However, even though lawns tend to be smaller than that, our residents tend to use more water than that, with about 25 percent of our residents using more than twice that amount.

This February, we approved changes to the water user fee system to better reflect our past assumptions, with very minor changes to monthly bills for users under 20,000 gallons per month, and rates more than doubling over the next 4 years for water used in excess of that. These adjustments ensure we no longer ask the general taxpayer to subsidize the cost of acquiring the water rights needed to supply water to those using more water than was provided when their homes were built while making only minor changes to those who conserve water.

## **Turf Removal**

Turf removal programs certainly help conserve water, and the Cedar City Rotary Club recently helped convert some turf areas on city property into water-wise landscaping. We do support homeowners who would like to participate in turf-removal, and the State recently received a grant from the legislature to implement a turf buy-back program that we are excited about. The Water District also holds a Localscapes course each year that is a great source for waterwise landscaping tips. However, we have to look at the whole picture.

There are several considerations that must be made when implementing a turf removal program. For example, we have learned that vegetation is needed to cool the surrounding environment and as Tucson and other southwestern cities have discovered, gravel, concrete, and asphalt radiate heat. A successful turf removal program needs to account for this by ensuring drought-tolerant plants replace the turf instead of only hardscapes. Placed in the appropriate locations, turf can also hold stormwater better than hardscapes.

The overall cost of turf removal programs is expensive and tends to exceed

## **CEDAR CITY CORP. DEVELOPER WATER FEE PER UNIT**

(CALCULATED AT THE FEBRUARY 9, 2022 APPRAISED  
WATER RIGHT VALUE OF \$14K/ACRE-FOOT)

Type of Housing	Pre-2021 Policy	After June 15, 2022
R-1 Single Family (3 units/acre)	\$4,667	\$24,418
R-2 Twin Units (6 units/acre)	\$3,500	\$14,758
Townhomes (12 units/acre)	\$1,750	\$8,944
Single Family Conservation	Not available	\$9,928

\*Note: These figures are for illustration only, and are adapted to a per-unit format instead of using official Cedar City fee schedules



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\$50,000 per acre-foot of water saved, according to the Division of Water Resources. While residents are welcome to remove their own turf, the city is focusing on more cost-effective conservation measures before implementing taxpayer-funded incentives. Those measures include addressing building policies and policies on water systems, wastewater programs, recharge efforts, and public infrastructure updates.

In a short time, Cedar City's policies have become far more sustainable and encourage more conservation. However, there is always more we can do. We will continue to explore policies that allow our youth to have local housing options in a sustainable way without shutting the door on them and ensure taxpayers don't bear the cost of water waste and unsustainable subsidies.

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*Several special interest groups have recently moved their focus to Cedar Valley water and have been spreading misinformation. The Central Iron County Water Conservancy District was created by a vote of Cedar Valley residents more than two decades ago. It has consistently been dedicated to developing and stabilizing the valley's water supply through conservation, recharge, reuse, and importing of water for the benefit of all current and future water users in the region. The District utilizes scientists, experts and professionals to understand the valley's underground aquifer and to determine responsible solutions for the community as it strives to meet local water challenges. For reliable information on the Pine Valley Water Supply Project specifically and the Cedar Valley's water situation in general, please visit <https://cicwcd.org/>. For more detailed information about the Pine Valley Water Supply Project and the Draft Environmental Impact Statement, please visit <https://eplanning.blm.gov/eplanning-ui/project/1503915/570>.*

