

Questa drafts water conservation regs; council may vote Aug. 2

By Matthew van Buren

The Taos News, July 21, 2011

Questa may soon have a “water conservation ordinance” designed to reduce water consumption. The Village Council discussed a draft ordinance Tuesday (July 19) and may vote on it Aug. 2.

Among other provisions, the ordinance would require signs and literature in restaurants and hotels in order to conserve water. Restaurants and caterers would only provide beverages, including water, upon request, and language explaining the ordinance’s provisions would be required to appear on menus, signs on tables or in a clearly visible sign on the premises.

Lodgers would need to provide informational brochures in each guest room, and the ordinance would not allow daily changing of sheets and towels for guests staying more than one night “unless the guest specifically requests each day that the linen and towels be changed.” Public and semipublic restrooms and showers would also be required to display a “water conservation sign” with village-approved wording.

Plant nurseries and landscape contractors would be required to provide village-provided “low-water-use landscape literature and water-efficient irrigation guidelines” to the people who will ultimately own and maintain the plants. Nurseries would also be encouraged to tag their low-water-use plants. The ordinance would also set requirements for water-efficient fixtures for new and remodeling construction, as well as replacement plumbing fixtures. Nonresidential users may also be required to retrofit their facilities within a certain period.

Toilets would be required to have an average water consumption of 1.6 gallons or less per flush; urinals would need to consume an average of 1 gallon or less per flush; and shower heads and faucets would be required to supply 2.5 gallons or less per minute.

“Self-closing or self-closing metering faucets shall be installed on lavatories intended to serve the transient public, such as those in, but not limited to, service stations, train stations, airports, restaurants and convention halls,” the draft ordinance states.

“Metered faucets shall not deliver more than .25 gallons of water per use.”

If the village determines a minor water leak exists, the owner would have 15 days to fix it following notification. Severe leaks would need to be repaired immediately.

The ordinance would prohibit outdoor irrigation between 10 a.m. and 6 p.m., except for nursery stock, licensed landscapers, certain construction purposes and acequias. Vehicle washing at residences and at on-site governmental washing facilities would be limited to once per month per vehicle.

The draft ordinance also contains language encouraging the use of artificial turf for sports fields, excluding village and school-owned recreational fields.

Violations would be considered misdemeanors, and five modes of enforcement are laid out in the proposed ordinance: administrative fees, discontinuance of water service, prosecution through Municipal Court, injunctive relief in the District Court or determination of a public nuisance.

Fees would increase for multiple violations within a calendar year. The first violation would cost \$20, the second \$50, the third \$100 and beyond three violations each would cost \$200. Administrative fees would be added to utility bills.

In light of last winter's natural gas outage, former Questa mayor and Taos County commissioner Charlie Gonzales asked if Questa's ordinance could contain language that would allow users a certain amount of water so they could leave faucets dripping during particularly cold periods in order to prevent lines from freezing. Village Administrator Brent Jaramillo said staff will look into it, as other municipalities have included such allowances.

The draft ordinance can be reviewed at the Village of Questa Administrative Offices, which can be reached by phone at (575) 586-0694.