

Published June 3rd, 2015

Will Brown Become the New Green in Lamorinda?

By Sophie Braccini



The green lawns at the Moraga Commons may turn a bit brown this summer, but thanks to local mitigation measures, not as brown as the unwatered weeds pictured here below the walking path. Photo Ohlen Alexander

with a mobile sprinkler. But the town has stopped watering the median strips.

And in Lafayette, Public Works Director Mike Moran said they are adding mulch to the center medians and roadside landscaping to help retain moisture and dress up areas where some plants may fail.

Moran also came up with a water budget that reduces water use compared to historic use for each of the water meters, which he reads each week to see if the city is meeting its budget. If not, he said the city will make adjustments to reduce the watering schedule. He added that Lafayette is converting most of the remaining spray heads (except for turf areas) to a drip, or low-flow bubbler irrigation system.

At the Acalanes Union High School District, Chris Learned, the director of business practices, said one of the district's main strategies is to involve students in identifying areas of waste and proposing solutions. The targets for water reduction include lawn areas not used for sports practices that could be converted into something else. While the AUHSD has four synthetic fields, there is no plan at this time to add more.

At Saint Mary's College, the Chapel Lawn and athletic fields are not currently being considered for water reductions - athletic fields will be maintained to meet NCAA standards for playability and safety, according to SMC Director of Media Relations Mike McAlpin. But other conservation strategies will continue to be implemented, such as using waterless urinals, low-flow shower heads and toilets, replacing aerators on sink faucets to water restrictors, replacing a natural turf field with an artificial turf field, reducing water runoff when irrigating, and incorporating drought-tolerant plants in design guidelines. These measures led to a 12 to 15 percent water reduction in 2014. This year, the college received a 20 percent reduction goal from its 2013 consumption level, and has a self-imposed target of 25 percent.

The most visible high water users are the country clubs.

Moraga Country Club's General Manager Andrew Scott confirmed that the club received a 40

With state mandated water restrictions in place, and the East Bay Municipal Utility District's water reduction goal at 20 percent, local municipalities are taking notice, with many adopting the slogan "Brown is the New Green." But thanks to mitigation efforts throughout Lamorinda, parks, sports fields, golf courses and other grassy areas may keep a mostly green luster this summer.

"We might see some green turning brown," said Moraga Parks and Recreation Director Jay Ingram, referring to The Commons and Rancho Laguna parks. "It will depend on how hot this summer is going to be."

The three Lamorinda communities are working to reduce water consumption, starting by following EBMUD guidelines: watering no more than two non-consecutive days per week with no runoff; watering only before 9 a.m. or after 6 p.m.; not watering within 48 hours of measureable rainfall; and not watering ornamental turf on public streets.

Ingram is refusing to let the large lawn used for weddings at the Hacienda de las Flores in Moraga turn brown, so he enacted spot watering

percent water reduction goal from EBMUD. "With approximately 100 irrigated acres, we are going to discontinue irrigating roughly 40 acres of our golf course," said Scott. This year the club will study capturing runoffs, and is considering a gray water-recycling project. Some yellow and brown may appear at MCC, but not on putting greens.

The Orinda Country Club operates under completely different paradigm, since it has its own private source of water: Lake Cascade. "Our lake has risen to near capacity from rainfall runoff, which is our only source of filling," said Bob Lopic, OCC's director of course maintenance. "This has allowed us to use a very modest amount of EBMUD water for areas where lake water is not appropriate." OCC also has a fully integrated system to minimize water use and the country club is also looking into new grass. "Advances in fescue seed breeding is dramatic and OCC intends to take full advantage of this. These grasses not only use less water but also require less fertilizer and chemicals," said Lopic. "We want a fully integrated system that produces the best product using the least amount of resources."

Marguerite Young, the recently elected EBMUD board member for Lafayette and Moraga, among other municipalities, believes that the long-term solution for California involves a statewide approach including innovations in agricultural water use. But enacting changes will take time.

Meanwhile, to help offset the need for water for its customers this year, EBMUD purchased 16,000 acre feet of water from the Sacramento River to replenish water in the San Pablo and Upper San Leandro reservoirs.

"(But) we can't buy our way out of the drought," warned Abby Figueroa, EBMUD's public information representative. "People need to reduce their use."



EBMUD replenishing the Upper San Leandro Reservoir, after purchasing water that comes from the Sacramento River. Photo Sophie Braccini

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