



ENGINEERING & THE ENVIRONMENT

the
GeorgiaEngineer®

Volume 16, Issue 4

August/September 2009

City of Sandy Springs Incentivizes Builders to Conserve Water

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Sandy Springs is home to 98,000 residents who make it Georgia's sixth largest city and the second largest in the metro Atlanta area. Sandy Springs is a progressive city both in thought and deed. It was the first city in the nation to try a bold new partnership using a public-private model, it launched the police and fire departments in 13 and 18 months, respectively, after passing the referendum for cityhood, and it produces publications and a Web site that year after year continue to win top honors locally, regionally, and nationally. It's this type of thinking that garners attention.

When it comes to water conservation, innovative thinking from the Mayor, City Council, and staff was at the forefront. The City of Sandy Springs City Council unanimously voted to pass a new water conservation permit incentive program on June 2, 2009. The goal of the program is to underscore the value of all water on a building site. They felt site planning and design should be based on the understanding that water is a valuable natural resource that should be used conservatively, cleaned and reused on-site.

"I am very pleased that the City of Sandy Springs is a leader in water conservation by providing incentives to builders when they incorporate water saving plumbing in construction and landscaping," said Mayor Eva Galambos. "This goes way beyond low flow toilets—it is truly a way to address water shortages that must be avoided if the Atlanta area is to continue to grow."

Builders in residential construction may choose the following options from the menu below. If they meet the criteria, a specific 'turtle' will be awarded based on the items they successfully complete. The 'turtle system' has been adopted because the City's mascot is the Eastern box turtle. Following is the listing of criteria:

A Bronze Conservation Turtle will be awarded for applying the following items.

1. Replace or install all fixtures with low-flow plumbing fixtures: 1.3 gpf or less water closets, 1.5 gpm lavatory faucets and 2.0 gpm showerheads.
2. Replace or install landscaping with Xeriscape applications as described in the State of Georgia Water Conservation Implementation Plan.

A Silver Conservation Turtle and a 30 percent Fee Rebate will be awarded for applying the following items.

1. Meet Bronze Turtle incentives.
2. Choose three option(s) from Strategies 2-4 that are appropriate to the project.

A Gold Conservation Turtle and a 50 percent Fee Rebate will be awarded for applying the following items.

1. Meet all Silver Turtle incentives.
2. Choose three additional options (for a total of six) from Strategies 2-4 that are appropriate to the project.
3. Install an interior gray water system.

A Platinum Conservation Turtle and a 100 percent Fee Rebate will be awarded for applying all of the items listed in the Bronze, Silver, and Gold lists.

For land disturbance permit fees and building permit fees, the City asks builders to follow basic water conservation guidelines such as mulching planting beds to minimize evaporation and maximize water retention, maintaining a three inch minimum mulch layer to the drip-line of trees and shrubs, and group plants with similar water needs together to maximize irrigation efficiency. Companies are also awarded Conservation Turtles based on the following:

Strategy 1 - Water Conservation Planning Techniques

A Bronze Sandy Springs Conservation Turtle will be awarded for combined use of all of the following items:

1. Maintain large areas of existing vegetation which provide shade and evapotranspiration to cool buildings. Protect vegetation canopy and forest leaf litter. Install multilayered planting schemes that replicate natural sites with both canopy and vegetative ground cover. Large areas must be ten percent greater than code.
2. Limit turf areas. Where turf is desired, select drought-tolerant, low-nutrient lawn species that will reduce maintenance incentives.
3. Utilize water-efficient irrigation systems that use drip or subsurface delivery methods, tailor irrigation to weather conditions and measure soil moisture.

Strategy 2 - Design grading and plan layout to capture and slow runoff.

A 30 percent Fee Rebate will be issued and the Silver Sandy Springs Conservation Turtle awarded for meeting the Bronze Turtle level plus any three of the following:

1. Use landscape-based water treatment methods such as dry wells, vegetated swales instead of curb and gutter systems, raised inlet rims, vegetated filter strips and infiltration facilities.
2. Install a rain garden or small vegetated catchment areas which filter rainwater and increase groundwater recharge by capturing excess water. Individual infiltration ponds on residential lots must be approved by the Engineering Department.
3. Use pervious surfaces that allow water to infiltrate soil.

4. Protect soils from compaction during site construction by restricting machinery to designated zones. Restore infiltration capacity and reduce compaction of soils by breaking up compaction, adding organic matter and planting vegetation.
5. Raise stormwater inlets in planting areas to allow water to soak into the soil.

Strategy 3 - Eliminate Potable Water Use In The Landscape.

A 50 percent Fee Rebate will be issued and the Gold Sandy Springs Conservation Turtle will be awarded for meeting Bronze and Silver Turtle levels and two of the following.

1. Collect and filter grey water (stormwa-

ter) for on-site non-potable water needs such as irrigation, cleaning outdoor surfaces and water features.

2. Collect and filter water from building roofs and use cisterns or rain barrels to store harvested rainwater.
3. Collect and filter condensation water from air conditioning systems.

Strategy 4 - Maximize Water Conservation Practices

A 100 percent Fee Rebate will be issued and the Platinum Sandy Springs Conservation Turtle will be awarded for applying all of the conservation practices listed in Strategies 1-3.

Fee rebates are determined on type of construction and may not include some administrative fees.

"The goal of this program is to have a minimum reduction of ten percent in water usage for residential construction projects," said City Manager John McDonough. "We hope that builders and residential customers start thinking about the efficient locations of water heaters and further, the installation of low volume dishwashers and high efficiency clothes washers as well as landscaping that is drought resistant. If we get in this mindset it will serve us well into the future." ❖



As part of the water conservation effort, the City gives away free Water Conservation Kits from Atlanta Watershed Management to residents who sign a water conservation pledge. Included in the kit are a low-flow shower head easily installed by homeowners, toilet dye tablets to allow one to check whether the flushing mechanism is leaking and kitchen and bath faucet aerators that reduce water consumption from those sources. Pictured are Sandy Springs Environmental Compliance Officer David Schmid and Fulton County resident Samantha Jackson.

Sandy Springs Building Inspector Robert Floyd checks water heaters in new residential construction. By placing water heaters close to the kitchen or bath, the water has less distance to travel, resulting in a reduced amount of waste. The heaters feature a water circulation pump on the side that allows a continuous flow of hot water to reduce the time needed for hot water to get to the faucet.

Mt. Vernon Presbyterian School in Sandy Springs has installed waterless urinals and sinks activated by sensors. The faucets have both a sensor that eliminates the water running unnecessarily and also a low flow aerator to reduce water consumption. The urinals alone are estimated to save 40,000 gallons of fresh water per urinal per year. These are two examples of items that could qualify for the Sandy Springs Water Conservation Incentive Program.