



To: Mayor and Town Council Members

From: Mark C. Meyers, Town Manager

Date: September 3, 2026

Subject: Water Shortage Contingency Plan - Revised

Background

Last year the Washington County water Conservancy district developed a water shortage contingency plan which was adopted by the town council. And the plan provides a system for prioritizing drinking water under diminished supply. It includes mitigation measures drought monitoring identification of shortage stages response actions of vulnerability assessment operational framework and an update process.

If the district declares A shortage condition water budgets will be issued to municipalities based on the shortage response target parentheses EG-10% to -60% use end parentheses. Importantly member municipalities will be responsible for initiating a response plan to ensure operation within the water budget (and avoid a financial penalty). The district is now requesting that municipalities adopt water contingency plans to use as guides to address shortage conditions.

To that end attached is a draft local water shortage contingency plan. The plan uses the district's guidance found in the overall plan which will ensure consistent action and language should implementing the plan become necessary.

The plan was discussed at the August 12, 2026, work meeting and August 18, 2026, regular meeting and questions arose regarding how the plan would be communicated to customers and about the referenced stage rate structures.

Based on the questions, a communication plan has been added. Also, the reference to stage rate structures has been omitted. Setting higher rates during shortages to encourage conservation is optional and I'm not prepared to recommend taking that step at this time. Instead, the plan should be used as an educational effort encouraging voluntary compliance. If the plan were ever implemented, we could gage compliance and take that additional step of introducing stage rates if determined necessary.

Likewise, pool limits, ultra water efficiency standard and no new connections references are omitted. I believe these items, like stage rates, require a more in-depth policy discussion. Also, other items were removed that aren't relevant to Virgin including references to golf courses, splash pads and water parks.

Recommendation

Staff recommends that the Town Council review the revised Water Shortage Contingency Plan and consider formally adapting it. The plan will provide local guidance if slash when the Washington County water Conservancy district board of trustees declares a shortage condition.

Virgin Town, Utah

Water Shortage Contingency Plan

1. Purpose

To ensure the continued availability of safe drinking water during periods of drought, infrastructure limitations, or emergency disruption by establishing clear conservation stages, enforcement actions, and alternative supply strategies.

2. Water System Overview (Context)

The Town of Virgin relies primarily on:

- Water run-off from snowpack and precipitation from the surrounding watershed into the Virgin River
- Seasonal flows influenced by the Virgin River basin
- Regional coordination with Washington County Water Conservancy District
- Demand influenced by nearby tourism and proximity to in greater Zion

3. Trigger Conditions (When Plan Activates)

Stage 0 – Conserve

- Implement Conservation Plan

Stage 1 – Caution

- Promote Stage 1 watering guidelines
- Reduce irrigation of public facilities by 10%
- ~~Implement Stage 1 water rate structure~~
- Stage 0 actions Plus:
 - Leverage smart metering systems to strengthen messaging
 - Prevent lawn installations May through September
 - ~~Limit residential swimming pool permits to 500 square feet or less surface area~~
 - Reject new connections for non-critical facilities with demands over 9 MGY
 - Increase enforcement of municipal water waste policies

Stage 2 – Concern

- Deploy Stage 2 communications
- Promote Stage 2 watering guidelines
- Reduce irrigation of public facilities by 20%
- ~~Implement Stage 2 rate structure~~
- Stage 1 actions plus:
 - Defer new grass installation. Drip irrigated, water-efficient plants only
 - Prohibit irrigation of ornamental lawns in all sectors
 - Defer new private swimming pool permits
 - ~~Require new housing to meet ultra efficient water standard~~
 - ~~Reduce operation of public splash pads~~

- Reject new connections for non-critical facilities with demands over 3 MGY
- Restrict car washing frequency
- Prohibit ornamental fountain operation
- Prohibit comfort mist cooling systems
- ~~Implement golf water budgets for 20% reduction~~
- ~~Increase incentives for water efficient landscape 50%~~

Stage 3 – Alarm

- Deploy Stage 3 communications
- Promote Stage 3 watering guidelines
- Reduce irrigation of public facilities by 30%
- ~~Implement Stage 3 rate structure~~
- ~~Turn off outdoor water features, including splashpads~~
- Stage 2 actions plus:
 - Spray irrigation prohibited except for communal active recreation areas
 - Watering limited to drip irrigation or hand-held hose with positive shut-off nozzle
 - ~~Implement water budgets for golf courses to reduce demand 30%~~
 - Planting only allowed for conversion of lawn areas to water-efficient landscape
 - ~~No new connections approved except critical facilities or low water demand facilities~~
 - Swimming pools covered when not in use. Only make up water allowed
 - ~~Recreational water parks and splashpad operations suspended~~

Stage 4 – Crisis

- Deploy Stage 4 communications
- Deploy Stage 4 watering guidelines
- Reduce irrigation of public facilities by an additional 20% (60% total)
- ~~Implement Stage 4 rate structure~~
- ~~Golf course irrigation budgeted at 60% reduction~~
- Stage 3 actions plus:
 - Outdoor irrigation prohibited except communal active recreation areas which are budgeted at 40% of average.
 - All outdoor water recreation suspended
 - Car washing prohibited, except dry wash products

4. Communication Plan

Virgin Town will coordinate with the Washington County Water Conservancy District (WCWCD) to provide information to customers regarding water supply availability and response stages via the following sources:

- *Website* – The news section will include information regarding shortage declaration and link to the WCWCD web site with additional information.
- *Social Media* – Town Facebook and Instagram pages will be utilized and posts also sent to neighborhood social media groups.
- *Email blasts* – Messages will be sent immediately using email addresses of water customers.

- *Press announcements* – The Public Information Officer (PIO) (Town Manager) will develop and draft a press release in the event of a water shortage declaration in consultation with the Mayor and Public Works Director.
- *Newsletter* – Periodic updates will be featured in printed newsletters as is practical.

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