

Water Resources Review Committee
Hearing Concerning Measures to Conserve Municipal Water Used for Outdoor
Purposes
Aurora Water Testimony

Mr. Chair, members of the committee, I want to thank you for permitting me to speak today on potential measures to conserve municipal water used for outdoor purposes. I am Greg Baker, the Manager for Public Relations at Aurora Water. In that role, I oversee Aurora's Water Conservation program, which has received national recognition and is considered a benchmark for water providers throughout the arid west.

Aurora Water serves a community of over 348,000 residents, with a large commercial, industrial and institutional sector, encompassing both the Fitzsimons Medical Campus and Buckley Air Force Base. Only 50% of Aurora's total land area is developed and it is projected that the city will double its population in the next 40 years. With the current construction of a light rail line along the I-225 corridor and large amounts of undeveloped land in the eastern section of the city, Aurora will dramatically change by 2050. Water, of course, plays a critical role in achieving that development, and Aurora's city council has long been proactive in ensuring a sustainable water supply to meet that challenge.

Aurora Water, as a department of city of Aurora, works with the city's planning department to refine codes to encourage a conservation ethic. Since the year 2000, Aurora's per capita consumption of water has fallen by 30%. Aurora was one of the first Front Range cities to restrict turf installation in new development. Our landscape code restricts the use of cool weather turf only to a maximum of 40% of the front yard and encourages the use of low water use Xeriscape rather than turf. For existing developments, Aurora has an active rebate program where we help pay for the replacement of turf with Xeriscape plant materials.

For new development, Aurora instituted a tap fee structure this year that is based on projected water user rather than a traditional flat fee based on the engineered tap size. This structure encourages higher density development and smaller yards as a cost savings mechanism. Simply put, the smaller the home and lot, the smaller the tap fee. We offer a \$1000 credit financial incentivize for new development that install Xeriscape landscaping rather than turf. For common areas, such as parks, medians and open spaces, we have created a whole new category of landscaping, which we refer to as a "Z-zone." Z-zones are designed to require no supplemental irrigation after a three-year landscape establishment period. As a result, no tap fee is associated with Z-zones, since no permanent water source will be needed. The development community has been very supportive of this concept and we've started approving new development common areas using native grasses and other no water plant materials.

Aurora has undertaken these efforts not because of a mandate or possible legislative action, rather we did this because market forces dictated that the water we currently own is the cheapest water available to use. We want to get the most out of our existing resources before we rely on the open market for more water. This was the reason Aurora invested \$650 million

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in our Prairie Waters system, which recaptures our return flows so we can fully utilize our current transbasin diversions and consumptive rights in the South Platte basin. But this does not mean we will not need to buy water in the future. We will. But Aurora is actively involved with the agricultural community to help preserve food production, as well as the farming culture. We are also working in the development of alternative methods of transferring water to ensure the sustainability of agriculture in Colorado. Yet, there still will be times when pressures from development and economic hardships will result in water coming to the market, and Aurora will evaluate the need to purchase that water to meet our future water demands.

While Senate Bill 17 was well-intentioned, it did have many unintended consequences, and would have been difficult, if not impossible, to implement in many communities. Aurora is one of only a few water providers that has a direct connection to the city's planning office. We work closely with our city planners to develop water conserving codes. Most water providers, however, are either separated from municipal functions by charter or are special districts that do not align with municipal boundaries. Coordinating water acquisition with development in these cases is not practical.

Finally, the primary objection from many municipalities, including Aurora, was the loss of local control. Senate Bill 17 would have been the first attempt by the State of Colorado to dictate community landscape standards through legislation. This is considered by many on our city council as an overreach of authority. This would diminish the great effort we have already taken to achieve many of the same goals desired by the original legislation. Placing further restrictions and mandates on development, when in fact the market is driving us towards the same objective, provides little benefit to either the municipal or the agriculture community.

I thank you again for the opportunity to speak before you.