



---

## Drought

---

Wilson, Richard <RWilson@burbankca.gov>

Mon, Jan 24, 2022 at 4:52 PM

To: [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] Lindell, Dawn" <DRothLindell@burbankca.gov>

Dear Mr. Spencer,

Thank you for your question about Burbank's development plans and the drought.

I understand the "where is the logic?" sentiment expressed by residents like yourself. Many believe that the city is asking residents to conserve so that we can build more apartments. If that *were* true, the inverse would also be true: if we don't build more apartments, we don't need to conserve. Obviously, that is not true. We do want to conserve and not waste our precious resources. So, the reasons for building new units and the need to conserve water are unrelated. That is not to say that one is not dependent on the other: we must have water and electricity to supply the new developments. Let's tackle each one separately.

### Reason for Building New Units

The city is experiencing a housing crisis. Before the COVID-19 epidemic, our population doubled each work day because we have more jobs in Burbank than we have housing units. Approximately one hundred thousand workers commute to Burbank from other cities each day on buses, cars and trains. Many of those workers would move to Burbank if housing were available. And because of the natural law of supply and demand, rents are high and unaffordable to many.

As you know, affordable housing in California is a state-wide issue. Through legislation, the city is required by law to build more housing and provide a specified number of new units at below market rates. This is driving the development of new housing units.

### Water Conservation

During the last drought, a five year stretch from 2011 to 2016, California suffered record low precipitation levels. At the time, Governor Brown issued executive order B-37-16 that made conservation a way of life across California and included four objectives: (1) using water more wisely; (2) eliminating water waste; (3) strengthening local drought resilience; and (4) improving agricultural water use efficiency and drought planning. As I am sure you will recall, Burbank responded with the successful billion-gallon challenge and we were also required to reduce consumption by 20 percent by 2020, which we did (in fact we achieved a 30-percent reduction).

Now, the state is in another drought with new and unique challenges. Water deliveries from the state water project, which brings water to Southern California from the San Francisco Bay-Delta, has been severely curtailed. The water level in Lake Mead is at a historic low. Last July 8<sup>th</sup>, Governor Newsom issued an executive order that asked for voluntary reductions in *state-wide* water use by 15 percent from 2020 levels.

With these existing conditions, never has it been so crystal clear that, when it comes to water, *we are one*. The whole southwestern United States and all of California is interconnected and interdependent. In response, to the governor's executive order, Burbank implemented Stage II of its sustainable water use ordinance to do its part to alleviate drought conditions.

We need to change how we think about water. In the same way people want to know how their food was raised and harvested and brought to their table, we want people to know the story of how water is captured, stored, transported, treated, tested and delivered to your home. So, when our newsletter is asking for conservation, it does so, first, in response to current conditions, and second, because it is *liquid gold* and it takes a lot of energy, money, regional cooperation and effort to reliably deliver it to your tap and it should not be taken for granted.

### Water Supply

So, how do we know that we will have enough water to supply the developments?

Every five years, Burbank and the Metropolitan Water District (MWD) submit to the state our Urban Water Management Plans (UWMP). They analyze projected water demand and water supply for the next 20 years (2025 through 2045), under various conditions, including multi-year droughts. For Burbank, we include all of the city's housing units projected by the Community Development Department.

MWD's UWMP, dated June 2021, developed its projections based on information received from each of the 26 member agencies' UWMP's (including Burbank's). There is a lot of analysis required (the state has determined the criteria for all UWMP's to ensure consistency) and, since we cannot predict the future, assumptions are made based on the past:

- Normal Year – The average of historic years 1922-2017 most closely represents the water supply conditions that MWD considers available during a normal water year.
- Single Dry Year – The conditions for the year 1977 represent the lowest total water supply available to MWD.
- Five-Year Consecutive Drought – The five consecutive years of 1988-1992 represent the driest five consecutive year historical sequence over a 96-year period. This is used to determine MWD's service reliability and drought risk assessments.

Based on data provided by each of the 26 member agencies, which includes regional population growth and specific growth due to development in each community, MWD has determined that it has supply capabilities to meet expected demands under each of the scenarios listed above through 2045.

I would also like to note the following:

- The development occurring in Burbank (apartments and condos) uses much less water than single family homes. Most of the water used in single family homes is for outdoor irrigation. Condos and apartments are mostly restricted to indoor use, and since they are new, they will use high efficiency toilets and fixtures. If proposed legislation is passed, indoor water use will be reduced from 55 gallons per capita per day to 42 gallons per capita per day. So, the new developments will actually be the most water efficient housing units.
- Under state law (SB610) a development consisting of more than 500 units must complete a 20-year water supply assessment as part of the permitting process and the project will not be approved unless the assessment verifies that sufficient water supplies exist to support the project.
- There are always opportunities to conserve more by reducing waste, here in Burbank, and across the region. We are investing in our infrastructure to repair a leaky reservoir, use new technologies to find and replace leaky pipes and offer rebates to switch to more water efficient fixtures, devices and irrigation systems.
- The region's water supply is not static. MWD is investing more in regional supplies to increase reliability and reduce the need for imported water. Water transfers and water banking will be used when water is plentiful. Expanded regional use of recycled water systems will be used to recharge ground water basins. Regional investments help cities like Burbank (lower need for imports by one agency, leaves more for others when in need).

I hope this explains the rationale behind the city's approach to new development and the drought and answers your questions.

Richard



**WATER AND  
POWER**

**RICHARD H. WILSON, P.E.**  
Assistant General Manager – Water Systems

(818) 238-3558 office | (415) 793-1590 cell

*Always There for You!*