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## Joint Initiative Looks at City's Water Supply

By Matt Simonette

Upon entering an April 26 meeting about the City's water supply, visitors were asked to take part in a taste test between two cups of water. One was bottled water and the other was Evanston's tap water. Nobody in the room—including the organizers—accurately guessed which was which.

Maintaining the availability, integrity and quality of Evanston's water was the topic of the meeting, which was held at the Civic Center and led by representatives from the City as well as the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning.

The gathering was part of a joint initiative by CMAP and the City to develop a program that addresses water use and supply issues, increases water efficiency and promotes water conservation, said Amy Talbot, an associate planner with CMAP. The initiative is part of the City's Climate Action Plan and was partially funded from a three-year, \$4.25 million grant that CMAP received from HUD.

An online survey earlier this year suggested that most Evanston residents thought they used lower-than-average amounts of water, but they often did not know how much water "lower-than-average" actually was. Respondents' guesses about the amount of water they used ranged from about "five gallons a day" to "500 gallons a day," Ms. Talbot said. "That's one of the things that goes to doing more education and outreach—trying to get people to understand how much water they are using," she added.

In fact, most Evanstonians use on average about 97 gallons a person a day; that figure is much lower than the regional average, she said. Nevertheless, the City can do more to promote conservation and efficiently utilize its water supply. A draft of the water plan is expected by the end of May, and, after further public feedback, should be completed in June or July.

CMAP forecasts a 10 percent growth in Evanston's population between 2010 and 2040. "That's not too drastic a change, but there are definitely going to be more people in the area, so that's something to accommodate when you are thinking about water use," said Ms. Talbot.

About 63 percent of Evanston's water use is residential, but the water plan will also include recommendations for local businesses and the City government itself, she added. "We wanted to make sure we aimed recommendations at everyone."

A key strategy was increasing water-related information dissemination, especially by updating the format of water bills. Water usage is currently delineated in cubic feet on bills, so the plan will likely suggest bills that indicate usage in gallons—a measurement residents could more easily visualize—and offer more comparative data.

The plan would also formalize the City's participation in National Drinking Water Week, which usually falls in early May, says Evanston's Sustainable Programs Coordinator, Catherine Hurley. A number of activities were planned this year, she said, and "this is the first year that the City has had more activity than just a press release saying that its National Drinking Water Week."

City facilities would also be expected to hold to standards of conservation and efficiency. The plan would start, for example, by discouraging consumption of bottled water in the Civic Center. "If you go down the hall right now, there is water for sale in vending machines, but if you go down the hall, there is also water in water fountains," said Ms. Talbot.

Among the recommendations for residential usage would be encouraging residents to switch to high-efficiency toilets and distributing leak-detection tablets. Furthermore, the City would discourage residents from overwatering their lawns. "It's important to communicate that your lawn needs just about an inch of water a week," Ms. Talbot added.

Evanston dining establishments would be encouraged to install high efficiency pre-rinse spray valves. "A lot of businesses are in older buildings, using old hoses to rinse off dishes, but they make (hoses) much more efficiently right now," according to Ms. Talbot. "This is a small thing that we can do to save water in an efficient way without anyone having to change their behavior."

Another suggestion would be encouraging restaurants to provide water only on request; such a policy would prevent water on the table from being wasted and create fewer dishes needing to be washed, Ms. Talbot added.

Ms. Hurley emphasized that the water initiative "is a continuation of good groundwork" that is already going on, and that the water conservation issue has become a joint effort of City facilities ranging from the library to the Evanston Ecology Center. "We are really looking to broaden the issue so that people understand how it connects to their bills, their behaviors and their pocketbooks," she said.