

# waterwise

The official publication of Colorado WaterWise

*The Voice of the  
Colorado Urban Water  
Conservation Community*



## In this issue...

From the Chairwoman's  
Desk - page 3

Land Use & Water: the Next  
Frontier for Water  
Efficiency - page 4

Model Conservation Projects  
at a Denver HOA - page 6

Water Conservation and  
Efficiency at CII Facilities:  
Assessing Boulder County's  
Irrigation Systems - page 8

Plant Spotlight - page 10

How Does Organic Matter  
Benefit Drought  
Tolerance? - page 11

CWCB Earmarks Funds for  
Innovative Demand-side  
Conservation Measures in  
Lakewood - page 13

colorado  
waterwise

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# MODEL WATER CONSERVATION PROJECTS AT A DENVER HOA

*by Diana Denwood, Aurora Water*

Cherry Creek 3 Townhomes is a 251-unit multifamily complex in Denver, Colorado. At 53 years old, it is one of the oldest homeowners' associations (HOA) in the city. Over the past decade, its board of directors has decreased water usage by millions of gallons, resulting in savings of hundreds of thousands of dollars. This success happened through careful planning, development, and implementation of a water conservation program that has made it a model recognized statewide and beyond.

The impetus for this program was, not surprisingly, a water bill. At the conclusion of the 2008-09 fiscal year, the Cherry Creek 3's Board realized that consumption had increased. They had purchased over 36 million gallons of water and spent about 42 percent of their budget on combined water and sewage costs.

The board started paying closer attention to its monthly water consumption, hired a contractor to discover and repair service line leaks, and began thinking about how to tackle indoor water use.

Concerned homeowner, Don Ireland, became the board's water conservation champion. He enlisted the help of Denver Water and a contractor, who set to work replacing the HOA's old, 3.5 gpf toilets with efficient models. Mr. Ireland was able to persuade more than 150 individual homeowners to participate in the project, as well as overcome the board's concerns about liability issues, invasion of privacy, flush performance, and sewer line clogs. By autumn of 2009, 425 toilets in more than 125 units were replaced. This project resulted in a reduction of 4.7 million gallons of water.

Next, the HOA petitioned Denver Wastewater to review its sewer bill. To Cherry Creek 3's surprise, they were issued a refund check of \$17,070 – an amount that greatly exceeded the HOA's costs to implement the toilet program.



Photo by Don Ireland

Mr. Ireland became the HOA board president in 2010 and pushed for further water conservation. Cherry Creek 3 created a multi-year Landscape Improvement Program with three objectives: conserve water, improve the beauty of the neighborhood and boost property values. The board replaced about 50 front yards over a 5-year period at a cost of \$125,000, and installed new controllers, rain sensors and 1,500 sprinkler heads. Denver Water provided incentives for water reductions and rebates for the sprinkler heads. Homeowners attended landscape classes, learned about Plant Select and were included in project decisions.

At each building, low-water ground covers replaced bluegrass and juniper bushes. When a major water-sewer line replacement project was conducted on a sloped hillside, instead of re-seeding with sod, a mulched "Conservancy Area" containing water-wise plants was planted.

The original intent to conserve water reaped many unanticipated benefits, including increased property values, renewed community spirit, and an urban landscape that sustains the ecosystem. Homeowners love seeing a thriving population of pollinators. Although there is a greater fiscal demand for weeding and plant maintenance, those costs are offset by water and sewage cost reductions.

Cherry Creek 3's water conservation and re-landscaping efforts have not gone unnoticed. They became the first in the state to win awards from Audubon Rockies Habitat Hero, Colorado WaterWise, the state's Environmental Leadership Program and Plant Select. The community effort has been showcased in two documentaries.

It was an understanding of Colorado's climate and native landscape that encouraged Mr. Ireland to champion water conservation. "My desire to help my HOA battle increasing water bills led me to a lot of research and understanding that water is precious and we need to get involved in conservation efforts." said Mr. Ireland in a 2016 Colorado WaterWise article.

And they did. In 2017, the Board offered rebates for installation of WaterSense devices. Several owners received rebates for new toilets, dishwashers, and front-loading washing machines. In 2019, the HOA Board increased rebate amounts to help incentivize additional owners to replace water devices with high-efficiency models.

Cherry Creek 3 is a model for other neighborhoods looking into water conservation. Get started by calling your water utility to ask about incentives, expertise, and programs.

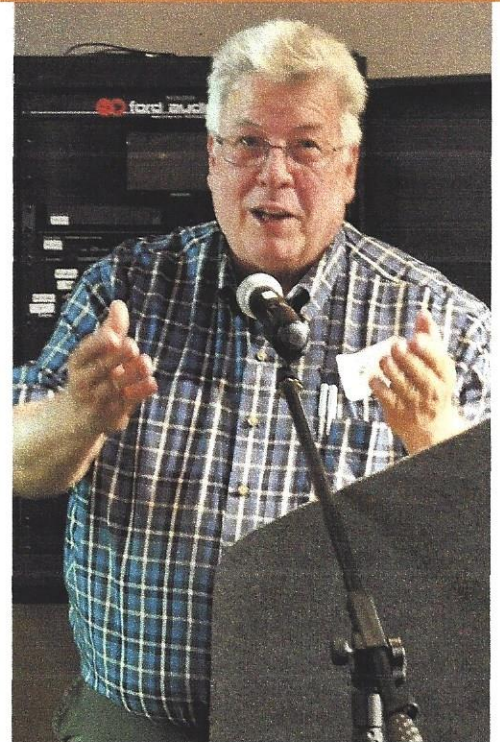


Photo courtesy Don Ireland

*"In recent years, we've managed to drop our HOA's annual consumption from 36 million gallons to around 22 million. I'm proud of the accomplishment but I think we can do better." - Don Ireland*

Water conservation changes in the Cherry Creek 3 landscaping contract:

1. The HOA board manages the irrigation clocks, based on recommendations by Denver Water.
2. Sprinklers are turned on the final week of May and shut off in late September.
3. The contractor mows grass to a minimum of 3.5 inches to promote a healthier lawn.
4. Rain sensors ensure sprinklers won't operate if it is raining, and new clocks won't water if substantial rain occurred one or two days before the scheduled clock operation.