



DATE: February 25, 2026  
TO: City Council  
FROM: Ted Henry City Manager  
SUBJECT: Regional Water Conservation and Bel Aire's Response

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## **Water Supply for Bel Aire**

The City of Bel Aire receives treated water from two primary sources. The Chisholm Creek Utility Authority (CCUA) serves both Park City and Bel Aire and currently has the capacity to treat and deliver up to 2.75 million gallons of water per day. While CCUA provides the majority of Bel Aire's daily supply, maintaining a wholesale agreement with the City of Wichita remains important for system reliability and future planning. During a typical year, peak summer demand exceeds the treatment capacity available to Bel Aire through CCUA alone. We can discuss this in greater detail at the meeting but wanted to provide a high-level overview.

## **Background on Water Conservation**

Over the past several years, water conservation has shifted from an occasional discussion to an ongoing priority. Communities across south-central Kansas (including Bel Aire) have experienced extended dry conditions and increasing concern about long-term water reliability tied to Cheney Reservoir (the primary water source for Wichita and surrounding cities.)

Beginning in early 2023, Wichita entered the initial stage of its drought response plan after Cheney Reservoir levels began to decline. Early messaging focused on voluntary conservation, but as the region moved through another hot summer with limited rainfall.

By mid-2024, Wichita entered Stage 2 of its drought plan, marking a significant turning point. Outdoor irrigation was reduced to one day per week, and the city was divided into watering zones to distribute demand evenly. This decision was driven by declining reservoir conditions and a desire to achieve measurable reductions. The goal was to slow demand quickly, stabilize reservoir levels, and encourage residents to rethink traditional lawn-watering habits. Bel Aire followed suit and significantly reduced its overall water usage during this period.

## **The 2025 Transition from Drought Response to Permanent Conservation**

While 2025 brought significant rainfall and improved reservoir conditions, the City of Wichita began discussing how water management could not rely solely on reacting to drought emergencies. Even as conditions improved, long-term trends showed increasing variability in rainfall and growing pressure on regional resources. In response, Wichita's City Council approved a permanent outdoor watering schedule allowing irrigation three days per week, regardless of drought stage.

Under the new policy:

- odd-numbered addresses water Wednesday, Friday, and Sunday
- even-numbered addresses water Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday
- Mondays are non-watering days; and
- Midday watering is discouraged to reduce evaporation during peak heat.

Wichita framed this decision as a proactive shift toward long-term sustainability. Instead of repeatedly tightening and loosening restrictions based on short-term conditions, the permanent schedule was intended to create consistency.

### **Bel Aire's Initial Alignment and local Evaluation**

When Wichita adopted the permanent three-day watering schedule, Bel Aire temporarily accepted the new restrictions to maintain regional consistency and avoid confusion for residents. City Council recognized that Bel Aire operates within a shared regional water system and that immediate alignment provided clarity while the City evaluated its long-term approach.

Rather than viewing the change as final policy, Bel Aire began a deliberate process to explore how conservation could be managed locally. A series of meetings with the Utility Advisory Committee were held to review Wichita's framework, analyze Bel Aire's water-use data, and develop a strategy that reflected local priorities while supporting regional goals.

Using guidance from the Kansas Water Office and historical system data, Bel Aire developed a conservation proposal centered on monitoring and accountability rather than permanent restrictions alone.

As outlined in the City's conservation letter, Bel Aire proposed:

- establishing a target of 100 gallons per capita per day, measured as a rolling 12-month average (see page 4)
- monitoring aggregate water usage monthly as an early warning system
- working directly with high-usage customers when trends indicate potential concerns
- using local data to guide conservation decisions.

This plan reflects the City's belief that detailed monitoring and proactive engagement can achieve meaningful conservation outcomes while maintaining flexibility.

Importantly, Bel Aire's proposal does not reject Wichita's framework. Instead, it creates a tiered approach: if local water use exceeds the established per-capita target, Bel Aire would implement Wichita's watering schedule, including limiting outdoor watering to three days per week using the odd/even address system.

This structure allows Bel Aire to maintain a locally managed program while remaining aligned with regional expectations when conditions warrant.

### **Discussion**

The City has shared Bel Aire's monitoring-based conservation approach with Wichita. While Wichita acknowledged the City's efforts, they have continued to emphasize the importance of a consistent regional strategy and have strongly encouraged both their residents and wholesale customers to follow their permanent watering framework.

As Bel Aire's City Council considers the path forward, several policy and operational factors should be evaluated:

#### **Regional Partnership and Contract Considerations**

Bel Aire currently maintains a wholesale agreement with the City of Wichita. While Bel Aire retains local authority over conservation messaging and enforcement, the long-term relationship with Wichita must be considered. Particularly our current take-or-pay agreement that extends through 2028. Decisions made today may influence future negotiations and operational flexibility.

#### **Long-Term Water Supply and Infrastructure Planning**

The City continues to experience steady growth, and without significant investment in both CCUA infrastructure and Bel Aire's internal water system, future demand may require ongoing reliance on the wholesale agreement with Wichita.

Expanding CCUA's reliable supply would require additional storage capacity and other upgrades at the CCUA treatment plant. On Bel Aire's side, added storage (another water tower) would strengthen operational resiliency and help manage periods of high demand. While these improvements are achievable, they would require a comprehensive study before moving forward.

**Local Flexibility versus Regional Consistency**

Bel Aire's proposed conservation plan reflects a desire to manage water use through data-driven monitoring and targeted engagement rather than permanent restrictions alone. At the same time, regional consistency provides clarity for residents. Council may wish to weigh the benefits of maintaining local flexibility against the advantages of aligning with a unified regional approach.

year	billing month	residential rate code		population	gallons	12-month
		consumption	days in billing cycle		per capita	rolling average
2022	January	11,246,800	30	8,820	43	
2022	February	11,506,100	31	8,820	42	
2022	March	11,365,200	29	8,820	44	
2022	April	18,658,500	29	8,820	73	
2022	May	21,627,500	33	8,820	74	
2022	June	29,582,100	30	8,820	112	
2022	July	42,777,300	30	8,820	162	
2022	August	42,901,800	29	8,820	168	
2022	September	48,899,900	29	8,820	191	
2022	October	22,328,100	38	8,820	67	
2022	November	12,588,800	23	8,820	62	
2022	December	12,933,500	30	8,820	49	
2023	January	10,933,900	33	9,565	35	91
2023	February	10,550,900	29	9,565	38	90
2023	March	13,624,300	28	9,565	51	90
2023	April	23,829,000	32	9,565	78	90
2023	May	34,972,600	29	9,565	126	90
2023	June	31,175,500	34	9,565	96	95
2023	July	37,155,600	28	9,565	139	93
2023	August	50,391,700	31	9,565	170	92
2023	September	42,844,700	29	9,565	154	92
2023	October	31,270,700	31	9,565	105	89
2023	November	13,194,000	30	9,565	46	92
2023	December	13,387,300	29	9,565	48	91
2024	January	13,072,100	30	10,066	43	91
2024	February	11,596,700	30	10,066	38	91
2024	March	11,895,700	31	10,066	38	91
2024	April	25,541,700	26	10,066	98	90
2024	May	24,890,000	34	10,066	73	92
2024	June	34,415,600	28	10,066	122	87
2024	July	51,721,400	40	10,066	128	90
2024	August	22,157,600	27	10,066	82	89
2024	September	23,091,100	29	10,066	79	81
2024	October	22,708,400	29	10,066	78	75
2024	November	14,943,000	32	10,066	46	73
2024	December	14,862,901	34	10,066	43	73
2025	January	12,783,878	30	10,356	41	72
2025	February	10,631,824	24	10,356	43	72
2025	March	14,877,492	32	10,356	45	73
2025	April	17,476,857	29	10,356	58	73
2025	May	21,472,032	33	10,356	63	70
2025	June	17,636,600	28	10,356	61	69
2025	July	26,474,200	31	10,356	82	64
2025	August	28,085,800	33	10,356	82	60
2025	September	19,723,800	27	10,356	71	60
2025	October	25,411,400	33	10,356	74	59
2025	November	13,934,800	30	10,356	45	59
2025	December	14,049,900	31	10,356	44	59