

## Fresno council members Brand, Caprioglio will unveil bill to spur water conservation

By George  
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Two council members are tackling the third and perhaps final part of City Hall's effort to make Fresno drought resilient forever — consumption.

Council Members Lee Brand and Paul Caprioglio have written what they're calling the Water Conservation Act, a bill whose title explains all.

The act would offer rebates for certain water-saving devices, consider a payment assistance program for low-income customers and advocate for smarter irrigation practices across the city.

Brand and Caprioglio expect to officially unveil their bill Wednesday at a City Hall news conference. They plan to present it to the City Council on Nov. 6.

"We're trying to find a way to make Fresno a leader in water conservation and efficiency," Brand said in an interview on Tuesday.

Added Caprioglio: "We want people to get involved in conservation. We can be a leader in the state."

The drought has already spurred City Hall to action. City officials this summer told residents they could water their yards only two days a week rather than three. Residents were warned that the winter (Dec. 1 to March 1) watering schedule would be cut from one day a week to zero.

Officials now say the winter edict is under review. Still, the administration of Mayor Ashley Swearengin is always on the prowl for wasters and back-sliders.

The Brand-Caprioglio act would make the council a partner with the administration in this crusade.

The city currently has a modest rebate program to encourage conservation. The Brand-Caprioglio act would expand the program. For example, the act would offer a rebate of \$50 to \$100 to a customer who installs a soil moisture sensor system or a rainwater harvesting system.

The rebate program would get \$250,000 per year for two years, the money coming from the water division. There would be a limit of \$1,000 of rebates per property. The rebates would be available to all city water customers, including those in county islands.

The act also would encourage the creation of a list of irrigation priorities and regulatory exceptions. For example, the council members said, it makes no sense to force a business owner to excessively water a landscape two days a week when she can prove that strategic watering four days a week saves water and improves the green space.

Caprioglio also wants watering exceptions made for grass areas heavily used by the public.

"We want to irrigate the fields so, when kids are playing, they're not bouncing off hard pan," he said.

Brand and Caprioglio said their act will complement City Hall's other two high-profile initiatives that directly affect water.

The first is the new 2035 general plan and updated development code. Both encourage high-density infill

development. Neither puts much stock in big front yards full of water-hungry lawns.

The second is a multimillion-dollar upgrade of the city's water system. Like the general plan and development code, this one is still working its way through the political process. But if successful, and the rains return with historical regularity, the upgrade would replenish the aquifer while ensuring a reliable source of surface water.

Smart plans, steady supplies, prudent consumption — quite a triple play, the council members said.

“It all makes Fresno a better place to live,” Brand said.

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