

## Without water restrictions, Hutto neighborhoods nag about lawn care



Rodolfo Gonzalez

Steve Ross poses for a portrait on the front lawn of his home in Hutto on Saturday. Without water restrictions, neighborhood associations want homeowners to keep their lawns looking green.

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*Comment,*

*This is what Rosenberg and Richmond are probably in for. Please pass this article along to your friends in Fort Bend County. This is a real life example of what the stakeholders have in mind for the residents. Take or Pay Contracts will blow water bills out of proportion. EP and other water marketers have made these kinds of things happen. This is one example to pass along to your neighbors. The battle over water source and marketing of the valuable resource is exacerbated by drought and greed*

By [Benjamin Wermund](#)

AMERICAN-STATESMAN STAFF HUTTO —

While Central Texas withers under an unrelenting drought and cities keep tightening watering restrictions, at least one subdivision in Hutto is still encouraging residents to keep their lawns alive.

The City of Hutto is not under any watering restrictions because its 40-year water agreement with Heart of Texas Water Suppliers is meeting its needs, said Micah Grau, the city's finance director. The contract provides 2.27 million gallons of water per day to the city, and the peak water demand this summer was between 1.6 million and 1.9 million per day, he said.

The average water user in Hutto this year uses 12,000 gallons a month and pays \$124.71, Grau said. Heart of Texas Water Suppliers gets its water from the Carizzo-Wilcox Aquifer .

The city has higher water rates than many other cities in Williamson County because it has had to pay for new pipelines and other infrastructure to accommodate its growing population, Grau said. He said the city did a comparison in 2010: Customers who used 5,000 gallons of water paid \$95 in Leander, \$81 in Hutto, \$62 in Taylor, \$57 in Georgetown and \$57 in Round Rock.

At least 137 of the 761 properties in the Legends of Hutto neighborhood off FM 1660 have received notifications that their lawns are not up to par with the subdivision's deed restrictions.

Officials with Pinnacle Texas, the company that manages Legends of Hutto, said although they understand there is a drought and that people may not be able to afford the cost of keeping their lawns green, homeowners associations have a responsibility to enforce deed restrictions. And so they continue to notify residents when they observe violations.

"The observation is, typically stated, large areas of dead grass," said Tanya Emmons, owner of Pinnacle Texas.

"It's not a hateful letter. It's just to remind them," said Tony Wertz, vice president of the Legends of Hutto Homeowners Association. "If they do it again, there's another little bit more forceful letter that goes out. It's not as if we're sending nasty letters the very first time."

Though Pinnacle has given out multiple notifications in some cases, watering-related violations will not lead to a fine, as least as long as the drought persists, Emmons said. "That's all it is — it's a notice that they're not in compliance."

Still, Emmons said, she's received a good deal of pushback from residents.

Stephanie Watts, a Legends of Hutto resident, said she stopped watering her lawn after she racked up a \$160 watering bill.

"I'm not going to take food out of my kid's mouth to water the grass," Watts said. "If they want to pay part of the bill, I'll work with them."

Steve Ross, a resident of the Enclave at Brushy Creek, a neighborhood with a new homeowners association near the Legends of Hutto, said he would support the enforcement of lawn care in his neighborhood.

"Everybody's yard is dying," Ross said. "We just ask that you keep it under control."

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