

Stone Creek
Water Conservation Group

“Managed Area Water
Conservation & Irrigation
Improvement”

Proposal
September, 2024

The SC Water Conservation Group has been working on the issue of reducing the excessive water use in Stone Creek, especially in the “managed areas” including garden homes, villas, common areas, etc.

In early 2023, the Nottingham Landscape Committee, residents working on irrigation and landscape issues, invited our group to join their meeting. Shortly after that, we received the Bay Laurel water use records for all the managed areas. In March of 2023 we made a presentation to Rachel Mayer, our community manager, and others. **Since 2023 then, we have focused part of our efforts on the managed home and common areas** in Stone Creek.

The 600 plus managed homes (planned to go to 800) use an excessive amount of water (see the full presentation for charts showing this). Some of these areas have used nearly 3 or 4 times as much as what the Bay Laurel Water Utility recommends. As a result, the HOA budgets for the present and past years clearly show that Pulte has had to deficit spend significant amounts (see chart for actual deficit spending).

We recommend that the HOA should begin now to alleviate this problem. A careful audit and evaluation of the present irrigation infrastructure, landscaping, and watering practices will reveal what could be done to reduce the usage. Modern irrigation technology and an improved monitoring system can lead to solutions. Our group feels that these solutions should be initiated now so they can be solved before Pulte turns over the budget. The alternative is to wait, not do what is necessary, and then suddenly have the HOA face the water use financial issue with three choices: continue paying for the high usage by taking funds from other budget items; investing a large amount to fix the various neighborhoods system and again taking from other budget items; or just raise the HOA fees on managed homes or all homes to pay the high water bills.

We propose that the HOA take on the task of correcting the problem now by initiating a process that will first evaluate each of the managed home neighborhood’s irrigation systems, and then correct them where needed.

Funds should be allocated in next several HOA budgets to pay for this. Additionally, the **HOA could pursue the Southwest Florida Water Management District's W.I.S.E. grants to help pay some of the costs** (50 percent reimbursement of the project cost up to \$20,000). If this is done over a period of the next several years, we believe that **sufficient water savings would equal the expense of upgrading the systems.**

The charts included in the report show the water use for the HOA Budget, the amounts budgeted and then what was spent.

To begin the process of correcting the managed home water usage, **we suggest beginning with the Sante Fe neighborhood, the smallest and oldest of the managed home areas. It has been and remains the highest user of water by connection in all of SC.** (see charts). We would then calculate the water use and savings to evaluate the success of this approach.

Note: Additionally, several large areas in Sante Fe are just turf, using a tremendous amount of water. Bay Laurel's turf reduction incentive program (\$1 reimbursement for each square foot of turf removed) could help to pay replacing those areas with Florida Friendly landscaped areas that could be irrigated with drip. This could be done later after all the basic water saving work is finished.

After Sante Fe is successfully upgraded, the HOA may then evaluate and upgrade another neighborhood. For example, they could evaluate the irrigation system in Pinebrook, a much larger area of managed homes, and again a very heavy user of irrigation water. From there, the HOA could evaluate all the managed and common areas and correct the systems to bring them up to water efficient standards. The newer managed areas, although still excessive users of irrigation water, should be better equipped regarding the irrigation and should be less expensive to correct.

We believe that water use in these areas can be brought down to water use levels that are financially sustainable and environmentally responsible. We believe the savings in water use over a period of several years will more than pay for the expense of improvements and will conserve a tremendous amount of water.

As a group, we will commit to assisting in this effort in any way the HOA requests.

The SC Water Conservation Group