Leash Law Update

There will be changes ahead for dogs, kids and other park users. At the June 19 Regular Council Meeting, Council approved the appropriation of $10,000 to implement a leash law outreach program. The program includes designating a part-time City staff member to make contacts with park users, share information about the City’s leash law, and to facilitate compliance. At the Study Session on June 19, staff presented to the Council recommended changes to the current leash law based on comments received from the community before, during and after the May 11 Leash Law Town Hall Meeting. The Council provided feedback so that staff can bring a revised ordinance to Council for a first reading on July 10. For more information, please visit www.mercergov.org/leashlaw.

Please note that dogs are not allowed in public park properties which include a public swimming area between May 1-Sept 30 and at all other times, dogs must be on a leash or other similar physical restraint. Dogs must be leashed or under signal or voice control in all other park properties. Though the current law allows for voice and signal control, even well-behaved dogs can be unpredictable and for this reason, please keep your dog on a leash when you are outside of the designated off-leash areas (OLA’s).

Contact: Parks and Recreation Department @ 206.236.3548.
Employee Service Day: City Employees Help the Community

On June 7, approximately 60 city employees donned gloves and work boots to make improvements to Ellsworth House, the low-income senior housing residence located in the 2700 block of 76th Ave SE. Together, the City staff:

- Made two planter beds
- Re-striped the parking lot
- Re-painted the fire lane curbside
- Put up new parking signs on 24 stalls – many were set in concrete
- Filled holes in the parking lot pavement
- Weeded ivy and plant beds
- Trimmed bushes and cut back trees
- Re-painted the shuffle board court
- Repainted handicapped logos on the parking places
- Swept all the lots
- Weeded and lined the rose bed walkway with gravel along the rose bushes in the garden

This is the first time that the city has arranged such a project, but it was so successful in terms of bonding and helping the community, that staff are considering repeating the project next year.

Contact: Cindy Goodwin @ 206.236.3535

Don’t know what to do with old cell phones or rechargeable batteries?

Citizens can now drop their cell phones and rechargeable batteries into the public collection boxes in the lobby of both the Police and Fire Departments. The City of Mercer Island is now a “community collection site” for the Call2Recycle program operated by the Rechargeable Battery Recycling Corporation (RBRC). RBRC is a non-profit organization established in 1994 and offers businesses and municipalities a way to properly recycle unused cell phones and batteries at no cost and relatively little effort. RBRC has collected more than 26 million pounds of rechargeable batteries the equivalent weight of nearly 7,300 cars! This effort will allow the City to actively participate in the preservation of natural resources by keeping discarded products and hazardous substances out of landfills.

Contact: Kelly Donnelley @ 206.236.3595

Extended Hours at Interim Park-and-Ride Parking Location

Sound Transit has extended the time periods for park-and-ride spaces at the Initial Tropical Plants interim Park-and-Ride lot (2441 76th Avenue SE). Parking is now available from 6 am to 11 pm and on weekends as well. These later hours will better accommodate those people returning to Mercer Island from a late Mariners' game or other event or activity. This is the only Interim Park-and-Ride lot with parking available on the weekend. Other alternate parking areas are located at:

- QFC Village, SE 68th Street and 84th Avenue SE
- First Church of Christ Scientist, 8685 SE 47th Street
- Mercer Island Presbyterian Church, 3605 – 84th Avenue SE
- Mercer Island United Methodist Church, 7070 SE 24th Street

The Mercer Island Park-and-Ride Project will include a two-story parking garage and related rider amenities at the existing Mercer Island Park-and-Ride lot site. The garage will provide 450 parking stalls on two levels, increasing the capacity of the existing lot by approximately 200 stalls. The garage layout will include several ADA stalls, a “kiss and ride” area for drop off and pickup as well as accommodate any alternate fuel vehicles. Improvement to the bus boarding areas along North Mercer Way will double their capacities, and provide new bus shelters, bicycle lockers, lighting, and signing. Additional project amenities include closed circuit television surveillance, landscaping, and public art. The project has also made a contribution to the City’s bike-bypass project to help reduce bicycle – pedestrian conflicts along the front of the park-and-ride. For more information, please visit www.mercergov.org/parkandride.

Contact: Transportation Planning @ 206.236.3580.

Seafair Traffic Alert and I-90 Bridge Closures

From August 3-6, SEAFAIR will bring thundering Blue Angels jets, hydroplanes and hundreds of boats out along the shores of Lake Washington. This is the biggest weekend of the Puget Sound summer and these events will impact the Island community with traffic and I-90 bridge closures. The City of Mercer Island Police, Fire, and Parks and Recreation Departments along with the Washington State Department of Transportation and Washington State Patrol have collaborated in coordinating the details of the closures and emergency services plan. Please visit www.mercergov.org/seafair for important traffic and bridge closure information.
Drilling for Emergency Water Supply to Begin in July

The advice of utilities personnel in areas struck by Hurricane Katrina is clear: before a major disaster strikes, do everything you can to be self-reliant. In a major catastrophe, cities should assume major services such as the flow of drinking water will be interrupted for at least five days. In order for the City of Mercer Island to become more self-reliant, test well drilling will begin in Rotary Park in mid-July to find a ground water supply that can provide emergency water in case the City’s water supply is cut off and/or the City’s water system is out of service due to catastrophic events. The project combines emergency water needs with park improvements (please see the request for public comment on park design below). Here is a brief overview of the project:

How long will the project take? The project is expected to start in mid-July and end in September.

Why was Rotary Park chosen as the site for test well drilling? The City evaluated several sites and concluded that Rotary Park is the best option because it is centrally located and accessible to all Islanders. It is also located on the more stable “spine” of the Island. Areas along the perimeter of the Island are less likely to be stable in a major catastrophe such as an earthquake.

How much will the project cost? City Council allotted $230,000 for the test well phase of the project. Funds were allocated from the City’s water fund and unspent 2005-2006 water capital project dollars. The final production well could potentially supply Islanders with seven days of emergency water supply.

Some residents have asked why the City is drilling a test well rather than setting up systems to filter lake water in an emergency. A major catastrophe such as an earthquake is likely to rupture sewer lines throughout the lake, so lake water will be highly contaminated. The City explored filtration options and found that filtration would be more expensive and less reliable than a well.

What happens if sufficient water is reached? Staff would approach the City Council for funds to complete the project which includes the design and construction of a production well and an associated facility. The estimated 20-foot-by-25-foot facility would blend with the park landscape. The goal of the project is to have a production well that could provide 1 to 5 gallons per person per day for domestic uses for several days.

Contact: Maintenance Department @ 206.236.5329

Rotary Park Landscape Renovation Seeks Public Comment On Two Concept Plans

A renovation of Rotary Park at 88th Ave. SE & SE 44th St. is moving forward with the release of two concept plans for the park. This project addresses the worn out plaza area as well as the declining poplar trees in the park. The Mercer Island Parks and Recreation Department hosted an open house on April 20th to solicit public input on renovation work and public comment from the open house was used to develop two concepts for the park. In conjunction with the landscape renovation, an emergency water supply project is being explored at the park (please see related article above).

The following are the two plan options in summary. Plan drawings of these concepts can be found at www.mercergov.org/rotarypark. To request a printed set of plans, contact Paul West, Park Arborist at 206.236.3544 or paul.west@mercergov.org.

Concept One incorporates several of the existing central plaza features into an updated design. The sandbox would be filled in and converted to grass with a small boulder in the middle for informal seating. The long bench on the south side of the park would be divided in two by a planter to create more contained seating areas. The plaza would become slightly smaller overall, and it would be rebuilt with concrete pavers. The poplar trees would be replaced with columnar hornbeams – a tough, drought-resistant tree.

Concept Two transforms the central plaza into a more circular form to complement the landforms at either end of the park. Two stone retaining walls would border the plaza, and natural flagstone would create two distinct seating areas in the plaza. Built-in seating is replaced with park benches. Concrete pavers would be used in the central space to connect the path areas. Overall, the paved area of the plaza would be similar to the existing plaza, but increased slightly in size. The poplar trees would be replaced with columnar oaks – also a tough and drought tolerant tree that keeps its narrow form.

Both plans include planting beds to create colorful accents in the park; provided for additional benches throughout the park. and include additional trees to the north of the plaza to provide additional screening of the water tanks.

To comment, please call 206.236.3545, e-mail miparks@mercergov.org or send comments by mail to: Mercer Island Parks and Recreation Department, 2040 84th Avenue SE, Mercer Island, WA 98040. Comments will be accepted through Friday, July 7, 2006. The plan will be presented at a second public meeting that will be scheduled in September 2006.

Visit the City website! www.mercergov.org
Summer Camps for Kids!
The Mercer Island Parks and Recreation Department has another great summer line-up of fun activities for kids and families this summer. A variety of full and half-day camps are available, sports camps, art camps, preschool camps and writing camps! Some camp highlights this summer include:

* **Kamp Rock Day Camp** - Come experience a summer packed full of adventure, crafts, field trips, swimming, friends, memories and much more! Each week there is a different theme and then fun activities are planned around that theme. Theme weeks include: Water, Water Everywhere, Kamp Idol, Survivor, Summer Safari and much more. The camp will be held at the new Community Center and is for youth 6 - 11 years of age and runs Monday - Friday from 9 am – 3 pm with extended care until 5:30 pm. The fee is $161 per week and an additional $20 for extended care.

* **Itsy Bitsy Islanders Camp** - A camp designed just for your little ones. Each week this camp for 3 - 5 year olds has a creative and educational theme for campers such as Singin' in the Sunshine, Silly Splashers and Fitness Fun! The camp runs from 9 am - noon, Monday through Friday and the cost is $125 per week.

* **Multi-British Sports Camp** - UK coaches are landing on "The Rock" and bringing their traditional sports with them. Cricket, Bocce and Netball are all popular sports in the UK that you can learn to play this summer! The camp is offered the week of August 14 - 18 at Island Crest Park. The camp is offered as a half day or full day option. Half day for 4 - 14 year olds is from 9 am - noon for $99 and full-day is for 7 - 14 year olds from 9 am – 3 pm for $145.

* **Challenger British Soccer Camp** - This camp provides a great opportunity for campers to receive high level coaching from a team of international experts right here in Mercer Island. Each camp features international coaching staff, low coach to player ratio, and age and ability specific curriculum. Also, if your child is attending one of the camps you can sign up to host a coach in your home and reduce your camp fee. To host a coach call Kirk Wills at 206.236.7487. Camps are offered the week of July 17 - 21 and August 7 – 11.

Be sure to check out the many options all the details in the Recreation Guide or online at www.MyParksAndRecreation.com. So much fun and only 10 weeks of summer to pack it all into! "Come Play with Us" this summer at Mercer Island Parks and Recreation.

Contact: Parks & Recreation Dept. @ 206.236.3545

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SE 53rd Trail Construction Underway
Construction of the trail in the SE 53rd Open Space started last month. The trail alignment will run along the bottom of the steep slope at the edge of the ravine. This avoids wetland areas lower in the ravine while keeping the trail out of view of adjacent residences. The path will provide the neighborhood with a new recreational feature, as well as facilitate restoration work of this forested open space.

The City has partnered with the Mountains to Sound Greenway Trust to complete substantial portions of the project. They are using a specialized trail-building machine they cooperatively share with Washington State Dept of Natural Resources. The City's Maintenance Department has assisted by installing a culvert at one trailhead location. Eagle Scouts and other volunteers will be finishing the trail with gravel, culverts and waterbars.

Contact: Paul West @ 206.236.3544

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Fun Mobile: Recreation On-The-Go!
Fun Mobile - Ready, Set, Play! The Fun Mobile is back and ready for action this summer. School is out and the sun is shining, so what a better way to spend your day than with the crazy, action packed Fun Mobile staff. Learn the great "street games" of the past and get out and get moving this summer. The Fun Mobile will be at local parks, beaches and neighborhoods playing sports and games all summer.

A new spin on fitness and fun this summer, Call Colleen at 206.236.3543 to schedule a Friday night street games play date in your neighborhood.

For information on where the Fun Mobile will be check out the schedule on the City’s website calendar or call 206.236.3545 to have one mailed to you.
2006 SUMMER CELEBRATION!
The fireworks, entertainment, food, crafts and fun of Summer Celebration! start on Friday, July 7 and run through Sunday, July 9. Here are some of the highlights of Mercer Island’s 16th Annual Community Festival:

Friday, July 7
5:30 pm to 10:30 pm
Luther Burbank Park
Festivities begin 5:30 pm at Luther Burbank Park with fun activities for children. Starting at 7 pm, crowds will be entertained by the classic high energy rock of The Convertibles and then the disco and funk of Sonic Funk Orchestra. At dusk, fireworks will be set off over Luther Burbank Park from a barge on the lake.

Saturday, July 8
10 am to 7 pm
Town Center Street Fair
Kicking off the celebration on Saturday at 10 am is the “Countrywide Home Loans” Grand Parade. There will be hundreds of participants. Viewing is along 78th Avenue SE from SE 27th Street down to Mercerdale Park at SE 32nd Street.

Take a boat ride around the Island! Departures at 11 am, 1 pm, and 3 pm from Luther Burbank Park—only $10.50 per person! Please call 206.235.3545 for tickets.

A marketplace of crafters and artisans provide a broad selection of handmade juried arts and crafts for the buying public. Summer Celebration! is not complete without its Food Faire featuring a selection of 14 restaurant and concession booths. A variety of activities for children can be found at Mercerdale Park. Also, the Mercerdale Park Stage will feature non-stop performances from steel drums to the blues, as well as a special performance of Shakespeare in the Park “As You Like It” by Wooden O Theatre at 7 pm.

Sunday, July 9
10 am to 5 pm
Town Center Street Fair
On Sunday, July 9, the festival awakes with the Rotary Club of Mercer Island Pancake Breakfast beginning at 9 am and serving until 12 noon. Also on Sunday, the Classic Car Show with new sponsors Acura of Bellevue and Chevrolet Hummer of Bellevue returns for the fourth year and will take place at the Farmers New World Life Insurance parking lot from 10 am – 3 pm. The Edsels 50’s & 60’s rock & roll band will perform at the car show from 12 noon – 2 pm. One can expect to see classic, antique, exotic, and customized cars.

Summer Celebration! is presented by the City of Mercer Island and sponsored by Overlake Hospital Medical Center, Starbucks Coffee Company, and Countrywide Home Loans; and is a SEAFAIR community events program.

Contact: Summer Celebration! @ 206.236.7285.

New Rainout Phone Line for Ballfield Users: 206.236.3473
Beginning June 1st, ballfield users on Mercer Island will be able to access field conditions at City parks through a Mercer Island Parks and Recreation Department maintained rainout phone line. The number, 206.236.3473, will be updated by Parks Maintenance staff as warranted by weather conditions to provide timely information on conditions of the fields at Island Crest Park, South Mercer Playfields, Homestead Field and Feroglia Fields at the I-90 Park on the Lid.

This new number will be active from early March through mid-August to provide information for baseball and softball players, but will not be maintained for other sports. The individual league administrators have been encouraged to maintain their own current rainout information numbers. The rainout phone number will be available online at the City of Mercer Island Web site: www.mercergov.org, distributed widely within the user organizations, and will also be posted at the parks.

Contact: Parks and Recreation Department @ 206.236.3545.
Thank You to First Hill Neighbors and the Mercer Island Preschool Association!

The sun shined upon many Mercer Island park neighbors and supporters on Saturday, May 20 as First Hill Park (SE 32nd & 72nd Ave SE) received a make-over thanks to the initiative of Addison Scarff, daughter of Island Residents Amy and Stuart Scarff, who proposed the improvement project as part of her 2nd grade Giraffe Project at West Mercer Elementary School. With assistance from the Mercer Island Parks and Recreation Department, Addy helped promote and organize a neighborhood work party of over 20 individuals to clean picnic tables, power wash hard surfaces, remove blackberry, ivy and other invasives, pruned vegetation, and cleaned up litter. As a result, the park has more sunlight, provides improved views into the park, allows more room for play and is more inviting for families. The Parks & Recreation Department’s “volunteer trailer” provided tools and equipment in support of the project.

As First Hill neighbors worked diligently, the Mercer Island Preschool Association celebrated the community’s park improvement efforts at Deane’s Children’s Park (5500 Island Crest Way), better known as “Dragon Park”, with a park re-dedication ceremony. The celebration capped off a multi-year $80,000 upgrade of the park that yielded a $15,000 Starbucks’ Neighborhood Park Grant and $5,000 Safeco Community Grant. A new castle play structure anchors the recent improvements that also included a new climbing rock, swing, pathway to Island Park Elementary, park benches and more.

The facelift was sparked by the Parks and Recreation Department’s need to make minor repairs to the park and solicited input from the original park founders, the Preschool Association. Island Park Elementary students participated in the design process, Youth and Family Services V.O.I.C.E. volunteers helped improve pathways and re-paint the dragon, and MI Park members raised funds and provided ongoing support for the improvements. For more information on this park project, please visit: www.mipreschoolassociation.org or www.mercergov.org.

Thanks to all for making Mercer Island an even better place to live and work.

City of Mercer Island Ratings Remain Strong

A recent survey shows that a strong majority of voters give the City of Mercer Island high marks for public safety, road maintenance, upkeep of parks and trails, programs for citizens of all ages, and its use of taxpayer dollars.

Survey results were presented at the May 15 City Council Study Session. The 2006 telephone survey is a “tracking” survey, and updates data first collected in 2004. The purpose of the research is to gauge voter satisfaction with the quality of City services and provide feedback on spending priorities, partly in preparation for the 2007-2008 Budget planning.

The results show that there continues to be a positive relationship between voters and the City. When asked about the level of service provided by the City, 81% of voters think the city provides "about the right amount" of services. Several services in particular received high approval ratings. For example, 95% have a favorable or strongly favorable opinion of the Mercer Island Fire Department and 87% say that the Parks and Recreation Department is doing a good or excellent job of maintaining parks, trails, and open space.

The survey also included questions about spending priorities. In both the 2004 and 2006 surveys, voters were asked to prioritize a list of items the City could spend tax dollars on. Overall voter priorities in 2006 are consistent with those from 2004. Crime prevention and prompt emergency response remain at the top of the list.

Four hundred and two interviews were conducted amongst registered voters on Mercer Island during evening hours of April 18 through 20. The margin of error for the overall results is ±4.9 percent at the 95% confidence interval. The results of this survey can be projected to the entire voting population of Mercer Island.

Contact: City Manager’s Office @ 206.236.7238.

Town Center Update

Mercer Island’s Town Center is transforming before our eyes. Two residential mixed-use projects have been completed, two large projects are under construction, two projects will break ground this summer, and one additional developments is approved to proceed in 2007. The Sound Transit Park-and-Ride is also under construction.

As new mixed-use developments emerge in the Town Center, there will be adjustments related to parking. The City has increased requirements for parking, so more parking will be available. Some parking will be in a different place than Mercer Island shoppers are used to: inside parking garages and not visible from the street. This parking will be free and available to all shoppers and residents as they take advantage of the new and returning old businesses. You are encouraged to park once, walk the new streets and sidewalks, and visit all of the new businesses.

For more Town Center updates, please visit www.mercergov.org/towncenter.
2006 Summit for Heroes
by Trever Kissel, Mercer Island Firefighter

As part of a national attempt to have a Police or Fire Fighter on top of every highest peak in each of the 50 states, we made the summit of Washington’s highest peak, Mt. Rainier. My brother Justin Kissel, (Wenatchee Police Officer) my good friend Matt Treat and I stood on the summit at 9:30 am on May 20. It was an emotional and wonderful tribute to all our nations’ fallen heroes. The progress and success of this nation wide tribute can be viewed at the “climbers log” at www.copsontop.com/upcoming_expeditions.htm.

I made a special tribute to Mike Beery who was a Firefighter with Jefferson Co. Fire District #1. Beery passed away in June of 2005 on Mt Rainier. I had the privilege of meeting Beery’s family and friends and I learned what an amazing person he was. I am grateful that I had a chance to honor Firefighter Mike Beery in this climb.

You Can Save A Life! Citizen CPR & Defibrillation

According to the American Heart Association, each day 600 people die from Sudden Cardiac Arrest. It strikes suddenly and the survival rate is only 5 to 10%. Early Citizen CPR and Rapid Defibrillation can help improve the chances of survival.

On May 17, 2006 CPR and early defibrillation saved a Mercer Island citizen’s life. While bicycling on West Mercer Way, a 72 year old Island resident collapsed suddenly, apparently from sudden cardiac arrest. Island citizens arrived at his side quickly and performed CPR. The Mercer Island Fire Department arrived within minutes and assumed patient care and continued CPR, and then defibrillated the cyclist with one of the Fire Department’s defibrillators. Paramedics from Bellevue Fire were also dispatched to the incident and arrived soon after to find the patient with a strong pulse and breathing.

Without CPR, a person without a heartbeat will die in 4 to 6 minutes. Early Citizen CPR gave the cyclist another chance at life. Defibrillation also played an important role - it helps a non working heart rhythm to become a working rhythm. The sooner the shock is applied the better chance of survival, especially if CPR was performed prior to defibrillation. Defibrillators are becoming more common and are very easy to use in the Public Access Deliberator (PAD) version. Many PAD’s are found around the Island including City Hall, the North Fire Station lobby, and the Jewish Community Center. PAD’s can be used by any rescuer and are very easy to learn to use. The Mercer Island Fire Department offers the following classes at the North Fire Station (3030 78th Ave SE):

- June 28, 7-9 pm Infant Child CPR
- Sept 2, 9 am-2 pm First Aid with CPR
- Sept 6, 7-9 pm Adult CPR
- Sept 27, 7-9 pm Infant Child CPR
- Nov 4, 7-9 pm First Aid with CPR
- Nov 8, 7-9 pm Adult CPR
- Nov 15, 7-9 pm Infant Child CPR

Sign up via phone at 206.236.3600. For special requests or group classes, please call 206.236.7670

Donate a Vehicle to Mercer Island Youth and Family Services

Auto donation revenues help provide many different community needs like individual and family counseling, senior outreach and substance abuse intervention services. The vehicle donation process is quick and simple. Call to 800.332.8201, or donate on-line at www.donatecarusa.com/?charity=139. No need to fuss with ads, sales calls or annoying paperwork. Your car, boat, van, SUV, truck or RV will be picked up at no cost whether the vehicle or running or not. Once the vehicle has been auctioned, you can deduct the value from your taxes.

About Mercer Island Youth and Family Services (MIYFS):

Services include: individual and family counseling; senior adult outreach; elementary, middle school and high school counseling; alcohol and drug prevention and intervention services for youth; juvenile court diversion services; family assistance and support; JobLink; youth employment services; volunteering; advocacy and community planning. MIYFS also contracts with area service providers to deliver specialized sexual assault, domestic violence, and legal resource services. Services are supported as a public/private partnership through the City of Mercer Island, the Mercer Island School District, King County, private contributions and grants, fundraising and special events and revenues generated by our volunteer-based Thrift Shop.

Contact: MIYFS @ 206.236.3525

About Avian Flu...

The Mercer Island Fire Department is preparing for the possible arrival of avian flu and the potential of a pandemic outbreak. As part of our strategy, we are providing our community with the latest information derived from a variety of sources including Federal, State, Medical & Health organizations, and other leading experts. Please visit www.mercergov.org/pandemicflu for helpful information, links and updates.
Mostly Music in the Park

Presented by Mercer Island Arts Council & KeyBank, this year’s summer concert series features music ranging from classical to Cajun, blues to big band. All concerts are held at Mercerdale Park from 7 to 8:30 pm. The schedule is as follows:

- Thursday, July 13...The Nowhere Men – Beatles Tribute Band
- Sunday, July 16...Bobby Medina & The Red Hot Band – Motown and Hot Hits
- Thursday, July 20...Tiller’s Folly – Celtic Music
- Sunday, July 23...Filé Gumbo Zydeco Band – Spicy Cajun, Zydeco and Rhythm & Blues
- Thursday, July 27...Latigo Lace – Country with a Twist
- Sunday, July 30...Mangoson – Latin American and African
- Thursday, August 3...Salieri String Quartet – Classical Music with Guest Flutist & Guitarist
- Sunday, August 6...Portage Bay Big Band – Big Band Swing
- Thursday, August 10...The Mark Whitman Band – Blues

In case of rain, concerts will be cancelled and possibly rescheduled. For more information, please call 206.236.3545.

Water Conservation—You Can Help!

Many of the simple actions you can take such as using water wisely outdoors and taking shorter showers are free, easy to do, and save you money. Other actions such as buying a resource-efficient washing machine, putting on a low-volume showerhead, or installing a water-efficient toilet will cost you money up-front but will more than pay for themselves in just a few years.

It’s In Your Hands! We all make decisions about how much water we use. Every person in the region uses an average of 78 gallons of this precious resource each day. 1% Water Conservation challenges everyone in the region to reduce their use of water 1% each year for the next 10 years. For more information and helpful water conservation tips, please visit www.mercergov.org/conservation.