

City Council decides to limit activities at Watergarden site

Only 2 groups to be allowed to hold events in area in '92

By Rosemary Barnes
STAFF WRITER

The Art Museum of South Texas and the Texas Jazz Festival Society could be the last two groups to host major events in the city's Watergarden area.

The City Council Tuesday unanimously voted to allow the two groups to hold their festivals at the site - but only in 1992.

In an effort to address concerns that special events have caused extensive damage to the grassy area around the Watergarden, the council instructed City Manager Juan Garza to draft a policy that would prohibit major events from

- Solicitation revisions favored/B1
- Parking-fine hike rejected/B1

being staged at the Watergarden site. The council plans to vote on the policy in two or three weeks.

Garza said the two festivals will be the last he recommends be held around the Watergarden. He urged the council to proceed with plans to establish a permanent festival site in an area beneath the Harbor Bridge.

"I don't think the Watergarden should be used for a festival site," Garza said. "It was intended more for passive enjoyment."

The city's Park and Recreation Advisory Committee had approved a special-events policy that allows no more than three major events to be held in the Watergarden area annually, but Garza recommended that the council reject the policy.

Garza said the art museum and jazz festival society should be allowed to proceed with their events next year because it would be too late for the groups to plan for alternate sites.

The art museum's Festival of the Arts - formerly known as Art in Please see **Watergarden/A8**

11-27-91

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CC - Bayfront - Watergarden '91

Watergarden

FROM PAGE A1

the Heart - will be staged for the first time in the Watergarden April 3-5. The jazz festival, which has used the Watergarden since 1988, will be held July 3-5.

Lillian Murray, director of the art museum, said the group previously had held its annual festival in the downtown area but wanted to hold the 1992 event at the Watergarden site to coincide with the museum's 20th anniversary. The museum is adjacent to the Watergarden.

Murray said the museum had looked at other areas, including the Bayfest site along Shoreline Blvd., Cargo Dock One in the Port area and the city's barge dock, but that all were unavailable for different reasons.

"It's important for us to hold the festival in the park in which we reside," Murray told the council.

Claude Melton, president of the jazz festival, urged the council not to limit the use of the Watergarden, saying it has been a perfect site for the annual event.



FILE PHOTO

The Art Museum of South Texas and the Texas Jazz Festival Society will be the only groups to be allowed to hold festivals at the Watergarden next year.

"The city has something good down there," Melton said. "Trying to keep it a sterile environment may not be such a good idea." Most council members indicated

their support for restricting the use of the Watergarden for major events.

But Councilman Dr. David McNichols objected to limiting the use of the Watergarden area.

"A policy to protect a public area from the public is ridiculous," McNichols said. "What are we going to say next week, that kids can't use KidsPlace?"

A majority of the council also supported planning the development of a festival site in an area beneath the Harbor Bridge and behind the Bayfront Arts and Sciences Park.

The area, which the council in May designated as the city's official festival location, needs paving, landscaping, utility and water connections before it can be used, Garza said.

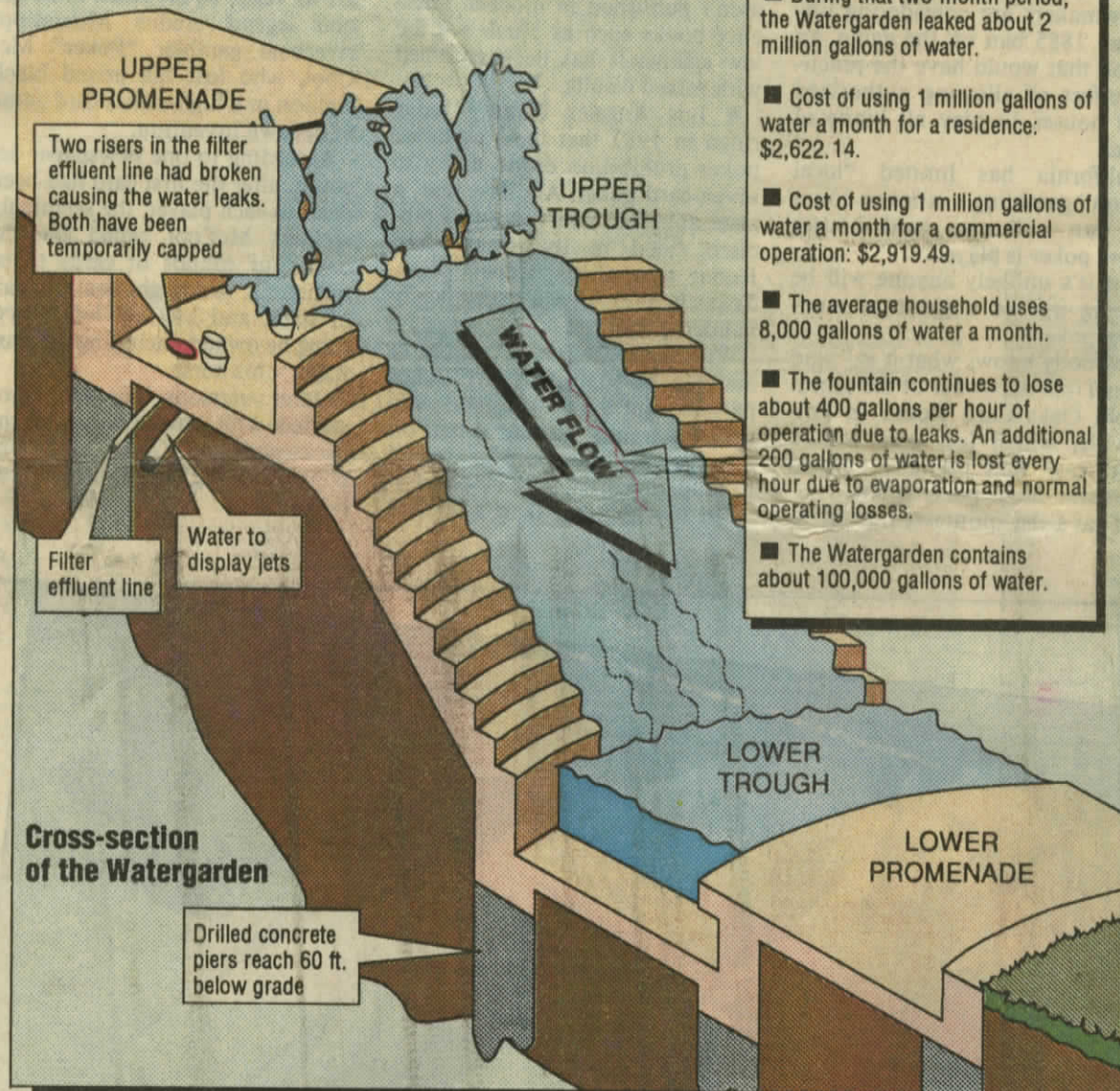
"We must begin to reroute festivals out of the Watergarden area," said Mayor Mary Rhodes. "But it's going to be incumbent upon us to have a new festival site ready by 1993."

11/27/91

CC - Bayfront improvements - Watergarden 7/

Leaky plumbing at the Watergarden

From mid-February to mid-April, Corpus Christi's Watergarden leaked 3,000 gallons of water per hour during operation.



- During that two-month period, the Watergarden leaked about 2 million gallons of water.
- Cost of using 1 million gallons of water a month for a residence: \$2,622.14.
- Cost of using 1 million gallons of water a month for a commercial operation: \$2,919.49.
- The average household uses 8,000 gallons of water a month.
- The fountain continues to lose about 400 gallons per hour of operation due to leaks. An additional 200 gallons of water is lost every hour due to evaporation and normal operating losses.
- The Watergarden contains about 100,000 gallons of water.

ALBERTO MARTINEZ

Water, water everywhere

6-6-91 C

City looks for way to plug Watergarden leak permanently

By Mark Horvit
STAFF WRITER

The Watergarden, a highlight of the Bayfront Arts and Science Park, lost about 2 million gallons of water during a two-month period earlier this year, and continues to lose several hundred gallons of water every hour it operates, city officials said Wednesday.

The majority of the leakage from the three-year-old fountain

was stopped in April, and an engineering study is being completed this week to determine how to permanently stop the Watergarden from watering the adjacent grass and soil.

City officials learned the fountain was leaking in February. The city owns the Watergarden and provides the water free-of-charge.

Mayor Mary Rhodes said that although the water loss from the

fountain represents only a small fraction of the city's total water usage, the leak sends the wrong message to city residents who are being asked to become conservation-conscious.

Carl Crull, director of the city's engineering department, said that at the height of the problem, the Watergarden was leaking about 3,000 gallons an hour

Please see **Watergarden/A8**

6-6-91 (over) C

Watergarden

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Temporary measures were taken during operation.

in April to reduce that loss to about 600 gallons an hour, Crull said, adding that some of the on-going loss is due to evaporation and cannot be avoided.

Hal Peterson, manager of the Bayfront Plaza Convention Center, said the fountain runs six days a week, from 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. At that rate, about 33,000 gallons were lost daily, with approximately 1.8 million gallons being lost over the two-month period in which the city knew the Watergarden was leaking.

In comparison, the average household would have used about

traction.

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the fountain operating because of his staff made the decision to keep

City Manager Juan Garza said

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city is putting the finishing town's filtration system.

Some of the dirt used to fill in the area around the Watergarden during construction settled over

fix leaking faucets in their homes.

"We are going public telling people they need to fix drippy faucets, cracked," he said. The firm recommended that the two pipes be

plugged temporarily to stop the

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Garza said that, in retrospect, consideration could have been given to shutting down the Watergarden until the majority of the leaks were stopped, to conserve water.

Werner said the amount of loss is not large when compared with the city's overall consumption, which is more than 3 billion gallons a month.

Werner said, "You'd like to see it go for something that is a beneficial use, but unfortunately things like this happen."

City Manager Juan Garza said his staff made the decision to keep the fountain operating because of its prominent role as a tourist attraction.

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leakage, and the city agreed.

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cc - Bayfront - Watergarden '90

Use of Watergarden could be restricted

By Jennifer Rios
STAFF WRITER

The city Park and Recreation Advisory Committee may begin to draft policies to restrict the use of the Corpus Christi Watergarden if its members support a proposal drafted by city staff.

The new policies - spurred by concerns that large crowds have damaged the Watergarden area - could prohibit events like the Texas Jazz Festival at the site, adjacent to the Bayfront Convention Center.

But Jazz Festival president George Lasko said he's "locked into the Watergarden," because there is no other place in Corpus Christi that could support such a large musical event.

The city's draft proposal calls for events to be limited to "no more than 500 in attendance due to the potential damage to the area as well as parking limitations."

In addition, carnival rides and animal or circus shows would be

prohibited, along with enclosed temporary structures, such as food booths.

Events would be limited to four days, including set-up and take-down time, under the city staff's proposal.

While city staff members are concerned that large festivals damage the area, event organizers argue that the Watergarden is the best setting because of its location, size, aesthetics and acoustics.

"We have tried to find another place. That just doesn't exist," Lasko said. "We don't work at something for 30 years just to make it smaller."

This year's jazz festival, which was staged 15 days after Fiesta de Corpus Christi was held at the Watergarden, drew an estimated 120,000 people over three days.

Malcolm Matthews, director of the city Park and Recreation Department, said placing two major events back to back did not allow

Please see **Watergarden/B4**

Watergarden

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recovery time for the site and caused problems with the landscape and over-worked staff members.

Lasko urged the committee to seek a compromise to allow the festival to remain at the site and satisfy the city's concerns.

Some committee members expressed a willingness to establish policies that would allow large-scale activities at the Watergarden.

"I'm against keeping activities out of there," said committee member Toby Oshman. "You can only protect things so much ... things have to be used."

8-9-90



The Watergarden takes shape in front of the Bayfront Plaza Convention Center in Corpus Christi on Aug. 31, 1987.

ERICH SCHLEGEL/CALLER-TIMES FILE

AN ARTFUL OASIS

Watergarden was dedicated in 1988



Throwback Thursday
Allison Ehrlich
Corpus Christi Caller Times
USA TODAY NETWORK - TEXAS

Corpus Christi's Watergarden came up during Tuesday's City Council meeting. The water feature located between the Art Museum of South Texas, Corpus Christi Museum of Science and History and the American Bank Center has been out of order since about August 2017.

The idea for the Watergarden origi-

nated in the early 1980s, when Edwin and Patsy Singer commissioned New York landscape architect Robert Zion to come up with the design to tie together the somewhat disjointed area between the museums and the new convention center.

The original plans included an underground parking structure, which was later dropped in 1987. Construction cost \$2.38 million, and was split between the city and the private Founda-

See **WATERGARDEN**, Page 5A



Nicholas Lopez, 8, left, watches as Tracy Garza shows her 7-month-old daughter, Angelique Salais, one of the fountains on July 16, 1999.

MICHELLE CHRISTENSON/CALLER-TIMES FILE

OCVF - Bay Front Plaza - Watergarden - 1-24-2019

THURSDAY, JANUARY 24, 2019 | 5A

The Corpus Christi Watergarden at the Bayfront Arts and Science park is seen on Sept. 26, 2008.
MICHAEL ZAMORA/CALLER-TIMES FILE

Watergarden

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tion for Sciences and Arts Inc. The city's share came from a hotel-occupancy tax increase.

A groundbreaking was held in July 1987 and the formal dedication, which included a black-tie gala, was held May 26, 1988.

And though the cool waters have tempted people for 30 years, you aren't actually supposed to swim in it. When running, the water is treated with strong chemicals to keep algae at bay and can be an irritant. Plus the bricks that create the delightful babbling effect in the artificial stream that feeds into the fountain area — that's called a rill, if you were curious — have sharp edges that can cut up your feet and other body parts if you attempt to wade across.

Allison Ehrlich is the archive coordinator for the Caller-Times. Contact her at allison.ehrlich@caller.com and follow her on Twitter @CallerArchives.

C-T 1-24-2019 1A, 5A

SPLISH SPLASH, MORE CASH



Visitors stroll through the Corpus Christi Watergarden in July 2005. GEORGE GONGORA/CALLER-TIMES FILE

Watergarden, park fountain costs could double from plan

Kirsten Crow Corpus Christi Caller Times
USA TODAY NETWORK - TEXAS

More than two years after the Corpus Christi Watergarden and bayfront fountains ran dry, there's a new price tag to bring the signature attractions back to life.

The big question: exactly how big to go. That could reach from basic repairs to touches of extra shine. Think light shows.

In a report last month, engineers told a city board that minimally recommended renovations would likely cost nearly double what was anticipated, from about \$1.8 million to about \$3.6 million.

The allocation would fix existing problems that caused the fountain failures to begin with, and update designs equipment to head-off future failures, officials said.

See COSTS, Page 8A



The Corpus Christi Watergarden at the Bayfront Arts and Science park is seen on Sept. 26, 2008. MICHAEL ZAMORA/CALLER-TIMES FILE

Costs

Continued from Page 1A

The project's original estimate was based on a preliminary report, city engineer Jeff Edmonds wrote in an email to the Caller-Times. Since then a more detailed report has provided "a more comprehensive cost estimate that identifies elements of work that were not included in the preliminary estimate."

Some of the increases are attributed to items intended to boost reliability and maintenance, Edmonds said, such as purchasing backup water pumps, as well as relocating a storm water drain and improving an access road that would lead to a new above-ground pumphouse.

A lengthier presentation on costs is expected at the next meeting of the city board, which oversees the spending of a one-eighth cent sales tax devoted to the seawall.

Rehabilitation of the Watergarden and Bayfront Park fountains is expected to be bankrolled through the account. Approved by voters nearly 20 years ago, that revenue can only be used to fortify downtown's flood protection and boost economic development in the area around the seawall.

Aside from the recommended repairs, there are optional project additions, according to a city memo — among them, surface restoration of both water structures, installation of programmable LED lights and overhauling nearby wind turbines, enabling them to spiral in the breeze again.

Those kind of enhancements would range from about \$45,000 to \$682,000, documents show. That would be outside of what is included in engineers' advised \$3.6 million plan.

Many of the elected and appointed decision-makers haven't publicly weighed in yet — but early on, reactions to the cost estimate has been mixed. Some view it as forward-thinking investment in a city asset, while others have criticized it as unnecessarily inflated spending.

City Councilman Everett Roy, who represents the area, noted there is flexibility in the project's scope — and its final cost — available for the council to discuss and ultimately choose.

"I think we need to fix the structure," he said. "I do think there's some leeway whether we can get to the extent of the light show. We need to talk about that, (it) needs to be a reasonable conversation."

What caused the problems?

The Watergarden — the ring of fountains that tie together the campuses of the American Bank Center and several of the city's more popular museums — was built a little more than 30 years ago.

A nonprofit and the city — through its hotel occupancy tax revenue — underlined the project. Construction rang in at about \$2.4 million. Adjusted for inflation, that would be roughly \$5.3 million in 2019, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics' calculations.

The Watergarden has been shut down since 2017. But officials say there were troubles long before then. That's attributed to a history riddled with large-scale flooding events — as well as smaller-scale groundwater infiltration — damaging equipment in an underground vault.

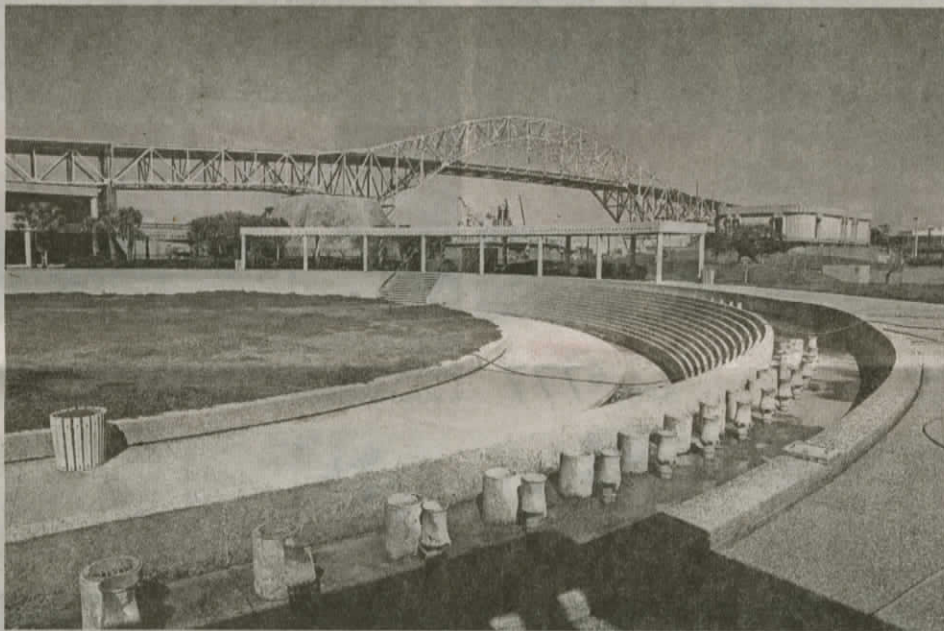
The city has likely paid between \$500,000 to \$1 million in repairs since the Watergarden was constructed, Edmonds said.

Just off the seawall, the nearby Bayfront Park fountains are a little more than 10 years old.

They, too, have been down for about two years. It's thought to be largely due



Alex Ronje, employee with the Bayfront Plaza Convention Center maintenance department, replaces one of the burnt-out bulbs in the lights that illuminate the Corpus Christi Watergarden in October 1989. CARLOS MORENO/CALLER-TIMES FILE



The Corpus Christi Watergarden has been inoperable since Hurricane Harvey made landfall in Aransas County in August 2017. Plans to revive the feature may cost more than expected. RACHEL DENNY CLOW/CALLER-TIMES

to general wear and tear, according to a consultants' report.

How much will it cost?

The consultants were hired in May, after the City Council approved a \$364,000 contract for the private engineering firm to evaluate the structures and come up with solutions to address deficiencies.

The overall project budget then totaled about \$1.8 million, according to records.

But anticipating and deterring deterioration should be factored into strategy, Edmonds said — as originally built,

he added, the Watergarden "experienced problems so frequently I think it was down as much as it was up."

Aimed at curbing damage to the Watergarden's equipment, the new proposal would call for construction of an above-ground pumphouse. Engineers say that layout would be much less likely to flood — and maintenance would be much easier — than the current housing in the underground vault.

The \$3.6 million includes about \$600,000 to renew operation of the Bayfront Park fountains, Edmonds told the city board in its Sept. 16 meeting.

All of the lighting assemblies need replacement, according to the consult-

ant's report. The new estimate includes about \$141,000 that would go to installing basic LED lights, which would come in four colors that could be switched on and off.

It would not include the more elaborate multi-color, full-spectrum lights that could put on a show. That would be an add-on that would run about \$682,000, according to a city memo.

Where is the money coming from?

Of the \$1.8 million project budget presented in May, about \$1.4 million was shown in city documents as earmarked sales tax revenue. The remainder came from other proceeds, including insurance and the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

Although city officials have said all or some of the difference between the \$1.8 million and \$3.6 million budgets could be made up through the sales tax fund, other ideas that have been suggested include potential opportunities for naming rights or philanthropic contributions.

Last spring, repairs of both attractions spurred controversy as city officials debated the merits of using the sales tax income solely for downtown flood protection or whether it should also go to economic development endeavors.

Both are permitted under the ballot language.

The majority of the money remains earmarked by the city board for flood protection projects.

Responses of board members, upon hearing the new Watergarden and Bayfront Park fountain repair estimate, ranged from a focus on long-term investment to hard scrutiny of the changes.

Board member Lee Trujillo described the cost as infeasible, adding that the repairs had been "hard enough to sell at \$1.4, \$1.7 (million)."

Plans should stick to just turning the water back on, he added.

"I just don't understand how the price doubled," Trujillo said.

The issues go beyond "making it pump water," but extend to the full site, Edmonds said.

"We've got a bunch of the lighting and wiring that doesn't work out there," he said. "You've got to ask yourself: if you're going to put money in there, does it make sense to put \$1 million in there and then leave the thing to where you've got lights that don't work and concrete that's broken and things that need to be patched and painted?"

Where do decision makers stand?

That will become more clear in coming weeks, following a presentation to the city board expected to dive deeper into how engineers came up with the \$3.6 million estimate.

Nothing has been decided yet, and should the board eventually vote to increase the budget, it would go to the City Council for final approval.

At minimum, the fountains and Watergarden should be fixed, along with its concrete and bricks, and include the simpler version of the LED lights, Roy said.

He is leaning toward endorsing the total package, he added, but would accept the more basic proposal if it would push the project forward.

The area has in the past been a favorite of residents and tourists — in part as a scenic backdrop for photos, Roy said.

"We're always talking about improving quality of life for young people," he said. "This is one way to step up and do that... sometimes you can't put a price tag on a project that provides that quality of life, and giving the means for the community to enjoy something."