

# RAWB NOTIFICATION SYSTEM PROPOSAL

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## Letter of Intent

Mayor Tim Murry

City Council

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Dear Mayor Murry,

Thank you for your dedication to the city of Clermont and its residents. As your residents, we have noticed a rift beginning to form between the homeowners of Clermont and the community leaders because of the Running Annual Water Budget (RAWB). Homeowners are being fined for overuse of water and not adhering to the RAWB. Many have become frustrated due to not having a total for their RAWB so that they can plan accordingly.

On top of RAWB fines, homeowners can also be fined by their Homeowner's Associations. Many homeowners receive fines for brown grass and start watering their grass more frequently. This results in them being fined for the RAWB while also being subjected to HOA fines for a lack of lush grass. Thus, creating a never-ending cycle for homeowners.

As your residents, we are concerned and constantly being fined by either the city of Clermont or the Homeowner's Associations. To combat this, we have written up an eco-friendly plan for a RAWB Notification System that will alert homeowners of their budget and how much they are spending throughout the year. We believe this plan reflects the conservation efforts of Clermont. We have come together to bring you the following proposal in the hopes that it would provide better communication between the community members and community leaders. Thank you for your consideration of our solution to a problem that has been plaguing us.

Sincerely,

Technical Writer- Rachael Bell on Behalf of the Clermont Community.

## Introduction

The city of Clermont is a thriving community where many people come to shop, eat, swim, or even compete in triathlons. This city currently houses a population “estimated at 44,301 according to the Bureau of Economic and Business Research (BEBR). The median household income in Clermont is \$58,804, versus \$51,077 for the Orlando MSA” (“Demographics”). With the population continuing to increase, the city of Clermont is working hard to improve for its residents by providing more homes, businesses, and activities for the community and neighboring counties in the hopes of increasing revenue. Many of Clermont’s neighborhoods have created Homeowner’s Associations to keep up property value, which in turn brings more wealth into the city. In the hopes of continuing to preserve our earth, Clermont has partnered with using St. Johns River Water Management District to provide the city with naturally occurring water, to be eco-friendly while allowing for water conservation. But these two tools that Clermont uses to keep up its property values and conservation efforts have created a rift between community leaders and Clermont homeowners because they are being relentlessly fined.

The city of Clermont uses the St. Johns River Water Management District to irrigate its city landscapes. The St. Johns River Water Management District requires that “As part of its consumptive use permitting process, the district requires all permit holders to use water as efficiently as possible. Water supply utilities are required to implement conservation rate structures, perform water audits to ensure system efficiency and develop programs for the use of reclaimed water whenever possible” (“Clermont Utilities Keeps”). The city of Clermont receives a fine if their residents overuse water from the city’s RAWB that is given from the St. Johns River Water Management, which is why homeowners receive fines for overuse. The St. Johns

River Water Management District allows for Clermont to use their river as a natural reservoir allowing the city of Clermont to use their clean water for cooking, washing, and drinking.

Homeowners are provided a water irrigation schedule on which days and times to water so that the city can continue to conserve water in the St. Johns River:

To ensure the most efficient use of water, the city of Clermont follows the irrigation guidelines established by the St. Johns River Water Management District for residential and commercial customers. These guidelines apply to everyone and are to be followed for all outdoor water use regardless of whether the water comes from a private well, surface water, or a private or public utility. (“Water Conservation”)

Homes with even and odd numbers are given designated days and times to irrigate their yards.

Violations and fines for homeowners who do not adhere to the schedule and RAWB include “First offense: Written warning/Second offense: \$50 fine/Third offense: up to \$500 fine/Ongoing violators are subject to the disconnection of irrigation water services./Code Enforcement hearings can result in fines accruing daily with the possibility of a lien placed on your property” (“Water Conservation”). If homeowners water outside of these designated days and times they can be fined by the city, if they water more than their allotted budget they can also be fined by the city, and if they do not water enough, they can be fined by their HOA.

While HOAs provide Clermont with beautifully kept neighborhoods, residents are unhappy with their HOAs because they often receive fines. Many residents receive fines that have to do with landscaping, specifically with the watering of their lawns. If a resident’s yard looks patchy, brown, or has holes they will receive a fine. In the State of Florida HOAs are allowed to fine their residents:

Although it cannot exceed \$100, a fine can be levied every day that a violation occurs.

Altogether, you can fine residents a max of \$1000 for an ongoing offense. Once a fine has reached \$1000, a lien may be placed against the resident's property. In addition to fines, a resident can be suspended from common areas, assuming they can still access their property and utility services. The suspension must end once fines are paid. ("Florida Hoa Laws")

Residents will begrudgingly pay these fines to ensure that the property value of the neighborhood stays up. To combat the HOA fines, homeowners begin watering their yards more to adhere to their HOA standards of lush green yards. But because Clermont homeowners are not aware of their RAWB they have begun to receive fines due to not adhering to a budget they do not know the total of. This never-ending cycle is causing homeowners to become increasingly restless with the influx of fines.

Residents are aware that the RAWB is in place to maintain water conservation, but they are not clear on their allotted annual budget total. To use the St. Johns River, there was an agreement made between the city of Clermont and the St. Johns River Water Management District, to ensure that overuse is not taking place. If overuse were to occur before the river could naturally refill then the surrounding counties would be out of water. According to the City of Clermont ordinances, "All properties that receive water from the city for the purpose of landscape irrigation must have a separate landscape irrigation meter. The city shall establish a Running Annual Water Budget (RAWB) for each landscape irrigation customer based on property size, pervious area, and an annual landscape irrigation application rate of 35 inches" (City of Clermont). In theory, the RAWB is a fantastic idea, and it has worked for the past fourteen years. The problem has arisen because the city of Clermont has not provided its

residents with definitive budgets for each property, even though they have the information to do so. Since the RAWB differs from property to property no budget is the same. The lack of communication between homeowners and Clermont has created angry homeowners.

Homeowners trying to adhere to their HOA guidelines, so they do not get fined for dry grass, are only turning around to be given a fine from the city for overwatering their yards.

When homeowners are fined it is too late, their water budget has run out and they have to pay more for extra water. If homeowners were given their budget before they started using it then they could plan accordingly. This major lack of communication has caused a rift in the community. Residents were blindsided by the RAWB fines, having no idea that a water budget even existed. According to WFTV News Reporter Sabrina Maggiore:

[A]ll homes are assigned a water budget to help control overall water use, but many residents said they didn't even know they needed to adhere to it. 'I have been here since 2009. This is the first time I've received something like this stating that there is a water budget established for our property,' said Chris Burgess, who lives in the subdivision. 'The city needs to do a better job at communicating with people.' In a statement, a spokesperson for the city said the water budget system has been in use for more than ten years. (Maggiore)

HOA fines are being given to residents on top of RAWB fines issued by the city of Clermont. Homeowners are becoming increasingly restless due to RAWB issues and have asked to see their budgets but are met with no response. This lack of communication has led to unhappy homeowners who may warn potential buyers not to move to Clermont or even relocate themselves. This could stop Clermont's plans to continue to rebuild and rebrand their community because homeowners leaving would take away the city's sources of revenue.

## Project Narrative—RAWB Notification System

As a community, we propose that a RAWB Notification System should be created to provide homeowners with their allotted water budget for the year. This system will be digital to save on waste and suit the city's calls to be eco-friendly. The first notification will be sent via email or text to all homeowners by the Clermont Water Department with their allotted yearly water budget around the second week of December. Giving homeowners time to prepare before the new year. The notification will be sent through the Clermont Water Department because they currently keep track of the billing, homeowner records, and water usage. After the first notification is sent there will be three more sent quarterly to help homeowners keep track of their budget. This system will provide them with what is left of their current budget and how the county would recommend spending what is left over. It will also include how much a water citation or fine will cost residents if they do not adhere to the designated budget. This budget will also have the Water Department's contact information for inquiries.

The RAWB Notification System will provide homeowners with ample time to plan accordingly while keeping the city from being fined by the St. Johns Water Management District. It will also allow homeowners to adhere to their HOA requirements so that those that do have an HOA in place in their neighborhoods will not be fine. The hope is that this system will provide a safety net for all involved and will improve communication. With the city's investment in this system, it will show homeowners that their city has their back. We believe as a community that this would solve the problem of a lack of communication. This system will help give homeowners a balance allowing them to plan so that they do not receive HOA and RAWB fines. This improvement in communication and the provision of clear-cut guidelines will provide Clermont with happy homeowners who will be willing to invest in their city.

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