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Cheat sheet for the next mayor

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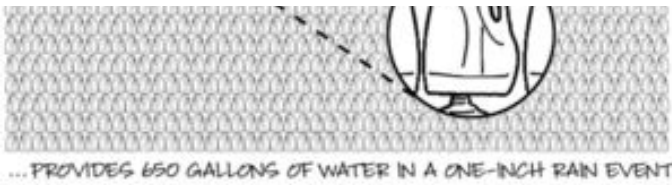
By Nate Downey
For The New Mexican

I'm not a one-issue voter, but you can bet that any candidates I support in the upcoming city elections will have satisfactory answers to Santa Fe's water questions. I've already been asked by

1000 SQUARE FEET OF ROOF SURFACE.....



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How much does harvesting the rainwater from your roof matter? Lots! Graphic courtesy George Lawrence

some of the smarter horses in the race for advice on what to say when it comes to water. To be fair (and since there are 15 or 20 excellent candidates!), I thought I'd provide the field with some talking points.

In the short term, we need to encourage more roof-water storage. Let's increase rebates and improve incentives that

allow for cost-effective cistern systems. Let's figure out a way to work with the Permaculture Credit Union and other forward-thinking funders. I'd add a plan to get the state of New Mexico, and (dare I say it, lest you laugh out loud?) the U.S. Congress. Water is a public health and safety issue as well as an essential economic driver. If we work together, how hard can it be to harvest runoff from every roof in town? This should be water goal number one.

Let's also get deeper into curb-cutting. This simple technique diverts stormwater and snowmelt from roads into on-contour swales, French drains, and runoff-absorbing wicks that provide water to the root zones of plant material. Curb cuts are required whenever we permit a parking lot. In fact, it's illegal to dump too much parking-lot water onto a city street. So, why, now, are we finally getting into curb cuts? (Okay, maybe this should be goal number one.)

For the long term, let's talk toilets. The conversion of every flusher in town to a composting toilet will take decades, so better start soon. Fortunately, we already have an excellent program we can copy, namely, our very own toilet-retrofit program. It's being cut-and-pasted all over the world as we speak, but deep down we all must admit that this water-conservation strategy is just the beginning. There is no reason in the world to pollute perfectly good water with excrement, and there is no reason in the world to throw away a rich source of soil nutrients.

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Okay, if you can't (yet) stomach composting toilets, why not plan to implement a pilot program for flushing toilets with greywater? We won't hold it against you if you go that route.

While on the subject, we also won't hold it against you if you never say the words, "green," "environment," "sustainable," "permaculture," or even "carbon footprint." This is not just some ecofreak's opinion. It's a plan that creates jobs in the technology, design, manufacturing, real-estate development, and service sectors. It's a plan that would significantly increase local property values, tax revenues, and quality of life. It would also send us ecotourists while simultaneously leading us back to our roots as a strong, creative, and resourceful people.

Water harvesting from roofs, roads, and waste streams is nothing new. Wouldn't it be great if our next mayor and city council became intensely committed to such a water-stimulated economy? It could happen, so inform yourself and vote.

Nate Downey is the author of [Harvest the Rain](#) (Sunstone Press, 2010) and the president of Santa Fe Permaculture, Inc. You can contact him through his new company website, www.permadesign.com.



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