NEWS // LOCAL NEWS

Austin to consider $15.7 million for studying new water supply strategies

By **Alex Driggars**, *Staff Writer*
May 28, 2026

Aquifer storage and recovery would take water from existing supplies, like the Colorado River and Highland Lakes, treat it and pump it underground for storage.

Austin American-Statesman

The Austin City Council on Thursday will weigh a $15.7 million contract between Austin Water and HDR Engineering to study brackish groundwater desalination and aquifer storage and recovery, two unconventional water sources officials say are key to shoring up the city's future supply.

Aquifer storage and recovery is “like a ‘water savings account,’” Austin Water Director Shay Ralls Roalson wrote to the Austin City Council in a recent memo. Austin Water would take water from existing supplies, like the Colorado River and Highland Lakes, treat it and pump it underground for storage. Then, during a drought or emergency, the utility could pump it back up and use it.

Brackish groundwater desalination, on the other hand, is the process of filtering and treating groundwater that is too salty for the city’s water supply. The utility would

treat the brackish groundwater with reverse osmosis to bring it into compliance with state regulations, Roalson said.

The strategies are crucial parts of Austin's 100-year water plan, she noted.

Testing sites Travis and Bastrop counties

The contract, if approved, will allow Austin Water to move forward with testing a city-owned site in eastern Travis County for suitability for the projects. The utility is wrapping up testing at another site in Bastrop County. Roalson said the two sites were identified as potential candidates for the well field during a desktop study that began in 2022.

If aquifer conditions at the test sites meet the city's needs and the tests are successful, they would "establish the scientific basis for a future, small-scale pilot project," Roalson said. A full buildout of the project could take more than a decade.

May 28, 2026

Alex Driggars

TRANSPORTATION REPORTER