



Memo

Department of Planning & Housing

TO: Planning & Zoning Commission

FROM: Steve Osguthorpe, AICP
Planning & Housing Director

DATE: January 27, 2012

SUBJECT: Landscape Standards Review Process

Background.

At a City Council Workshop on September 20, 2011, staff presented a PowerPoint presentation on current landscaping issues, outlining some of the more common complaints of landscaping standards, and illustrating various problems and successes in incorporating landscaping into development sites and streetscapes. Staff provided alternative approaches to addressing the landscaping issue including:

1. Maintain status quo, i.e., retain current standards with no increased efforts in enforcement of violations of current standards.
2. Retain and enforce current standards.
3. Eliminate current standards.
4. Amend current standards to address identified issues.

After review of the PowerPoint presentation, Council members agreed that there were problems with current landscaping approaches, such as the types of trees selected for various site conditions, the need to coordinate other site improvements with landscaping (e.g., parking and utilities), and problems associated with long-term maintenance of landscaping after initial installation. Council discussed possible approaches to the problem, such as looking at other ways of reducing heat-island effect, looking at how landscaping can be incorporated into and coordinated with storm water management, considering how landscaping might be clustered in some situations rather than spread throughout the site, applying different landscaping standards to different uses, and considering whether the issue of parking requirements should also be addressed. It was stated that the issue should be looked at in a way to make requirements sustainable and create flexibility between parking and landscaping while moving toward other goals of aesthetic appeal from foliage in the community, progressive storm water management and avoiding irrigation.

Council then discussed having a workgroup including a developer, landscape architect, someone experienced in storm water management and how landscaping might contribute to absorption of water in green spaces, and a landscape maintenance person experienced in managing successfully landscaped areas. In response, staff charted out an approach to the topic reflecting Council's desires, which included the following list of objectives and process.

Current Objectives.

Staff pulled together the following list of stated objectives in both the zoning code and the Land Use Policy Plan (LUPP). Broadly speaking, they are intended to protect and promote the public health, safety and general welfare by achieving the stated objectives. They are paraphrased for easy reading, but can all be found within the identified sections of the code or LUPP. Staff asked that the Council review these and determine their relevance as policy guidance for this review process:

- Reduce the effects of wind and air turbulence.
- Reduce the effects of heat and noise.
- Reduce the effects of automobile lights.
- Preserve ground water strata.
- Act as a natural drainage system.
- Ameliorate storm water drainage problems.
- Reduce the level of carbon dioxide and return oxygen to the atmosphere.
- Prevent soil erosion.
- Conserve and stabilize property values.
- Facilitate the creation of a convenient, attractive, and harmonious community.
- Relieve the blight of the appearance of surface parking lots.
- Generally preserve a healthful and pleasant environment.
- Achieve greater conservation of natural resources and compatibility between development and the environment.
- Provide biodiversity through the inclusion of plant and animal habitats.
- Provide landscape shade for all streets and sidewalks in Village Residential areas.
- Integrate building and development design in Suburban Residential areas with emphasis on
- Landscaping as a buffer element at the edge of different land use types.
- Install sufficient landscaped buffers in Suburban Residential areas to create an effective edge between different land use densities.
- Enhance the yard area of apartment buildings and soften the impact of the building from the street and from nearby residential areas.
- Include landscaping and screening to ensure that the land use relationship between commercial activity in Convenience Commercial Nodes and the adjacent residential land uses will be compatible.
- Provide, protect and maintain all landscaping in a healthy growing condition, and replace when necessary.

Issues to be Addressed.

Based upon the information provided to the Council in the September 20 workshop, and the subsequent discussion at that workshop, the Council agreed to the following list of objectives that would serve as a framework for this review.

- Determine if existing landscaping standards are in line with stated objectives in terms of:
 - Tree & shrub spacing and quantity requirements
 - Minimum widths of landscape areas
 - Specified minimum planting sizes
 - Limitations on use of rock as mulch

- Determine the best means of utilizing landscaping to reduce heat-island effect of urban areas.
- Identify means of coordinating landscaping into storm water control.
- Explore alternative and flexible means of distributing required landscaping throughout the site.
- Explore implications of zone-specific landscaping standards.
- Assess how current standards affect development of different parcel sizes.
- Develop a list of plant species best suited to various micro-climates and conditions. E.g., areas of:
 - Inundation (e.g., swales and flood-prone areas)
 - Snow storage
 - Salt and/or sand
 - Poor soil conditions
 - Little or no irrigation
 - Heavy foot traffic
- Identify measures that ensure ease of maintenance and long-term viability of landscaped areas.
- Balance other landscaping objectives with objectives of CPTED Standards (Crime Prevention through Environmental Design).
- Assess on-site parking needs and parking requirements and see if they are in balance with landscaping requirements and objectives.
- Ensure that the Council's approved objectives in the LUPP and Zoning Code pertaining to landscaping are accomplished.

Proposed Review Process.

1. Work within current code and LUPP objectives as a framework for moving forward with this review process (as confirmed by City Council).
2. **Report to Planning & Zoning Commission on this issue, and solicit preliminary P&Z input on how the Council's directive might be approached.**
3. Convene Landscaping Workgroup meetings. Invite as necessary guest attendees (technical or marketing experts) who may not otherwise be able to serve as regular workgroup members.
4. Staff, with workgroup support, will conduct two workshops to solicit input and ideas. The first workshop will be for developers; the second open house workshop will be for the public.
5. Submit to P&Z list of potential solutions and approaches to identified issues, as developed through workgroup input.
6. P&Z forward to City Council recommendation on suggested solutions and approaches.
7. Prepare draft ordinance incorporating Commission and Council feedback, and conduct formal public hearing before P&Z.
8. Forward to Council for review and action.

Planning & Zoning Commission Input Solicited.

Staff is soliciting input from the Commission on how the Council's directive might be approached, per the above defined process, scope and parameters. To facilitate this effort and to bring the Commission up to speed on the information shared with Council that led to this scope of work, staff will share with the P&Z the same PowerPoint presentation given to the City Council back in September. That presentation will be shared at this next P&Z meeting on February 1. Discussion will follow.