

Innovative Water Management for Commercial Landscaping

Austin requires landscaping of commercial areas for aesthetics, buffering, screening, and for urban heat island abatement. Although this landscaping has traditionally relied on potable water irrigation, there are opportunities to use stormwater or other non-potable sources to sustain the health of these landscapes.

Council Resolution 20091119-064

Require commercial storm water runoff to be directed to landscaped areas while providing flexibility through alternative methods and providing exceptions for unique site conditions.

Purpose

Reduce reliance on potable water for irrigation of commercial landscapes. "Commercial" includes any land use requiring a site development permit, such as commercial retail, office, multifamily, industrial, and civic.

Benefits

Community

- Water Conservation
- Enhanced Water Quality
- Urban Heat Island/Climate Protection
- Landscape Health/Survival
- Sustainable Sites/Green Design/Best Practice
- Education and Awareness
- Significant opportunity for future benefits (~ 35% of urban core is "commercial")

Property Owners

- Reduce long-term costs
- Potential water quality credit
- Potential LEED/Green Building credit
- More sustainable landscaping

Challenges Identified and Addressed

- Unique site conditions (steep slopes, existing trees, partial redevelopment, drainage)
- Entrance feature landscapes
- Design sophistication
- Pavement stability
- Up-front costs
- Plant choice impacts
- Supplemental irrigation management
- Recharge zone considerations
- Landscaping tolerance to pollutants

Proposed Ordinance

- Must direct stormwater to at least 50% of required landscaping.
 - Can use non-required landscaping as long as area is equivalent to 50% of required area
 - Multiple options to comply (e.g., overland flow, rainwater harvesting, preservation of undisturbed natural areas/existing trees)
 - Can receive partial or full water quality credit for landscaped areas if designed for purpose
 - Irrigation system (e.g., potable) required for landscaped medians, islands, peninsulas and all newly planted trees
 - Irrigation system (e.g., potable) optional for landscaped borders and perimeters
 - Temporary irrigation required for two growing seasons for areas not permanently irrigated
 - Assess success of ordinance after two (2) years to determine if changes needed
- Exceptions allowed:
 - Unique site conditions (topography, existing development, etc.)
 - Hot-spot land uses (e.g., gas stations, loading docks)
 - Recharge zone (parking lot impervious cover)
- No requirements (including irrigation) for areas where existing, undisturbed vegetation is retained.

Tentative Schedule

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|-----------------------------|--------------|----------------------------|--------------|
| • Environmental Board | Oct 20, 2010 | • Planning Commission | Dec 14, 2010 |
| • Planning Commission C&O | Nov 16, 2010 | • Water & Wastewater Comm. | Dec 08, 2010 |
| • Resource Mgmt. Commission | Nov 16, 2010 | • City Council | Dec 16, 2010 |