

AGENDA



Thursday, December 16, 2010

Public Hearings and Possible Actions
RECOMMENDATION FOR COUNCIL ACTION

Item No. 97

Subject: Conduct a public hearing and consider an ordinance amending sections 25-2-1001 and 25-2-1008 of the City Code relating to landscaping irrigation requirements for site plans.

Amount and Source of Funding: There is no unanticipated fiscal impact.

Fiscal Note: A fiscal note is not required.

For More Information: Matt Hollon, 974-2212; Pat Murphy, 974-2821

Boards and Commission Action: Recommended by the Environmental Board. To be reviewed by the Resource Management Commission on December 14, 2010, the Water Planning Advisory Board on December 14, 2010, and the Planning Commission December 14, 2010.

Prior Council Action: August 6, 2009 - Council passed Resolution 20090806-035 requesting staff evaluation and response within 90 days. November 19, 2009- Council passed Resolution 20091119-064 directing the City Manager to initiate necessary code amendments to reflect the recommendations provided by the Watershed Protection Department.

Austin requires landscaping of commercial sites for buffering, screening, and urban heat island abatement. This landscaping is traditionally curbed off from surrounding pavement and relies heavily on potable water irrigation to survive. Meanwhile, rainfall running off parking lots and rooftops is directed to storm drains and structural controls, bypassing the landscaping completely. There is a significant opportunity to bridge this existing divide by using rainwater more wisely on-site to conserve potable water, enhance water quality, and sustain the health of these urban landscapes.

City Council recognized this opportunity and passed a resolution in November of 2009 asking staff to develop an ordinance that would require commercial stormwater runoff to be directed to landscaped areas while providing flexibility through alternative methods and exceptions for unique site conditions.

The proposed ordinance will require commercial sites to direct stormwater to at least 50 percent of the required landscaping. There are a number of ways to comply, ranging from simpler solutions like overland flow and disconnected downspouts to more sophisticated designs like rain gardens and rainwater harvesting. Undisturbed natural areas and existing trees can also be counted toward the 50 percent requirement as long as no potable irrigation is installed.

Under existing code, permanent irrigation is required for all landscaping. The ordinance will now give sites the option to not permanently irrigate perimeter landscapes. However, temporary irrigation will be required for two growing seasons to allow for establishment. Permanent irrigation will still be required for all new trees as well as medians, islands, and peninsulas.

Administrative variances will be allowed for sites unable to fully comply due to unique site conditions such as topography, the location of existing development, or the potential for highly contaminated runoff. The ordinance also directs staff to report back to Council after two years on the effectiveness of the new requirements, including recommendations for potential improvements or amendments.