

***ITEM 1** Provo City Development Services requests Ordinance Text Amendments to Chapter 15.20.060 Design Standards. Citywide Application. Hannah Salzl (801) 852-6423
hsalzl@provo.org PLOTA20230206

Applicant: Development Services

Staff Coordinator: Hannah Salzl

ALTERNATIVE ACTIONS

1. **Continue** to a future date to obtain additional information or to further consider information presented. *The next available meeting date is March 13, 2024 at 6:00 P.M.*
2. **Recommend Denial** of the requested Ordinance Text Amendment. *This action would not be consistent with the recommendations of the Staff Report. The Planning Commission should state new findings.*

Relevant History: In the Council Work Session on May 16, 2023, the Council asked staff to evaluate Provo City's policies about artificial turf and return with a recommendation.

This item was continued from the Planning Commission meeting on September 27, 2023. That version proposed prohibiting artificial turf entirely, and the Commission asked staff to return with a more moderate limit and more Provo-specific research.

Neighborhood Issues: There has not yet been a neighborhood meeting on this item and staff has not received any feedback on the request at the time of this report.

Summary of Key Issues:

- Subsection 15.20.060(6)(a) currently permits artificial turf as long as it meets certain aesthetic and installation standards.
- Artificial turf is not a sustainable alternative to natural grass and should not be permitted.

Staff Recommendation: That the Planning Commission recommend approval of the proposed text amendments to the Provo City Council.

OVERVIEW

Artificial turf was permitted in 2019 on the grounds that it uses less water than natural turf grass. However, most installers recommend running irrigation for artificial turf to cool it down. It also reflects more heat than turf grass, increasing ambient temperatures, creating “dead zones” for insects and wildlife, and creating more stressful growing conditions for nearby trees. The environmental impact of artificial turf is equivalent to covering a yard with rocks. In short, it is not a sustainable alternative to grass.

On May 16, 2023, the Council approved a series of amendments to the landscape standards in 15.20. During the discussion, Public Works and several Councilors expressed concerns about Provo City Code’s allowance for artificial turf. The Council asked staff to consider prohibiting artificial turf and to return with a recommendation at a future meeting.

Development Services staff met with the Public Works, Energy, and Parks Departments. All four departments recommend amending Provo City Code to prohibit artificial turf except in athletic fields and public recreation spaces. Public Works said that it had not had the desired effect of decreasing outdoor water use. The Stormwater Division also expressed concern about microplastics and the lack of permeability in incorrectly installed turf. Parks’ primary concern was the heat and how that affected people and animals who used the artificial turf. Energy, especially the Forestry Division, had seen increased tree damage and death due to the heat islands, especially in parkstrips. They shared Public Works’ concern about the lack of permeability.

In the Planning Commission meeting on September 27, 2023, some Commissioners expressed concerns about the prohibition infringing on person property rights and the potential imbalance of still allowing artificial turf on large athletic fields that would have greater ecological impacts than small private lawns. Staff were asked to gather more Provo-specific research and, if that research was not compelling, to consider an amendment to limit artificial turf rather than prohibiting it.

Staff could not find sufficient Provo-specific data, especially during the winter months. This new amendment limits artificial turf to 60% or less in the same way as other non-vegetative ground covers.

Additionally, should a resident feel that artificial turf is the best option for their entire yard because they have a disability that makes caring for a yard more challenging, they can apply through the City’s existing reasonable accommodation process. Zoning Enforcement staff are already trained to teach residents about the process if it seems appropriate for their circumstances.

FINDINGS OF FACT

1. While artificial turf can use less water than some types of natural turf grass, it is not a water-free solution.
2. Artificial turf can become much hotter than natural turf grass and can radiate that heat, increasing ambient temperatures.
3. Fragments of artificial turf can contaminate stormwater runoff and contribute to microplastics in natural environments.
4. The General Plan reads, "To avoid becoming a concrete and asphalt-paved community, the city should continue to require developments to meet landscaping standards. Best practices for incorporating water-wise landscape or xeric landscaping design should be used where possible" (pg 27). The environmental effect of artificial turf is similar to paving over a space.
5. General Plan goal Resource Management 1.b calls for the City to "Promote the use of water conservative practices, including landscaping."
6. General Plan goal Resource Management 1.g. calls for the City to "Increase the urban tree canopy." The increased ambient heat from artificial turf creates a more stressful environment for nearby living vegetation.

STAFF ANALYSIS

Staff support the recommendation to limit turf grass.

Provo City Code Section 14.02.020(2) sets forth the following guidelines for consideration of ordinance text amendments.

Before recommending an amendment to this Title, the Planning Commission shall determine whether such amendment is in the interest of the public, and is consistent with the goals and policies of the Provo City General Plan. The following guidelines shall be used to determine consistency with the General Plan:

- (a) Public purpose for the amendment in question.

Staff response: The amendment would support the City's goals to promote landscaping that is not environmentally damaging.

- (b) Confirmation that the public purpose is best served by the amendment in question.

Staff response: Staff believes that the proposed amendments serve the public.

- (c) Compatibility of the proposed amendment with General Plan policies, goals, and objectives.

Staff response: The proposed amendments are consistent with the General Plan.

(d) Consistency of the proposed amendment with the General Plan’s “timing and sequencing” provisions on changes of use, insofar as they are articulated.

Staff response: There are no timing and sequencing issues related to this proposal.

(e) Potential of the proposed amendment to hinder or obstruct attainment of the General Plan’s articulated policies.

Staff response: This proposal does not hinder or obstruct attainment of the General Plan’s articulated policies.

(f) Adverse impacts on adjacent land owners.

Staff response: Staff do not foresee any adverse impacts on adjacent landowners.

(g) Verification of correctness in the original zoning or General Plan for the area in question.

Staff response: This proposal does not affect the zoning of any areas. It addresses landscaping standards citywide.

(h) In cases where a conflict arises between the General Plan Map and General Plan Policies, precedence shall be given to the Plan Policies.

Staff response: There is not a conflict.

CONCLUSIONS

Staff in the Development Services, Power, Public Works, and Parks Departments support reducing the amount of artificial turf in order to promote more sustainable landscaping, protect runoff systems, and reduce ambient temperatures. Staff recommend approval of the amendment.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Proposed Language 15.20.060 (Design Standards)

Attachment 1 – Proposed Language 15.20.060 (Design Standards)

15.20.060 Design Standards.

...

(6) Xeric landscaping and water wise landscaping is encouraged in all yards if the landscaping plan for yards adjacent to a street meets the following criteria:

(a) Living vegetation including turf grass, shrubs, perennials, **or** ornamental grasses ~~or artificial turf grass~~ shall cover a minimum of forty percent (40%) of the unbuilt surface area within three (3) years of planting. Tree canopy, **artificial turf**, and weeds may not count toward this percentage;

(b) The remaining unbuilt area not covered by living vegetation ~~or artificial turf grass~~ shall be covered by bark or wood mulch, decorative rock, hardscape, **artificial turf**, or any combination of these materials. Living plants should be grouped aesthetically throughout the yard;

(c) Living plants in the parkway area shall not be included in the minimum coverage requirement. Landscaping requirements for parkways shall be followed as defined in Section 15.20.120, Provo City Code.

(d) Artificial turf grass may be used in landscaping so long as it meets the following requirements:

(i) Artificial turf grass in yards adjacent to a street must have a blade length between two (2) inches and three (3) inches, have a natural green color, and be water permeable;

(ii) Artificial turf grass must be installed on top of a minimum of three (3) inches of sand, rocks, gravel, or similar product for drainage. Rocks, gravel or similar products shall range in size from three-eighths (3/8) inch to three-fourths (3/4) inch;

(iii) Artificial turf grass used for landscaping may not include rubber infill in a yard adjacent to a public street;

(iv) ~~Outdoor green carpet shall not be used in landscaping;~~

~~(v)~~ Upon request, specifications for installed artificial turf grass shall be provided to the Development Services Department.

(e) Outdoor carpet shall not be used in landscaping.