



MEMO

TO: Transportation, Water and Infrastructure Committee
Supervisor Andersen, Chair
Supervisor Piepho, Vice Chair

FROM: Tanya Drlik, IPM Coordinator

SUBJECT: Recommendations on Sustainable Landscaping from the IPM Advisory Committee

DATE: August 28, 2015

BACKGROUND

This is the fourth and most severe year of drought in California. The County has an opportunity to lead the way in water conservation and provide practical examples for its citizens. Turf around County buildings is used largely for aesthetic purposes and consumes far more water than drought tolerant landscaping. Drought-tolerant landscaping can be very attractive, and demonstration projects in the County will help citizens adjust to the new aesthetic.

This summer one such project was completed in the County. Approximately 70% of the turf at the Pittsburg Health Center (2311 Loveridge, Pittsburg) was removed and replaced with drought-tolerant plants that are widely spaced and mulched with wood chips. The change at the site is projected to save one million gallons of water per year. The current funding structure for maintenance of County landscaping is not conducive to projects such as this that may require an upfront investment that will provide returns only over the long-term.

Much of the landscaping around County buildings is aging and will require renovation in the near future. This presents the opportunity to alter County landscapes so they use less water and require less time and less pesticide to maintain them adequately.

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE IPM ADVISORY COMMITTEE

1. Develop a Countywide policy to convert existing turf to drought tolerant, low maintenance, and low pesticide use landscaping. The exceptions to this policy would be play areas for Head Start sites and turf in parks that is used for recreation (turf areas in parks that are not used for recreation should be converted to drought tolerant landscaping). The design for any turf conversion should use the least amount of pesticide practical in the preparation of the site.
2. Provide funding for conversion to sustainable landscaping
 - a. Develop ideas for a funding structure for new landscape installation, turf conversion, and landscape maintenance and renovation that is not coupled to the particular building or the departments housed in the building in order to provide secure, long-term funding for landscape maintenance and for projects that require up-front investment.
 - b. Pursue outside funding for turf conversion but do not allow the lack of outside funding to stymie the removal of existing turf. Perhaps the position of Sustainability Coordinator, if and when it is filled, could pursue grant funding for sustainable landscaping projects.
3. Develop a County policy to take decisions about the type of landscaping around buildings out of the hands of the tenants of that building in order that long range plans and long term investments in the landscaping can be made.



4. Make the following additions to the existing County Landscape Standards under “D. Design Guidelines, 3.01. General”:
 - a. Lifecycle costing will be used when landscapes are renovated or created.
[Note: This is to ensure that projects can be undertaken that require a substantial up-front investment to save money, labor, water, and pesticide in the future.]
 - b. Designs for all landscaping should take into account the level of maintenance and pest management that will be required to sustain the landscape. Designs should be aesthetically pleasing, low maintenance, water conserving, and maintained using an IPM approach for pest management.
5. Make the following changes in wording to the existing County Landscape Standards under “D. Design Guidelines, 3.06. Water Conservation, part C”
 - C. Emphasis shall be placed on plants well suited to the microclimate and soil conditions at the given site and that require minimal water once established, are relatively free from pests and diseases, ~~and~~ are generally easy to maintain, are pollinator-friendly, and are native to California. Reference shall be made to currently recognized sources such as EBMUD’s *Water Conserving Plants and Landscapes for the Bay Area* or Bob Perry’s *Trees and Shrubs for Dry California Landscapes* for recommended water conserving plants.
6. Make the following addition to the existing County Landscape Standards under “D. Design Guidelines, 3.09. Turf”:

Turf shall not be proposed except in Head Start and other child care play areas and in parks where it will be used for recreation. Turf shall not be proposed for purely aesthetic purposes.
7. Develop a County policy to require that landscape designs be reviewed and approved by the Public Works Grounds Division, in addition to the other required reviews and approvals. The Grounds Division should review plans for the long-term sustainability of the landscape with regard to maintenance costs and potential pest and disease problems. Landscaping can be in place for 10 to 20 years, and poor designs and inappropriate plant choices waste County resources. The Grounds Division has considerable expertise in determining maintenance costs and recognizing future maintenance and pest problems.
8. Develop a County policy to require that the plant lists for landscape designs be reviewed by the County Department of Agriculture whose staff are the County experts on invasive plants. Many of the invasive plants that are plaguing California wildlands today were unwittingly introduced by the nursery trade into urban landscapes where they escaped to become major pests that cost Californians at least 82 million dollars every year.

RECOMMENDATIONS/NEXT STEPS

APPROVE recommendations and DIRECT County staff as appropriate.