



City of Sunnyvale

Agenda Item

25-0152

Agenda Date: 2/13/2025

2025 COUNCIL STUDY ISSUE

NUMBER

ESD 22-02

TITLE Promotion and Assessment of Sustainable Landscaping Strategies

BACKGROUND

Lead Department: Environmental Services Department

Support Departments: Office of the City Manager
Office of the City Attorney
Department of Public Works
Finance Department

Sponsor(s): Sustainability Commission

History: 1 year ago: Ranked, Below the Line
2 years ago: Ranked, Below the Line

Council Strategic Priority: Yes
(At time of sponsorship) Accelerating Climate Action, the Active Transportation Plan and Vision Zero Plan

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

What precipitated this Study?

Current landscaping practices rely on technologies (e.g., motorized equipment such as leaf blowers) that may have adverse health, air and water quality impacts. The Sustainability Commission sponsored this Study Issue to encourage the use of more holistic landscaping practices, in order to eliminate the need for landscape equipment altogether.

This Study is relevant to the following City Policies:

- Climate Action Playbook Play 3.4: Decarbonize off-road equipment and vehicles;
- Climate Action Playbook Play 4.2: Ensure resilience of water supply; and
- General Plan, Chapter 7 Environmental Management, Goals EM-2: Water Conservation; EM-8.5 Prevent Accelerated Soil Erosion; and EM-11 Improved Air Quality

What are the key elements of the Study?

This Study would examine alternatives to traditional landscaping practices that would require less reliance on motorized landscape maintenance equipment. Factors that should be considered are landscaping equipment types, frequency of landscaping maintenance or service, and landscaping coverage types.

The City may collaborate at the regional level with other agencies to best deliver the following elements of the Study:

1. A list of best practices or comparisons of landscape maintenance strategies to be identified/developed. For example, what are the impacts of using mulching as a landscape practice versus using leaf blower equipment. This should include determinations for how frequency of service changes the impacts, which strategies require more or less staff time and resources, etc. One time and ongoing cost implications will be provided along with the comparison.
2. Identify any existing programs available to City residents which promote the adoption of the best practices identified in the Study.
3. Identify, evaluate next steps, and provide costs for the City to provide the following resources to promote the adoption of the best practices identified in this Study:
 - a. Incentives, such as sustainable landscaping certifications, gas-powered equipment trade-ins, price comparisons, rebates, etc.
 - b. An educational program/campaign to educate target audiences of the benefits of switching to the more sustainable strategies. This should include costs or savings, ecological impacts, pollution prevention benefits, etc. Target audience would include single family residential, multifamily dwellings, property owners, and landscape service providers.
4. Evaluate the existing Park Design Guidelines and Standard Details for revision to meet best practices identified in this Study.

Estimated years to complete study: 1 year

FISCAL IMPACT

Cost to Conduct Study

Level of staff effort required (opportunity cost):	Moderate
Funding Required for Non-Budgeted Costs:	\$100,000
Funding Source:	Will seek budget supplement

A budget supplement is requested to fund consultant support needed to conduct research on the key elements of this Study. Some resources on sustainable landscaping best practices specific to the Bay Area already exist and may be leveraged. For example, Alameda County’s “Bay-friendly Landscape Guidelines,” developed by the public agency StopWaste.org, recommends using landscaping practices that promote soil restoration, water conservation, energy conservation (including reduced reliance on motorized equipment), water and air quality, and less waste. Other such resources may exist.

Environmental Services Department (ESD), in collaboration with Department of Public Works (DPW) - Parks Division, will oversee the consultant’s work to ensure research is conducted in a manner that would benefit and inform current operations related to landscaping. For example, DPW would guide the consultant in selecting best practices for the comparative analysis in key element No. 1, with a view to include practices that could be implemented feasibly in Sunnyvale.

Cost to Implement Study Results

Unknown. The Study would include assessment of potential costs, including capital and operating, as well as revenue/savings.

Costs to implement would depend on the types of practices recommended by this Study. Costs may

be significant if a majority of current landscape maintenance practices are recommended to be changed.

EXPECTED CITY COUNCIL, BOARD OR COMMISSION PARTICIPATION

Council-Approved Work Plan: No

Council Study Session: No

Reviewed by Boards/Commissions: Sustainability Commission, Parks and Recreation Commission

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Defer. This policy issue merits discussion at a future 2025 Study Issues Workshop.

The Climate Action Playbook Update (CAP) and Game Plan 2028 include Play 3.4: Decarbonize off-road equipment and vehicles and Move 3.P: Create a phased ordinance by 2026 to ban local operation of gasoline and diesel-powered off-road equipment by type, including banning local operation of gasoline and diesel-powered small off-road equipment (SORE) by 2028, intended to reduce emissions and reliance on fossil fuel powered off-road equipment and vehicles. The addition of Play 3.4 and Move 3.P may assist the City in transitioning its operations to comply with AB 1346 regulations, which require small off-road engines (e.g., leaf blowers) to be zero-emission by 2024. The DPW Parks Division already implements several practices that are sustainable, including integrated pest management (IPM), water conservation, and use of native species. The ESD Regulatory Programs Division implements a landscape education series in partnership with the Bay Area Water Supply & Conservation Agency (BAWSCA) that informs residents of holistic maintenance practices and addresses a broad range of sustainable strategies for maintaining landscapes. The series does not address evaluating City operations for use of those practices.

In addition, ESD 17-01: Eliminating the Use of Pesticides on City Property and ESD 24-01: Evaluate the Use of Artificial Turf versus Living Groundcovers are two Study Issues underway that may indirectly address elements specified in this policy issue. These elements could include informing staff how existing practices can be expanded to incorporate air quality, noise, weed abatement, mulching practices and energy conservation considerations in City operations. Study Issue ESD 17-01 is anticipated to be complete in December 2025 and Study Issue ESD 24-01 is anticipated to be complete in June 2026. Finalizing the Study Issues ESD 17-01 and ESD 24-01 along with implementing Play 3.4 and Move 3.P in the CAP Game Plan 2028 could provide evidence that would suggest no further elements in ESD 22-02 need to be studied or that the scope and fiscal impact of ESD 22-02 can be significantly reduced.

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