

## **6.13 LANDSCAPE AND GROUNDS MANAGEMENT**

### **6.13.1 Purpose**

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that City landscapes are designed, constructed, and maintained in a manner that protects and enhances our region's natural resources and public health; that City landscapes are models of environmental stewardship in the eyes of the public; that the City establishes a leadership role in developing both aesthetically pleasing and ecologically sensitive landscapes; and that there is a consistent standard of environmental stewardship observed by City departments managing landscapes and other grounds.

### **6.13.2 Organizations Affected**

All City departments responsible for managing construction projects or managing City-owned grounds and landscapes are affected.

### **6.13.3 Definitions**

Integrated Pest Management: A pest management process that uses monitoring to determine pest injury levels and combines biological, cultural, physical, and chemical tools to minimize health, environmental and financial risks. The method uses the least toxic synthetic pesticides only as a last resort to controlling pests.

Sustainable Design, Construction, and Maintenance: Principles, materials, and techniques that conserve natural resources and improve environmental quality throughout the life cycle of the landscape and its surrounding environment.

Landscapes: Grounds that are actively managed such as parks, library lawns, right-of-ways, in-town watersheds, etc., but not large tracts of forest land like the Cedar River Watershed.

Water Budget: A set of month-by-month estimates of irrigation water use for a specific landscape taking into account plant material, soil type, type of irrigation system, and average weather conditions. The annual budget is the sum of all the monthly budgets.

Evapotranspiration (ET): The sum of the water lost from the soil surface and water use by plants.

### **6.13.4 Policy**

In planning, siting, designing, constructing, and maintaining grounds and landscapes owned and managed by the City, site objectives shall include management and maintenance practices that protect and enhance natural ecosystems. City grounds designers, planners, managers, crews, and their contractors shall give priority to:

- A. Maximizing water use efficiency (see Energy and Water Conservation Policy);

- B. Practicing the principles of Integrated Pest Management including the reduced use of pesticides (see also Chemical Use Policy);
- C. Reducing and reusing landscape waste materials through practices such as mulch mowing, mulching and composting;
- D. Selecting and using fertilizers that minimize negative impacts on soil organisms and aquatic environments;
- E. Designing new and renovating existing landscaped areas to suit the site conditions and with sustainable maintenance in mind. For example:
  - Using proper soil preparation and amendment;
  - Specifying weed-free soil amendments;
  - Using mulches to control weeds, conserve water, and build healthy, biotically diverse soils;
  - Using site adapted and pest resistant plants: “the right plant for the right place”;
  - Grouping together plants with similar horticultural needs;
  - Retaining and using regionally native plant material where appropriate;
  - Controlling noxious weeds and invasive, non-native, plant species;
  - Planting for erosion and weed control;
  - Assessing whether landscapes can still meet the intended site use objectives while modifying the aesthetic standard and/or applying less maintenance; and
  - Matching maintenance standards to site objectives in the design stage.
- F. Restoring, creating, and protecting environmentally valuable areas such as wetlands and riparian, aquatic, wildlife, forest, and meadow habitats. Protection shall include avoiding developing these areas whenever feasible.
- G. Increasing the City’s tree canopy. Trees contribute numerous environmental benefits including reducing the build-up of atmospheric carbon dioxide; absorbing atmospheric pollutants; and slowing the rate of precipitation which allows increased infiltration and reduced run-off, slope stabilization, and wildlife habitat.
  - City departments responsible for open space and public rights of way shall give priority to:
    - (a) Significantly increasing the number of trees in rights of way and open spaces;
    - (b) Replanting in parks and open spaces where trees are mature and nearing the end of their life cycle;
    - (c) Working with community and neighborhood interest groups to involve them in planting and maintaining the urban forest.
      - City departments managing construction projects shall give priority to incorporating into the construction design any existing, healthy, mature trees on the building site or, alternatively, to moving such trees.

### **6.13.5 Procedures and Responsibilities**

City departments responsible for managing landscaped areas shall provide training to grounds management and maintenance staff. The purpose of the training is to acquaint staff with this policy and to keep staff current with best landscape-management practices and technologies.

City departments responsible for managing landscaped areas shall prepare water shortage contingency plans for water shortage events such as droughts.

City departments shall implement procedures that ensure that contractors and vendors are knowledgeable about and comply with this policy.

In making landscaping staffing and budget decisions, departments shall consider the potential environmental tradeoffs; for example, will reduced staffing require increased use of pesticides to maintain the landscape at the same standard?

An interdepartmental Grounds Management Committee shall meet regularly to coordinate activities, share resources, plan training, exchange information, set goals, evaluate progress, and periodically review this policy and update it as necessary.

Designs for new or renovated landscapes shall include maintenance plans, which shall conform to the requirements of this policy. Pesticides shall be selected using the guidelines provided in the Chemical Use Policy. City departments responsible for grounds management shall establish a water budget for all irrigated landscapes larger than 0.5 acres that are not controlled by ET based systems.

Landscape design, installation, or maintenance contracts shall require contractors and vendors to comply with this policy.

Department heads shall be responsible for:

- Ensuring that departmental procedures, budget, and staffing decisions support implementation of this policy;
- Providing training to grounds management staff in the requirements of this policy; and
- Appointing a staff person to the Grounds Management Committee to represent the department on matters related to this policy.

The Office of Environmental Management (OEM) shall be responsible for:

- Providing staff support to the Grounds Management Committee; and
- Facilitating interdepartmental resource sharing.

### **6.13.6 References**

- City of Seattle, *Landscape and Grounds Management Guidelines: Environmental Stewardship* (1999).
- Related Policies: Energy and Water Conservation Policy and Chemical Use Policy.