



Published September 14th, 2022

Planning Commission recommends water conservation ordinance

By Jennifer Wake

The Lafayette Planning Commission at its Sept. 6 meeting discussed a city-initiated amendment to the Lafayette Municipal Code adding a new chapter titled "Water Efficient Landscaping" to implement the state mandate requiring local jurisdictions to implement water efficient landscape design and irrigation practices. According to the staff report presented by Assistant Planner Joshua Muller, the Model Water Efficient Landscape Ordinance (MWELo) is a state regulation designed to prevent water from being wasted on irrigated landscapes. "The law is important because about half of the water directed to urban areas is used on irrigated landscapes," Muller noted in the staff report. "The MWELo was created in 1993 from the 1990 Water Conservation and Landscaping Act and was updated in 2015 at the height of the drought. Additionally, Article 8 of SB 1383 requires MWELo compliance as related to compost and mulching." In 2015, the State of California adopted Executive Order B-29-15 which tasked the Department of Water Resources to update the MWELo regulations to increase water efficiency standards for new and existing landscapes through irrigation systems, graywater usage, onsite storm water capture, and by limiting the portion of landscapes that can be covered in turf, according to the report.

Projects are triggered for MWELo when they have 500 square-feet of new building with a landscape or new landscaping that did not exist before or 2,500 square-feet of rehabilitated landscaping. "Landscaping" is considered planting areas, turf areas, and water features (pools, spas, ponds, waterfalls, fountains, lakes, and artificial streams).

In a video presentation to the Planning Commission, Muller outlined the purpose of the ordinance, which would help to create hydrozones that include plants with similar characteristics such as water requirements, rooting depth, and climate suitability and would also address proper irrigation methods to increase water efficiency.

"We won't make people rip out their lawns," Planning Director Greg Wolff said of the new requirements at the meeting. "This is the trigger of the California building code ordinance, so Lafayette is coming on board to state law."

While the ordinance states it would go into effect 30 days after the City Council approval, Wolff noted that any enforcement of the ordinance would likely not begin until after the first of the year.

The Planning Commission unanimously voted to adopt Resolution 2022-14 recommending the City Council adopt an ordinance amending Title 6 of Planning and Land Use, establishing a new Water Efficient Landscaping chapter consistent with the requirements outlined in the California building code. Commissioner Gary Huisingsh was absent.

Reach the reporter at: jennifer@lamorindaweekly.com

[back](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA