



Memorandum

TO: PARKS AND RECREATION
COMMISSION

FROM: Steve Hammack

SUBJECT: Turf Conversion Policy

DATE: May 19, 2015

Approved

Date

RECOMMENDATION

Approve the attached policy for turf conversion at Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services (PRNS) operated properties. This will provide a framework for PRNS staff to reduce the amount of irrigated turf in our park system while continuing to provide opportunity for public comment.

BACKGROUND

Reducing the amount of turf area in our parks that are irrigated with potable water will directly benefit the residents of the city. In some locations, turf may be replaced with drought-resistant native landscaping, while in other locations turf may be removed and replaced with other park features such as tree canopy, playgrounds, picnic areas, or other low water use activities.

PRNS staff developed the attached Turf Conversion Policy to provide a framework for deciding which areas within a specific park may be converted, and which materials may be installed in place of the grass. Prior to developing the policy, members of the public had expressed concerns regarding site selection and proposed material replacement.

The attached policy has been developed with the guidance and input of a community group consisting of invited representatives from each Council District. Two meetings of the advisory group were held to review this policy and discuss the concepts employed.

ANALYSIS

The attached policy is intended to strike a balance between the desire of PRNS to reduce potable water use from irrigation while beautifying and diversifying our park landscapes, and the public's desire to have input into the amenities in their local parks. Through this policy PRNS is seeking to provide opportunity for public input in a manner that allows Parks Division Staff to implement the relatively minor park improvements required for turf conversion quickly and efficiently. We believe the attached policy strikes this balance.

EVALUATION AND FOLLOW-UP

This policy includes metrics for evaluating the effectiveness of the program. In addition to the metrics outlined, PRNS anticipates submitting a report to PRC on an annual basis, describing the work completed, and its effectiveness at meeting the program goals.



STEVE HAMMACK
Deputy Director of Parks,
Recreation and Neighborhood Services

For questions, please contact Nicolle Burnham, Parks Manager, at (408)793-4197.

Attachment: Policy for Turf Conversion

City of San José
Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services Department
Policy for Turf Conversion

“Building Community Through Water Conservation”

Purpose

To assist long term water conservation efforts by reducing the use of water-intensive turf grass in those areas within the City of San José park system that are not actively used.

Background

Current drought conditions aside, annual rainfall in the San José area varies widely from year to year. While some years flood conditions occur, historic data indicates that annual rainfall is decreasing. This suggests that potable water will continue to be a precious resource even after the drought ends, and that a movement toward low-maintenance, drought-tolerant landscaping will provide a long-term, sustainable option for the design of our parks and open spaces.

Keeping turf healthy and vital in parks requires one inch of water per week during the irrigation season. One inch per week equates to about 27,000 gallons of water per acre. Comparing that to a smaller scale, a 20' x 50' area (1,000 square feet) requires approximately 620 gallons of water per week for turf irrigation. As a comparison, a four-person household using an average of 60 gallons per person per day¹ consumes approximately 1,680 gallons of water per week.

Reducing the amount of turf area in our parks that are irrigated with potable water will directly benefit the residents of the city. The installation of low-maintenance, drought-tolerant landscaping will provide diversity in our park system, and start the city on a path toward sustainable landscaping, including maintenance and ongoing preservation of our urban forests. Drought-resistant landscaping requires little to no water once plants have been established, but may require additional maintenance hours. In some areas, turf may be removed and replaced by other park features, such as: tree canopy, playgrounds, picnic areas, or other low water use activities.

Throughout this program the Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services (PRNS) Department may partner with neighborhood and community groups, San Jose Conservation Corps and Our City Forest, among others.

¹ California Water Boards, Media Release, April 7, 2015 cites statewide per capita use for February 2015 at 76.7 gallons per day and San Francisco hydrologic region at 57.9 gallons per day. For discussion purposes, we used the rounded 60 gallons per person per day.

Program Outline

This section outlines the strategies and processes by which sites will be selected for turf reduction, including conversion methods, public information, outreach and transparency.

Site Selection

Sites may be considered for conversion if they meet the following criteria:

1. Turf irrigation occurs via potable water. Parks and other facilities served by recycled water will not be considered for turf conversion. Attachment A lists of the PRNS facilities currently served by recycled water;
2. Turf areas is located in areas not frequently used. Areas can be in any park location and do not need to be located along walkways or mow bands, etc. Each site will be considered independently. Figures 1, 2 and 3 illustrate examples of how park locations may be considered; and
3. Input will be sought for each location as described below in the community outreach section.



Figure 1. Site Analysis for Turf Conversion. Example 1. Community Center Site

Note: Site is not located in San Jose.

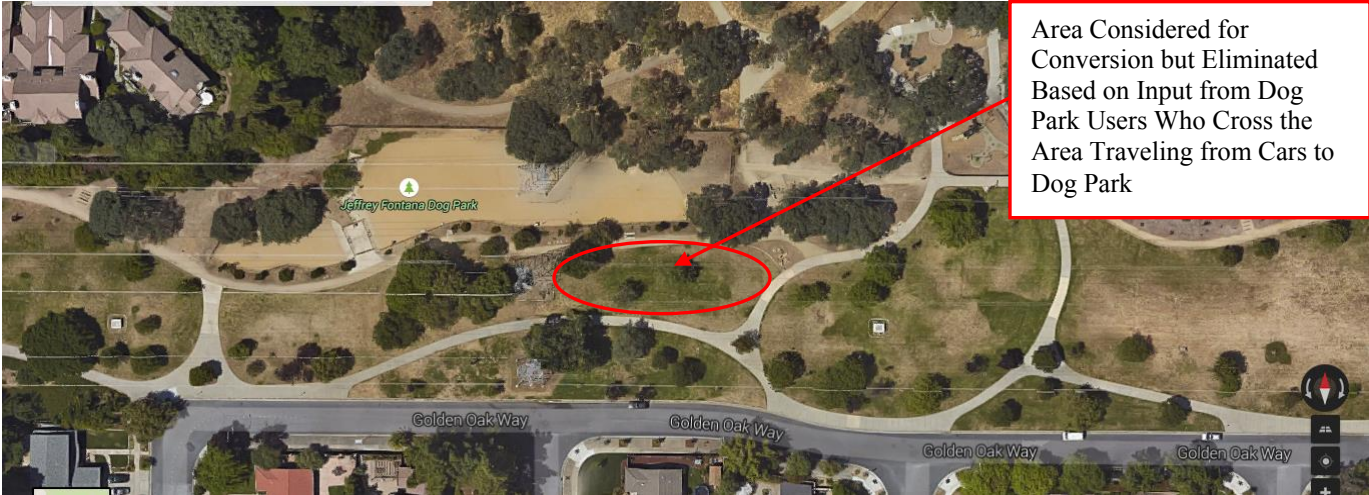


Figure 2. Jeffrey Fontana Park Turf Conversion Analysis Example



Figure 3. Jeffrey Fontana Park East End Turf Conversion Example. Conversion Completed March 7, 2015

Conversion Methods

Planting selection, hardscape, or other improvements will be determined on a site by site basis, to provide individual consideration of the unique characteristics of each park. Examples of potential post-conversion uses include:

- Low maintenance drought tolerant (with a preference toward native) landscaping with irrigation as required to support the proposed plantings and reduce maintenance. PRNS will develop a list of approved landscape materials for use in conversion projects. These will be taken from the Santa Clara Valley Water District (SCVWD) list of approved plantings, but refined to reflect materials that are suitable for use in a public park as determined by grow height, spread, and maintenance requirements;
- Mulch would be used as a complement to, not in place of, plantings. Placement will be performed to reduce evaporative losses from the soil and completed with respect to existing habitat;
- Decomposed granite or concrete surfaces. This might include installation of new picnic areas, benches, placement of new locations for bike racks, etc.;
- Decorative stone or rock; and
- Strategies to protect the landscaping such as walkways, fencing, signage, etc.

For each location selected by staff and/or the community, PRNS will develop a sketch showing the area where turf may be removed, and the proposed replacement material or materials. Some locations may include a combination of materials to create an aesthetically pleasing park area suitable for public enjoyment. Sketch plans will include:

- Proposed plantings and / materials. Materials will be selected from the list developed by PRNS as discussed above;
- Irrigation system modifications (if any are necessary). Where necessary, existing irrigation heads will be capped or modified to reduce water use. The final irrigation scheme will depend on the proposed park improvement plan selected. For example, in locations that will be converted to picnic areas the irrigation heads will be capped; in locations where natives will be planted some heads may be capped and others converted to a modern high-efficiency low flow fixtures. In areas where irrigation must be maintained to support new planting, irrigation timers will be upgraded to “smart meters” to improve the operational efficiency of the system; and
- Construction fencing and access locations. This will allow the public to see the temporary impact to the park areas based on the proposed construction work.

If public comments are received per the policy outlined below, PRNS staff will review the comments and respond. Where the public has expressed interest in assisting with plant selection PRNS staff will work with them to develop a satisfactory planting plan.

Public Information, Outreach and Transparency

At the outset of program, PRNS will post a work plan on the PRNS public website in a location dedicated to drought policy. The work plan will document the locations being considered for turf conversion. This will provide the public and City Council offices an early opportunity to consider the location and potential uses for the locations. The work plan will be updated periodically as the program evolves.

Prior to starting work on a conversion project, PRNS will post details of each project location as follows:

- On the PRNS web site. Posting to the web site will be made as soon as the sketch plan is developed for any given location and will include contact information for providing comments;
- Council office specific to the park where work is proposed. The sketch plan will be sent to the Council Office no later than 30 days prior to the start of work;
- Community groups (if any) that are active within the park under consideration; and
- At the project site. Notice will be posted at the park no less than 30 days prior to commencement of work. Notices will identify the park as a turf conversion location and provide the following information:
 - ✓ Project Description
 - ✓ Project Address or Location
 - ✓ Council District
 - ✓ PRNS Contact Information
 - ✓ Statement that more information is available by visiting the PRNS Web Site or via the Contact Information
 - ✓ Statement that information in Spanish and Vietnamese can be obtained by contacting the Department at a name and number to be provided.
 - ✓ The City of San José logo

Notices will be either 11" x 17," or 24" x 36" in accordance with the City's Planning Department sign policies. The size of the signs and the number placed in the park will be determined based on the size of the park. The following general guidelines will be considered for sign placement:

- ✓ Notices shall be placed within 10 feet of pedestrian and vehicular access points to the park
- ✓ Notices should not be placed more than 6 feet or less than 4 feet above grade, as measured from the top edge of the notice
- ✓ Where an existing building or fence is within 10 feet of a street lot line or pedestrian access point, on-site notices can be securely attached to the side of the building or fence
- ✓ Damaged or vandalized signs will be replaced once during the 30 day posting period

Comments received as a result of these public outreach efforts will be reviewed and considered. If plan modifications are made based on comments, the plan will be reposted on the website and re-distributed to the appropriate community groups.

Measurement of Success

The success of this program at achieving the goal of water reduction will be evaluated periodically and reported to the Parks and Recreation Commission. The following will be considered when evaluating success:

- Percentage of water reduction in parks where conversion has occurred over a baseline of 2013. This will be considered on a park by park basis;
- Post implementation reporting on lessons learned. Reporting will include an evaluation of obstacles encountered, solutions developed and considerations for future projects; and
- The level of public participation based on comments and feedback received during project development as well as following construction.