

Recommendations to Green Infrastructure Working Group Summary

August 24, 2015

ASLA-CTX supports the results of work sessions by the City of Austin Green Infrastructure Working Group (GIWG) on Land Cover and Natural Function, Integrate Nature into the City, Beneficial Use of Stormwater, and Stormwater Options for Redevelopment and Infill. We strongly advocate for these results to be included in the land development code rewrite and not serve simply as guidelines for greenfield development and infill redevelopment. We support testing of an interim draft code on actual sites to determine effectiveness in achieving green infrastructure goals and intents.

We would like to offer the following specific green infrastructure recommendations to the land development code rewrite:

Land Cover and Natural Function

- Create incentives for the use of Green Infrastructure in all contexts, including remodels.
- Establish performance benchmarks of ecological function as a basis for evaluating projects seeking green infrastructure incentives.
- Institute a Conceptual Site Plan submittal prior to the Completeness Check that shows a stormwater/green infrastructure and preservation of natural assets approach to site layout. Include the participation of Landscape Architects in the submittal requirement.
- Maintain or increase the existing 5% Private Open Space ordinance in Commercial and Multifamily and extend this requirement into new 'Transition Zones' that are planned for redevelopment or up-zoning. On-site private open space is critical to preserving pervious cover and existing tree canopy and to prevent downstream flooding.
- Require parkland dedication on-site, especially in areas of the city that are identified in the Parks Master Plan as deficient in open space and parks.
- Require the presence of public open space within a ¼ mile radius of proposed higher density districts and corridors. Acquire private land to convert to public open space such as neighborhood parks and pocket parks.
- Ensure that site specific environmental considerations are included in determining impervious cover limits.
- Establish a minimum of 30% pervious area in all required open space. Provide a nuanced code that recognizes the shallower soils in Western Travis County and the deeper soils in Eastern Travis County. Require a minimum soil depth (using existing or existing plus imported soil) in pervious areas to retain on-site stormwater.
- Create an open space network that provides connectivity for pedestrians and wildlife.
- Incentivize the restoration of floodplains, waterways, and urban forests.

Integrate Nature into the City

- Ensure that sites in all land use zones have a significant percentage of on-site green elements. Integrate Dr. Frances Kuo's research on the health benefits of green elements into the 'intent language' of the new code.
- Institute a similar program to the Green Area Ratio of Washington, D.C. or the Seattle Green Factor landscape approach for all infill and redevelopment sites. Extend into the new 'Transition Zones' with missing middle housing. (A green factor infill landscape approach incentivizes such items as protection of existing trees, increased soil depth, green

Integrate Nature into the City (continued)

- walls and green roofs.) Provide credit for documented on-site life cycle implementation and maintenance plans.
- Provide ecologically functional landscape transitions in the Compatibility Setback. (See ASLA's Green Compatibility proposal.)
- Establish "Green Streets" standards and specifications for all right-of-way (ROW) construction and graphically illustrate these principles in the code update.
- Modify the Sub-chapter E Ordinance to set back buildings from the property line, thereby allowing for green landscape on both sides of a sidewalk and increasing pedestrian comfort.
- Preserve and enhance the Urban Forest. Include Urban Heat Island mitigation and the goal of 40% tree canopy citywide in the 'intent language' of the new code.
- Maintain the Heritage Tree Ordinance & Tree Preservation/Mitigation Rules.
- Change the caliper size of protected trees to 8" or more. Establish a new size of protected 'understory' trees that have a caliper size of 4" or more. Establish tree soil volume requirements. Extend tree ordinances into the new 'Transition Zones' that are up-zoned or planned for redevelopment/infill.
- Prior to paying fee-in-lieu for tree mitigation, incentivize tree transplanting or tree mitigation with attendant automatic irrigation to nearby dedicated open spaces.
- In parking lot medians, require new trees be planted at a minimum of 30' on-center in order to offset heat gain.

Beneficial Use of Stormwater

- Require that post-development hydrology on all new (greenfield) development match pre-development hydrologic conditions through the use of uniformly distributed decentralized micro-scale controls that are associated with Low Impact Development (LID) techniques, such as rainwater harvesting and rain gardens.
- Incentivize permeable pavements for sidewalks, non-vehicular paved areas, and parking bays.
- Require water quality controls for all development in which the total disturbed area exceeds 5,000 square feet rather than the current requirement of controls for development that has 8,000 sq ft. of impervious cover.
- Require or incentivize water quality controls (i.e., green storm water quality infrastructure) that are better at removing nutrients (nitrogen and phosphorus) in comparison to conventional stormwater controls, such as sand filters.
- Require that a Homeowners Association (HOA) be created for all new developments that include micro-scale residential water quality controls (e.g., rain gardens) and require that the HOA assumes responsibility for the maintenance of such controls.
- Reduce the use of potable water for irrigation on commercial projects by 50% by implementing water conservation practices and stormwater capture and reuse. (We suggest the baseline procedure for irrigation reduction described in SITES v2.)
- Work toward goal of potable water budgets. Research and define an appropriate baseline for Central Texas and develop a reasonable time-line for implementation. Coordinate with implementation of reclaimed water lines. Coordinate with new codes that support use of rainwater harvesting, HVAC condensate, and gray water. Include the landscape and irrigation industry as key stakeholders in the process.
- Incentivize efficient irrigation through the use of smart controllers, computer tracking programs, soil moisture sensors, drip irrigation, and mulch.

Stormwater Options for Redevelopment and Infill

- Require that redevelopment projects mitigate their share of downstream flooding.
- Require that any development provide a visual impact watershed creek survey and propose on-site or off-site mitigation commensurate with development impact.
- Require mitigation of any increase in impervious cover from the current land development code.
- Tie any proposed increase in land use density to adequacy of infrastructure capacity. If a watershed has been determined to be at capacity by the Watershed Protection Department, then require that any new development in that watershed detain all stormwater. Do not allow fee in lieu, waivers or variances.