

DRAFT FOR ECC DISCUSSION

CONSENT CALENDAR

Month day, 2023

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council
From: Environment and Climate Commission
Subject: Expanding the Commitment to Protecting [Pollinators and Establishing Habitat](#)

RECOMMENDATION

Adopt five referrals that will further deepen Berkeley's commitment to protecting pollinator plants and establishing habitats that will protect pollinators and our environment.

Placeholder to update after sections confirmed

- 1. Refer to the Planning Commission to expand zoning requirements for open space and landscaped areas to include native plants.*
- 2. Refer to the Planning Commission to expand zoning requirements to require pervious surface areas.*
- 3. Refer to the City Manager an Update to Standard Details (Specifications) by the Parks, Recreation and Waterfront, Urban Forestry Staff.*
- 4. Refer to the City Manager consideration of Native Tree*
- 5. Refer to the City Manager to transition areas of the City's medians, non-active-use areas within parks, and other city managed landscape to non-turf green infrastructure, including pollinator gardens when appropriate.*

BACKGROUND

Native plants and pollinator habitats are a crucial, and visible, element of Berkeley's commitment to environmental and climate action. Native plants^[1], or plants that live in the region that they evolved in, promote a biodiversity of food and habitat for wildlife that are facing alarming declines, particularly insects and birds. Crucially, native plants are low-maintenance; this reduces the noise and emissions of landscape equipment mowers, the expense of regular upkeep, and water use. Native plants integrated into the city serve as a positive visual reminder that Berkeley is prioritizing resilience and addressing climate change rather than ignoring it. The Referrals listed here will create and/improve habitats.

The creation of pollinator habitat will provide multiple benefits towards resilience – decrease the urban heat island and improve shade equity across Berkeley through planting as well as the removal of concrete, decrease urban run-off and impacts to the storm drainage systems through increased pervious surfaces, and reduction in water use (and the associated energy use) since

native species generally do not require watering once established. Multi-benefit projects allow the city to meet multiple goals and pursue a range of grants and teaming partners.

Over the past few years, Berkeley has successfully implemented several programs, including those listed below, that have increased native plants and/or habitats.

- Adopt a Traffic Circle. Coordinated by the Public Works Department, volunteers maintain the planted area inside traffic circles to ensure they are clean, attractive, and do not interfere with visibility for cars. A curated list of native plants has been developed for volunteers interested in plants that provide habitat for insects and birds.
- Native Plant Pollinator Gardens. The Parks, Recreation and Waterfront Department has partnered with Transition Berkeley to create and maintain pollinator gardens in multiple city parks.
- Trees Make Life Better Program. Residents in South and West Berkeley have been able to request a tree through the Trees Make Life Better Program. This grant-funded program is planting 1,000–1,800 trees in areas of Berkeley that have fewer trees than the rest of the City.

On April 12, 2022, the City Council adopted Resolution No. 70,301-N.S., requiring Native & Drought Resistant Plants in all City Landscaping (Attachment [___](#)). The guidelines highlight the important role of native plants and pollinators and require these plants in the landscaping of City property where possible.

Update Municipal Code to Incorporate Native Plants

Env. and Climate Commission: Please note that this section is now simply for your information. In response to direction received at an earlier commission meeting, the subcommittee is currently handling this thought through other channels. In this instance, a letter was submitted and comment was made by an individual at the Planning Commission during public comment, non-agenda items.

Title 23 of the Municipal Code consists of the City's existing Zoning Ordinance, which includes requirements for open space, usable open space, public open space and landscaped areas. These requirements and associated definitions should be reviewed for opportunities to require native plants. An example is included below:

32.304.090 Useable Open Space

B. Standards...

7. Landscaping

- (a) At least 40 percent of the total required usable open space area, exclusive of balconies above the ground floor, shall be landscaped. All landscaping shall consist of native plants as identified by the California Native Plant Society for the City of Berkeley (<https://calscape.org/>)

(b) A landscaped area may not include off-street parking spaces, driveways, paved walkways and paths, patios and other surfaces covered by concrete or asphalt.

(c) For multiple dwelling uses, required landscaped areas shall incorporate automatic irrigation and drainage facilities adequate to assure healthy growing conditions for plants.

C. Other Open Space Areas. Areas of the lot which do not qualify as usable open space and which are not designated as driveways, off-street parking spaces or required walkways, shall be retained as landscaped areas. All landscaping shall consist of native plants as identified by the California Native Plant Society for the City of Berkeley (<https://calscape.org/>)

Update Municipal Code to Address Pervious Surfaces and Increase Available Planting Areas

Env. and Climate Commission to review and discuss. This element is anticipated to be a formal referral.

The City's existing Zoning Ordinance does not include a requirement for pervious areas. Increasing pervious surfaces would increase available planting areas, could also reduce the urban heat island effect, and could reduce stormwater runoff.

Lot coverage is defined Berkeley Municipal Code Section 23.106.020:

- A. Lot Coverage Defined. Lot coverage means all the area of a lot, as projected on a horizontal plane, which is:
1. Enclosed by the exterior walls of buildings or enclosed accessory structures;
or
 2. Covered by decks, porches, stairs and/or landings which cover an enclosed space or paved ground area.

Lot coverage should be refined to include a requirement for pervious areas.

Water Efficient Landscaping Requirements, Update the Bay Friendly Checklist

Env. and Climate Commission: Please note that this section is now simply for your information. Via this meeting, this suggestion is being conveyed to the Office of Energy and Sustainable Development staff at this meeting.

The City is subject to the California Water Efficient Landscaping Ordinance (WELO) and the associated EastBayMUD water conservation regulations. In conjunction with those requirements, the City currently utilizes a Bay Friendly checklist form created by Stopwaste in December 2011. The Bay-Friendly Landscaping program is now supported by ReScape California. While both include elements related to reducing waste, nurturing the soil, and saving water, ReScape has stronger language related to local awareness and habitat, and includes

carbon sequester, energy conservation and protection of water and air. Consistent with updated regulations and City Council policies, we request that staff update any associated landscape checklists to include native plants.

Require Native Plants in Standard Details (Specifications) for Projects Implemented by Public Works and Parks, Recreation and Waterfront Divisions

Env. and Climate Commission: Please note that this section is now simply for your information. In response to direction received at an earlier meeting, the subcommittee is currently handling this through other channels, anticipating making a statement during public comment, non-agenda item, at the Park, Recreation and Waterfront and Transportation and Infrastructure Commissions.

Similar to requirements and definitions in the Municipal Code described above, native plants should be specifically required in the Standard Specifications for projects implemented by Public Works and Parks, Recreation and Waterfront Divisions. Based on the Standard Details posted on the City's website, the only planting specification (sidewalk planting) relates to street trees and notes the specific tree species shall be approved by the Forestry Unit.

<https://berkeleyca.gov/sites/default/files/documents/Berkeley-Standard-Details.pdf>

Given the excellent work planting native plants along University Avenue west of the I-80 frontage road, along with the City Council Resolution, there should be language for city staff to work from.

Update Tree Planting Standards

Env. and Climate Commission to review and discuss. This element is anticipated to be a formal referral.

The Urban Forestry staff determines the location and species of any trees to be planted in the City right-of-way. As noted in the Tree Planting FAQs, this is informed by the Tree Planting Location Standards.

From the Tree Planting FAQs ([Tree-Planting-FAQs.pdf \(berkeleyca.gov\)](#))

Urban Forestry staff will inspect the property to determine if the site is suitable for having a street tree based on our Tree Planting Location Standards. For most residential properties, only one tree will be planted. When determining a planting location, many factors are taken into consideration including: underground utilities (gas, water, sewer and communication lines), utility poles, street lights, overhead service lines, driveway approaches, fire hydrants, stop signs and other street signs, proximity to intersections and the mature size of the selected tree species. Spacing between trees will be determined by the mature size of the species selected and location of existing trees.

Our research indicates that the majority of street trees planted in Berkeley are non-natives. We understand site constraints, and request that staff broaden street plantings to include native shrubs or gardens where native trees are not possible.

[1] Native Plants as described by The Conservation Foundation: The textbook definition of native plants is they are the plants that have been growing in area prior to European settlement. Another way to define native plants is: Native plants evolved or adapted to our local environment for thousands of years, and are an important part of our local habitats, ecosystems and ecosystem services (pollination, infiltration, carbon sequestration, etc.) They are the most sustainable plants for our specific area. Our native plants not only adapted physically ,but chemically and genetically.

<https://www.theconservationfoundation.org/native-plants-101-what-is-a-native-plant/> accessed 09/07/2023