



CONSENT CALENDAR

xx/xx/2021

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

From: Councilmember Terry Taplin

Subject: Native and Drought Resistant Plants and Landscaping Ordinance Referral

RECOMMENDATION

Refer to the City Manager **and the Parks Commission** the development of an ordinance amending the Berkeley Municipal Code to require that:

1. Plant materials (1) native to Berkeley and Northern California and (2) resistant to drought conditions shall be used exclusively in designing, planting, maintaining, and managing the landscape features of all City roadsides, parks, public areas, and other City properties and facilities.
2. **Plants friendly to pollinators be given preference for use in all City landscaping projects.**

BACKGROUND

As of the summer of 2021, the City of Berkeley and most of California are facing exceptional drought conditions.¹ The region's drought conditions have varied annually in the past decade, but the projections for our future under climate change are clear: California's drought will be as much as triple in severity by 2050.² Drought conditions have escalated so radically that the East Bay Municipal Utility District asked residents to cut back on their water consumption.³ The City must plan for a future in which it operates successfully with significantly reduced water use and should begin using water more efficiently as soon as possible.

To plan for a long-term urban infrastructure that consumes water in a manner that reflects the drought conditions that we are certain to face in the next century, Berkeley can pursue a policy of only using native and drought-resistant plant materials in all City landscaping and public areas. While a relatively less significant consumer of water than residential and commercial buildings, the opportunity to save water by switching all City landscaping to native and drought resistant plants is immense. In addition to requiring

¹ <https://www.drought.gov/states/california/county/Alameda>

² <https://statesatrisk.org/california/all>

³ <https://www.berkeleyside.org/2021/04/27/east-bay-area-water-officials-declare-drought-ask-residents-to-conserve-water>

less watering, native plant landscaping has been shown to have higher infiltration rates of water runoff, taking in water that would otherwise be discharged into sewers and filtering toxic materials before they reach the waterfront. Native plants also provide critical food and habitat for local birds and pollinators.⁴ **While the use of native plants would already be helpful for supporting pollinators, special consideration should also be given to the most pollinator-friendly plants. Supporting pollinators has shown to result in stronger local biodiversity.**⁵ Furthermore, native plants that are already adapted to our local environment are more resistant to extreme weather and often do not require pesticide and fertilizer use.⁶

Various cities and counties throughout the country have pursued similar measures to implement native, drought resistant landscaping mandates that Berkeley can learn from in its own approach. These cities and counties include Westchester County, New York, Eugene, Oregon, and Chicago, Illinois.⁷ While Berkeley can learn from similar efforts elsewhere, each native plant ordinance is inherently different between each location with different local ecosystems. City staff will have to identify the native plants that are most practical and suitable for wide-scale use throughout the City and set planting policy accordingly.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY AND CLIMATE IMPACTS

Increased use of native, drought resistant, **and pollinator-friendly** plants on City property will make major strides towards increased urban biodiversity, reduced water usage in the maintenance of public lands, and increased resiliency of plantings on City property to extreme weather conditions.⁸

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Staff time and cost differences related to the exclusive use of native and drought-resistant plantings in City landscaping work. Increased use of native and drought resistant plants may lead to reduced landscaping maintenance work related to a reduced need for pesticides, fertilizers, and extra watering that non-native plants often require.⁹

CONTACT

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ATTACHMENTS

1. Resolution
2. Westchester County Ordinance
3. Easy to Grow East Bay Native Plant List
4. California Pollinator Plants

⁴ <https://law.pace.edu/sites/default/files/Team%20%233%20Brief.pdf>

⁵ https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detailfull/national/plantsanimals/pollinate/?cid=NRCS143_022326

⁶ <https://perma.cc/FK54-B7L7>

⁷ <https://law.pace.edu/sites/default/files/Team%20%233%20Brief.pdf>

⁸ <https://sustainablecitycode.org/brief/require-use-of-native-plants/>

⁹ <https://sustainablecitycode.org/brief/require-use-of-native-plants/>

RESOLUTION NO. ##,###-N.S.

REQUIRING NATIVE & DROUGHT RESISTANT PLANTS IN ALL CITY
LANDSCAPING

WHEREAS, the City of Berkeley and the State of California are facing historic drought conditions that are projected to worsen over the course of the next half century or more, and

WHEREAS, the City of Berkeley must adapt its operations to future climate conditions characterized by excessive dryness, extreme weather, and declining populations of pollinators and other local wildlife, and

WHEREAS, the exclusive use of native plants in City landscaping offers an opportunity for less water-intensive landscaping throughout Berkeley, and

WHEREAS, native plants intake and filter toxic water runoff more easily than non-native landscaping, and

WHEREAS, native plants provide critical food and habitat for native animals and pollinators that are at risk under future climate conditions, and

WHEREAS, pollinator-friendly plants provide a natural boost to local biodiversity, and

WHEREAS, the costs of native plant landscaping may reduce overall landscaping costs due to a decreased need for pesticides and fertilizers,

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the City Council of the City of Berkeley refers the City Manager and the Parks Commission to draft an ordinance requiring that:

1. Plant materials native to Berkeley and Northern California and resistant to drought conditions be used exclusively in designing, planting, maintaining, and managing the landscape features of all City roadsides, parks, public areas, and other City properties and facilities.
2. The selection process for native and drought resistant plants in City landscaping projects give preference to pollinator plants.
3. Contracts with the City of Berkeley involving landscaping and/or plantings shall, when appropriate, require the use of native and drought resistant plant materials.