



Memorandum

To: Chair and Members of the Land Use Commission

From: Meagan Jones, Neighborhood and Land Use Planner, Melissa Klotz, Zoning Administrator, Sam Hubbard, Senior Planner, and Liz Williams, Planning Manager

Subject: Discussion on Envision Evanston 2045 Referrals:
Landscaping and Green Space

Date: October 11, 2024

Background

On July 25, 2024, several referrals related to Envision Evanston 2045 were made by the City Council based on observations made during the early phases of community engagement. These referrals represent a set of City Council policy directives and will be incorporated into the draft Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Code due for release this fall. On October 16, 2024, City staff will facilitate a discussion with the Land Use Commission to help inform the draft Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Code related to landscaping and greenspace. The specific referral from the City Council states, "Include landscape standards in the zoning code to increase the urban tree canopy".

The sections below outline a proposed approach to achieving this policy directive, draft policy statements, and a preliminary zoning framework for consideration. Each section concludes with a list of questions that help to inform the draft and guide the discussion.

Discussion

Sustainable Landscape Management Approach

Evanston's Climate Action and Resilience Plan (CARP) calls for an increase in natural landscaping. A key goal of the plan is to "Preserve, restore, and expand Evanston's urban canopy, natural areas, native vegetation, and green space to maintain and increase carbon sequestration, improve stormwater runoff detention, improve air quality, energy efficiency, and livability, and reduce adverse urban impacts on humans and key species such as birds and

pollinators.” It explicitly calls for increasing natural landscaping and expanding no-mow and low-mow areas.

Natural landscaping does require appropriate design and implementation in order to be successful long-term. Ecological or sustainable landscape management “incorporates natural systems and processes into a human-centered design.” Essentially, natural landscaping encourages plant communities that are adapted to local conditions and beneficial to the local environment. This may include replacing lawn grass with trees, shrubs, wildflower gardens, and groundcover plantings. Benefits of sustainable landscape management include:

- Reduction in carbon emissions from lawnmowers and other lawn-maintenance equipment
- Increase in carbon sequestration (the capture of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere) by deep-rooted native plants
- A more resilient and healthier community with access to additional nature, and relief from paved urban heat islands
- Minimize the cost and maintenance of weeding, fertilizing, moving, pruning, water, and replacing failed plants that are not intended for this climate/area

These benefits of sustainable landscape management also align with the existing plans and policies of CARP.

Sustainable landscape management is already successful in various areas of the city on both public and private property. Evanston has achieved community habitat recognition from the National Wildlife Federation, and the city is committed to the Mayor’s Monarch Pledge, which is often a required landscaping condition for Planned Developments. Natural Habitat Evanston actively works to encourage and support wildflower gardens throughout the community. Several natural area habitats exist including Clark Street Beach Bird Sanctuary, the Ladd Arboretum natural area, Perkins Woods, and the woods at Harbert-Payne Park and are managed by local volunteers.

A sustainable landscape management approach aligns development with the preliminary goals developed during the Envision Evanston 2045 process:

- **Prioritize Environmental Sustainability:** The use of sustainable landscape management that promotes natural habitats and native plantings attracts pollinators and results in successful long-term landscaping.
- **Create Equitable Opportunities for All:** Minimum landscaping requirements will result in additional outdoor areas at many different property types and land use types that can then be used by a variety of people. Public green space requirements promote equitable opportunities as the spaces are open for all to use and enjoy.

- **Invest in Transportation Options:** Landscape requirements for outdoor space should include paths that encourage walkability. Certain land use development types including mixes-use, commercial, and institutional uses should include paths that meet ADA requirements to improve mobility for all.
- **Establish a Strong Local Economy:** Increased landscaping and green space promotes a desirable community that more people want to be a part of.
- **Celebrate Arts and Culture:** Landscaping requirements encourage the integration of artwork such as sculptures and water features that promote art and culture within the green environment.
- **Increase Housing Diversity:** Landscaping requirements for all housing types will encourage desirable outdoor space for all residents.
- **Create a Healthy Community:** Landscaping and green space requirements will promote the use and enjoyment of outdoor space which directly correlates with healthy outcomes for individuals.

This approach not only addresses environmental concerns but also enhances social equity, economic resilience, and community well-being, fostering a holistic and integrated community development strategy.

Draft Policy Statements Related to this Referral

1. Expand park and recreation opportunities in the city.
2. Effectively manage the city's natural resources to optimize ecosystem health.
3. Employ land-use practices that optimize soil health.
4. Manage land along the lakeshore and the North Shore Channel to limit habitat degradation, and protect and preserve water quality.
5. Support community-wide participation in climate action to reduce environmental impacts and improve climate resilience by engaging community members, local businesses, and community organizations.
6. Effectively manage the city's tree canopy to optimize the benefits of the urban forest.
7. Maintain comprehensive and landscape-scale stormwater management strategies to protect water quality, manage flood risks, and enhance the natural function of wetlands, floodplains, and water bodies.
8. Ensure a sustainable water supply by protecting Lake Michigan and promoting water conservation practices among residential, commercial, and production and innovation sectors.
9. Prioritize natural stormwater management practices that slow, capture, and allow rainwater to percolate through the landscape, reducing runoff and supporting groundwater recharge.
10. Incorporate climate resilience measures into public and private infrastructure projects to build resilience against future climate impacts, including increased flooding, heat waves, and storm events.

Draft Zoning Framework

The new Zoning Code will include landscaping and green space regulation based on sustainable landscape management and the draft policy statements of the new Comprehensive Plan (noted above). Initial draft framework for the new Zoning Code includes the following landscaping and green space regulation:

Purpose. The purpose of this section is to establish landscaping and screening requirements that promote sustainability, enhance the natural environment, support the goals of the Evanston Climate Action and Resilience Plan (CARP), and improve the aesthetic appearance of the City.

Intent. These standards are intended to:

1. **Promote Environmental Sustainability.** Enhance green infrastructure, reduce urban heat islands, and support carbon sequestration efforts.
2. **Improve Stormwater Management.** Utilize landscaping to manage stormwater runoff and reduce flooding risks.
3. **Enhance Biodiversity.** Increase the use of native plant species to support local ecosystems and pollinators.
4. **Elevate Aesthetic Quality.** Improve the visual appeal of developments, contributing to the overall character and beauty of Evanston.
5. **Support Climate Resilience.** Incorporate adaptive landscaping practices that respond to climate change impacts.

Applicability: These standards and regulations will apply to all residential properties with more than 4 dwelling units, and all commercial, mixed-use, and innovation-manufacturing uses.

These standards will apply to new construction as well as additions and renovations over a certain size (that is yet to be determined):

Land Use Area	Minimum Landscaped Area	Shade Tree Requirement	Additional Requirements
+4 Residential Units	A minimum of 30% of the total lot area shall be landscaped	Provide 1 shade tree per 1,000 sq ft of landscaped area	Incorporate foundation plantings along building facades visible from public rights-of-way Shade trees shall be set back a minimum of 10 feet from all property lines
Commercial and Mixed Use	A minimum of 20% of the total lot area shall be landscaped	Provide 1 shade tree per 500 sq ft of landscaped area	Parking areas shall include landscape islands Shade trees shall be set back a minimum of 10 feet from all property lines (<i>consider requiring mixed-use and commercial properties to screen ground mechanicals</i>)

Land Use Area	Minimum Landscaped Area	Shade Tree Requirement	Additional Requirements
Innovation/Manufacturing and Institutional Campus	A minimum of 25% of the total lot area shall be landscaped	Provide 1 shade tree per 750 sq ft of landscaped area	Include screening of service areas and mechanical equipment Shade trees shall be set back a minimum of 15 feet from all property lines

Additional landscaping requirements under consideration include:

Standard	Requirements
Buffer Yards	Buffer Yard Width: At least 10 feet when a non-residential use immediately abuts a residentially zoned property. Screening: Continuous hedge, fence, or wall with a minimum height of 6 feet, combined with plantings of trees and shrubs. Trees: Evergreen species planted at intervals not exceeding 20 feet on center.
Street Frontage Landscaping	Landscaped Area Width: Minimum of 5 feet or shall conform to the block average along all public street frontages. Tree Requirement: One (1) shade or ornamental tree per 30 linear feet of frontage. Shrubs and Groundcover: Cover at least 70% of the landscaped area within three (3) years of planting.
Screening of Service Areas and Equipment	Screening: Service areas, loading docks, refuse containers, and mechanical equipment must be fully screened from public view using a combination of landscaping and structural elements. Design Consistency: Screening materials should be consistent with the building's architectural design and incorporate plantings to soften visual impact.

Parking lots, which do not require any specific landscaping or screening in the current Zoning Code (while nearly all other communities do), should be regulated with:

Standard	Requirements
Interior Landscaping (parking lots with 10 or more spaces)	Landscaped Area: Must cover at least 10% of the total parking area. Landscape Islands: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distributed throughout the parking area to delineate parking bays and guide traffic flow. • Minimum width of 8 feet and minimum area of 150 square feet. • Include at least one (1) shade tree and appropriate groundcover or shrubs.
Perimeter Landscaping (parking lots with 10 or more spaces)	Landscaped Strip: Minimum width of 5 feet along the perimeter of parking lots adjacent to streets or alleys. Required Plantings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One (1) shade tree per 30 linear feet. • Shrubs or a decorative fence/wall with a height of 3 to 4 feet to screen vehicles.

Standard	Requirements
Bioswales and Rain Gardens (parking lots with 10 or more spaces)	Include bioswales, rain gardens, or other green infrastructure within parking lot landscaping.

Requirements for properties with 4 or fewer residential units are still under consideration (including the threshold for applicability), but are potentially:

1. Front yards shall have a minimum of 50% vegetative landscaping.
2. At least 1 shade tree in the front yard.
3. At least 2 shrubs in the front yard.
4. Shade trees shall be set back a minimum of 5 feet from all property lines.

In Residential land use areas, maximum impervious surface requirements will remain substantially the same as current regulations. The new landscape and green space regulations intend to appropriately regulate the pervious space on properties and coincide with overall existing impervious regulations that will carry forward. In practice, the landscape requirements and additional plantings will reduce the stormwater impact and result in improved overall watershed at properties without further burdening the City's stormwater system.

All applicable developments must submit a detailed Landscape Plan as part of the Zoning Analysis Review. A Landscape Plan shall include:

1. Location and dimensions of all existing and proposed landscaping areas, including calculations outlining any required percentages of coverage.
2. Species list, size, and quantity of all plant materials.

Additional requirements regarding planting specifics include:

Standard	Requirement
Species Selection	<p>Native Plants: At least 80% of plant materials shall be native species to the Evanston region to promote biodiversity and ecological resilience.</p> <p>Diversity: No single species shall comprise more than 15% of the total plantings to prevent monocultures and enhance disease resistance.</p> <p>Invasive Species: The use of invasive plant species is strictly prohibited.</p>
Plant Sizes	<p>Shade Trees: Minimum caliper of 2.5 inches at planting.</p> <p>Ornamental Trees: Minimum caliper of 2 inches at planting.</p> <p>Evergreen Trees: Minimum height of 6 feet at planting.</p> <p>Shrubs: Minimum height or spread of 18 inches at planting.</p> <p>Groundcover and Perennials: Planted at densities to achieve full coverage within two (2) growing seasons.</p>

In addition to minimum landscaping regulations, greenspace regulations (differing from the above sustainable landscaping requirements) will apply as follows:

Purpose. The purpose of this section is to establish regulations for the integration of outdoor gathering spaces and greenspaces into developments within the City of Evanston.

Intent. These standards are intended to:

1. Promote environmental sustainability by enhancing green infrastructure and biodiversity.
2. Enhance community well-being through accessible, safe, and enjoyable outdoor spaces.
3. Support climate resilience by incorporating design elements that mitigate climate-related risks.
4. Integrate cultural elements reflecting Evanston's heritage through art and educational features.

Applicability: These standards and regulations will apply to all new construction of all types as well as additions and renovations over a certain size (that is still being contemplated):

Greenspace planting requirements include:

Land Use Area	Lot size/units	Minimum Greenspace (% of lot area)	Additional Requirements
1-4 Residential Units	Any	35%	At least 50% of front yard must be permeable with landscaping
+4 Residential Units	Up to 20 units	30%	Communal gardens or rooftop greenspaces encouraged
	More than 20 units	25%	Additional 10% as communal outdoor gathering areas
			Inclusion of children's play areas and senior-friendly spaces mandatory
Commercial and Mixed-Use			
General	Any	20%	
Large Lots	Over 1 acre	Additional 10% as public outdoor spaces	
Transit-Oriented Developments (TOD)			
Residential TOD	Any	20%	Focus on vertical greenspaces and rooftop gardens due to higher densities
Commercial/Mixed-Use TOD	Any	15%	Integration with transit facilities and pedestrian plazas
Institutional	Any	30%	At least 15% accessible as public outdoor gathering spaces

Additional requirements may include:

1. Permeable Surfaces: For single, two or three unit dwellings, at least 50% of the front yard must consist of permeable surfaces with landscaping.
2. Communal Spaces: Multi-unit developments with more than 20 units must provide communal outdoor gathering areas totaling at least 10% of the lot area.
3. Large Commercial Lots: Commercial and mixed-use developments on lots larger than one (1) acre are required to allocate an additional 10% of the lot area as public outdoor gathering spaces, integrating features that support community events and local markets.
4. Institutional Enhancements: Institutional developments must ensure that a significant portion of greenspace is accessible to the public, and educational institutions are required to incorporate outdoor learning environments to enrich educational experiences.

Greenspace areas will include design standards to require ADA walks, communal gathering space, biodiversity with a variety of plant species and types, wayfinding signage, green infrastructure such as bioswales and rain gardens, rain barrels, seating, public art, water features, etc. Submission requirements will be similar to the Landscape Plan submission requirements as part of the Zoning Analysis review.

Examples of Communities that have adopted this approach

Similar approaches to landscaping and green space have been accomplished in the following cities across the United States as the impact of climate change and the importance of appropriate outdoor space and landscaping becomes further realized:

Portland, Oregon - The city's zoning regulations encourage the use of green roofs, permeable pavement, and native landscaping in both residential and commercial developments. Their comprehensive plan prioritizes ecological health and integrates green infrastructure.

San Francisco, California - San Francisco has adopted zoning regulations that promote sustainable landscaping practices. The city encourages the use of native plants, rainwater harvesting, and green infrastructure in new developments, aiming to enhance ecological resilience and community health.

Berkeley, California - The City of Berkeley, CA, adopted a new Zoning Code in 2021. Their code includes provisions requiring the inclusion of onsite public art in private developments, which must be in locations that are accessible to and available for use by the general public. Additionally, their zoning code includes standards for required parking lot landscape screening.

Ann Arbor, Michigan - Zoning regulations in Ann Arbor contain standards for preservation of existing significant vegetation, the use of non-invasive plant species, and the selection of plant species based on site conditions including soil type, light exposure, presence of utilities, and salt tolerance. Regulations also encourage biodiversity, native plantings, and the inclusion of sustainable features such as rain barrels for irrigation and bioretention areas to reduce stormwater runoff and pollution.

Many larger cities across the globe have successfully enacted similar requirements and regulations:

Vancouver, British Columbia - Vancouver has implemented the "Greenest City Action Plan," which incorporates sustainable landscaping in zoning regulations. The city promotes urban agriculture, tree canopy enhancement, and green building practices, ensuring that new developments include green spaces and biodiversity considerations.

Copenhagen, Denmark - Copenhagen has embraced this approach through its "Cloudburst Management Plan," which integrates green infrastructure to manage stormwater. Their zoning regulations also encourage the incorporation of green roofs, parks, and water features, enhancing both sustainability and community livability.

Melbourne, Australia - Melbourne has a commitment to sustainable urban design reflected in its zoning codes. The city promotes vertical gardens and sustainable landscaping practices, to increase green cover and improve urban biodiversity.

Singapore - Singapore's "City in a Garden" initiative includes zoning regulations that require greenery in all new developments. This includes vertical gardens, green roofs, and landscaping that supports biodiversity, making sustainability a key component of urban planning.

Amsterdam, Netherlands - Amsterdam integrates sustainable landscape management into its zoning regulations through initiatives like green roofs and community gardens. The city's policies support biodiversity and sustainable water management, fostering a healthy urban environment.

Questions for discussion

1. What do you think about the guiding policy statements?
2. Are there additional actions you think the City should consider?
3. Do you have any feedback on the zoning framework?
4. Is there anything else you want to share with City staff regarding this referral?