

**STAFF REPORT – PLANNING  
CITY OF TEMECULA  
PLANNING COMMISSION**

**TO:** Planning Commission Chairperson and members of the Planning Commission

**FROM:** Matt Peters, Director of Community Development

**DATE OF MEETING:** October 1, 2025

**PREPARED BY:** Katie Garcia, Planning Technician

**PROJECT SUMMARY:** Long Range Planning Project Number LR25-0099, Amending Title 17 of the Temecula Municipal Code as detailed in the proposed Ordinance attached here as Exhibit A.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Adopt a Resolution recommending that the City Council adopt an Ordinance entitled “An Ordinance of the City Council of the City of Temecula Amending Title 17 of the Temecula Municipal Code Making Technical Revisions and Updates to the Water Efficient Landscape Design Ordinance to Make Consistent with the Citywide Design Guidelines and Making a Finding of Exemption under California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines Section 15061(b)(3)”

**CEQA:** Categorically Exempt  
Section 15061 (b)(3)

**BACKGROUND SUMMARY**

The City of Temecula City Council adopted the Municipal Code in January 1990. Since its adoption, the City Council has periodically made amendments to various sections of the Code to improve its clarity, codify best practices and make necessary corrections or updates.

Pursuant to Government Code Section 65800, the Planning Commission is required to review and make recommendations to the City Council regarding zoning regulations and amendments to Title 17 (Development Code) of the Temecula Municipal Code.

About 40% of the water used by Californians at their homes is used outdoors; this coupled with the reality of longer and cyclical droughts has increased the need for ongoing conservation efforts. The State of California has continued to refine the Model Water Efficient Landscape Ordinance or “MWELo” contained in Chapter 2.7 (Model Water Efficient Landscape Ordinance) of Division 2 (Department of Water Resources) of Title 23 (Waters) of the California Code of Regulations.

These requirements are intended to ensure climate adapted (drought tolerant) plants are used with high efficiency irrigation equipment.

The proposed amendments to the Temecula Municipal Code are intended to bring the City's Water Efficient Landscape Ordinance or "WELO" in conformance with the State's MWELO as required. Additionally, the changes are codifying existing best practices, updating definitions and remove ambiguity regarding requirements. The proposed amendments exclusively amendment Title 17 (Zoning) and will not result in an increase in the intensity or density of any land use above what is currently allowed in accordance with the Municipal Code and General Plan.

Listed below is a summary of the proposed changes to Title 17 of the Temecula Municipal Code:

1. Definitions – Section 17.32.020

The proposed Ordinance would add definitions for:

- "Artificial turf" and/or "synthetic turf"
- "Bioretention area"
- "Impervious surface"
- "Lawn" and/or "turf"
- "Lawn substitute"
- "Mulch stabilizer"
- "Permeable surface"
- "Shall" or "will"
- "Should"

The proposed Ordinance would also update the definition for "reference evapotranspiration (ET<sub>o</sub>)" to reference Temecula's measurement found in Appendix C of the California Department of Water Resources' Model Water Efficiency Landscape Ordinance.

2. Landscape Design Requirements – Section 17.32.060

The proposed Ordinance would:

- a. Make minor revisions to the design requirements for plant materials and add a reference to Specific Plan plant lists, when applicable.
- b. Allow green/artificial turf to be used in inner courtyards of memory care facilities to provide a stable surface for mobility devices as real turf may not provide for mobility impaired individuals. This memory care facility exception is codifying current practices.
- c. Remove and replace "stabilizing mulch" with "mulch stabilizer" and clarify that mulch stabilizer products shall be used on slopes when a binding agent is required.
- d. Set limits for inorganic ground cover of 15%. Require inorganic groundcover to be used as an accent material allowing only fifteen percent of the total landscape area to consist of such material in combination with live plants. This is intended to limit

the use of gravel as a substitute for shrubs and groundcover in designated planting areas.

- e. Add a new subsection to include landscape design standards for parking areas in commercial zones and multifamily developments for consistency with the Citywide Design Guidelines.
- 3. Irrigation System Design Requirements – Section 17.32.090  
Add engineered bioretention areas as an exception for overhead spray systems when used in landscape areas narrower than ten feet in width. This exception would be subject to the Public Works Director’s approval.
  - 4. Residential Requirements – Section 17.32.110  
Add setbacks for plant material from utility equipment in residential zones.
  - 5. Commercial/Office/Industrial/Public Institutional Requirements – Section 17.32.120  
Add setbacks for plant material from utility equipment in commercial zones.
  - 6. Maintenance and Enforcement – Section 17.32.120
    - a. Require a Modification Application for proposed changes to approved landscape plans.
    - b. Require any removed trees, due to maintenance issues or death, to be replaced in accordance with the approved landscape plans.
    - c. Add a reference for protected trees to comply with Chapter 8.48 Protected Tree Ordinance of the Temecula Municipal Code.
    - d. Add a requirement for groundcovers to be used in addition to, not in place of, the approved landscaping and to be maintained accordingly.
  - 7. Appendix B Prescriptive Compliance Option – Section 17.32.200
    - a. Remove language that prohibits turf in parkways less than 10 feet wide and remove the requirement for turf to be irrigated by sub surface irrigation.
    - b. Add engineered bioretention areas as an exception for the use of overhead spray systems when used in landscape areas narrower than ten feet in width. This exception would be subject to the Public Works Director’s approval.
  - 8. Appendix C Plant List – Section 17.32.200
    - a. Amend the plant list.
    - b. Add a note for areas located in Very High Fire and High Fire Severity Zones to refer to Calflora’s Fire Safe Plant List.

## ANALYSIS

1. The proposed Ordinance would add several definitions to provide consistency and clarity with the Citywide Design Guidelines. Additionally, the proposed Ordinance would amend the definition for “reference evapotranspiration (ET<sub>o</sub>)” to reference Temecula’s measurement found in Appendix C of the California Department of Water Resources’ Model Water Efficiency Landscape Ordinance. This is to ensure that the code will reference the most recent measurement and always be up to date.
2. The proposed Ordinance would make minor revisions to the landscape design requirements, set a 15% limit for inorganic groundcover use, and add a new subsection for landscape standards for parking areas in commercial zones and multifamily developments. Landscaping noncompliance is a recurring issue throughout the city, particularly within parking areas. Establishing clear, codified standards for commercial and multifamily parking landscapes will enhance applicant understanding, minimize resubmittals, and streamline the review of design documents. The proposed standards align with the Citywide Design Guidelines and formalize existing practices, promoting consistency and efficiency in the development process.
3. Currently, overhead spray irrigation systems are prohibited in landscape areas narrower than ten feet in width. The proposed Ordinance would create an exception for this by allowing overhead spray systems to be used in engineered bioretention areas, subject to the approval of the Director of Public Works. Overhead spray systems can provide more uniform coverage in bioretention areas, which promotes healthier plant growth.
4. The proposed Ordinance would add minimum setback requirements for plant material adjacent to utility equipment within residential zones to support fire safety and maintain clear access for maintenance work.
5. The proposed Ordinance would add minimum setback requirements for plant material adjacent to utility equipment within commercial zones to support fire safety and maintain clear access for maintenance work.
6. The City continues to face challenges with non-compliance in commercial landscaping, particularly when previously approved plans are altered without proper review. The proposed Ordinance would reaffirm the existing requirement for a Modification Application to be submitted to the Planning Department for any changes to entitled landscape plans. This process will help ensure that landscaping remains consistent with City standards and in full compliance. Trees removed due to maintenance needs or natural causes must be replaced in accordance with the original approved plans. Additionally, the Ordinance would clarify that groundcovers are to be used as a complementary element, not as a substitute, for required plantings, preserving the integrity and diversity of the landscape design.
7. The proposed Ordinance would revise Appendix B – Prescriptive Compliance Option by eliminating the current prohibition on turf installation in parkways less than 10 feet wide, provided they are irrigated using sub-surface systems. This amendment is intended to

reduce unnecessary limitations on landscaping materials and methods, offering greater flexibility while maintaining water-efficient practices.

8. The proposed Ordinance would update the approved plant list by removing Nerium oleander (oleander) and Dasylirion spp. (desert spoon) due to safety concerns. Oleander contains toxic compounds that pose a serious health risk, while desert spoon features sharp, rigid leaf tips that can cause injury. Eliminating these species helps reduce potential hazards to the public.

The proposed Ordinance would incorporate a reference to Calflora's Fire Safe Plant List for properties located within Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones and High Fire Severity Zones. This recommendation, suggested by both the Planning Commission Subcommittee and the City Council Subcommittee, reflects the City's ongoing commitment to prioritizing fire safety through responsible landscape planning.

This proposed Ordinance was presented to the Planning Commission Municipal Code Maintenance Subcommittee on August 20<sup>th</sup>, 2025, and to the City Council General Plan Update Subcommittee on August 26<sup>th</sup>, 2025. The subcommittees had general questions regarding the requirements and changes proposed and were supportive of the proposed Ordinance and its conservation goals.

## **LEGAL NOTICING REQUIREMENTS**

Notice of the public hearing was published in the *Press Enterprise* on September 18, 2025.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL DETERMINATION**

In accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act, the proposed project has been deemed to be categorically exempt from further environmental review.

This Ordinance is exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) as there is no possibility the proposed Ordinance would have a significant impact on the environment pursuant to State CEQA Guidelines Section 15061(b)(3). The Title 17 Code Amendments are minor revisions, updates, and clarifications to existing standards and practices with no proposed changes to land use. Staff recommends that a Notice of Exemption be prepared and filed in accordance the State CEQA Guidelines.

- ATTACHMENTS:**
1. PC Resolution
  2. Exhibit A- Draft Ordinance
  3. Notice of Public Hearing