



INFORMATION MEMORANDUM

TO: Planning and Zoning Commission

FROM: Tara Bradley, Planning Manager

DATE: May 11, 2026

SUBJECT: Discussion and feedback regarding draft landscape amendments to the Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance.

Background:

The rewrite of the landscape regulations of the Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance (CZO) is supported by the City's strategic initiatives (which directed a review of the landscape regulations); the Farmers Branch 2045 Plan (the City's Comprehensive Plan); and the City's Sustainability Plan. The goal of the revisions is to ensure the landscape regulations reflect and support adopted City policy, thereby aiding in policy implementation. The proposed revisions also bring the City's landscape standards more in line with current regional practices in the DFW metroplex, while maintaining the right balance for the City of Farmers Branch.

This study session is intended to provide the Planning and Zoning Commission (P&Z) with an overview of the draft landscape regulation amendments and to receive feedback prior to bringing the draft to City Council for their feedback and prior to initiating the public hearing process.

Discussion:

Revision of the landscape regulations will assist in the implementation of the City's policy documents; working towards identified goals.

The draft landscape regulations will support the implementation of Farmers Branch 2045, particularly the Guiding Value stating that "Redevelopment is designed with high-quality which enhances the character of the city". Several of the strategies within the plan emphasize the importance of the public realm in creating an attractive and comfortable environment for residents, employees and visitors.

The draft landscape regulations will also support the City's Sustainability Plan by improving stormwater management, air quality and increasing the tree canopy throughout the city.

Draft Landscape Regulations:

The sections below summarize the existing landscape regulations and the direction proposed in the draft revised landscape regulations. The draft revised landscape regulations were developed based on direction from the Planning & Zoning Commission and City Council, in consultation with the landscape subcommittee established by the Planning & Zoning Commission.

Objectives:

The current landscape section of the CZO has the following objective:

The objective of this section is to improve the surrounding neighborhoods and promote the general welfare by providing for the installation and maintenance of landscaping for screening and other public benefits.

In the draft revised landscape regulations the objectives have been revised to be reflective of the City's policies, the objectives of the draft landscape regulations are as follows:

1. Establish minimum requirements for the installation and maintenance of landscaping as a means of enhancing the community's public health as well as its ecological, environmental, and aesthetic qualities.
2. Maintain and increase the tree canopy within the city to mitigate heat and improve walkability, storm water retention, air quality and environmental resilience.
3. Provide shade for outdoor seating, walking, and activity.
4. Delineate spaces such as roadways and sidewalks, public and private open spaces and entryways to increase safety, and aesthetics.
5. Decrease the amount of stormwater runoff and improve the quality of stormwater runoff through natural filtration.
6. Provide species habitat for birds and other local wildlife.
7. Encourage use of plant species that are drought tolerant and local to reduce the need for watering and increase the rate of survival.
8. Assure an acceptable transition between adjacent and nearby uses by providing a visually appealing buffer.

These objectives will guide staff's review of landscape plans and ensure that installed landscaping contributes to the City's broader policy goals.

Landscape Plan/Irrigation/Instillation and Maintenance:

The current regulations provide guidance on required landscape plans and maintenance of landscaping installed. The revised sections provide an increased level of clarity and detail on each of the topics and ensure the regulations are reflective of current best practices in the region. There is no landscape plan or irrigation plan required for one-family or two-family dwellings.

Definitions:

Definitions have been added to the front end of the landscape section. These definitions are to aid in the understanding and interpretation of the regulations. Industry standard terms and definitions have been used in the regulation.

One-Family and Two-Family Residential Uses

Currently there are no landscape requirements for one-family and two-family residential zoning districts (R-1 to R-6). One- and two-family residential uses in districts D-1 to MF-4 are currently subject to the five percent landscaping requirement (which applies to land not covered by structures). Only two sections 4.1.G and 4.1.H will apply to new or redeveloped one and two-family residential lots; existing lots would not be considered non-conforming. Other portions of the landscape regulation would not apply to new or redeveloped one-family and two-family residential uses.

The draft revised landscape regulation would establish a requirement for one shade tree per one-family residential lot and one shade tree or ornamental tree for each unit of a two-family residential use. Required trees are to be located in the front yard setback to aid in aesthetics along the street. In addition, one-family and two-family residential lots would be required to have an approved means of soil erosion control on the lot.

Multifamily

The current landscape regulation for multi-family development requires that five percent of the entire lot area not covered by buildings or part of any right of way be landscaped and that trees (25ft apart) be planted along the street right of way.

This requirement is significantly lower than other municipalities (reviewed) in the DFW; most cities require between 10 – 20% of the entire lot area to be landscaped. Staff is proposing that the revised regulations require 20% of an entire site be landscaped. For multifamily uses, the City would allow 40% of this requirement to be met by hardscape areas which provide public or private open spaces or amenities, this can include areas that are not on the ground floor.

The draft landscaping regulations encourage landscaping to be used as a tool to enhance multifamily development as outlined in the adopted Multi-family Development Policy.

Non-Residential Lot Coverage:

The current landscape regulation for non-residential development requires that five percent of the entire lot area not covered by buildings or part of any right of way be landscaped and that trees (25ft apart) be planted along the street right of way.

This requirement is significantly less than other municipalities (reviewed) in the DFW; most cities require between 10 – 20% of the entire lot area to be landscaped. Staff is proposing to revise the required landscaping requirement to the following:

- Industrial uses: minimum 20% of the lot.
- Commercial, institutional and retail uses: 15% of the lot.

The City would require 50% of the landscaping be located in the front yard setback to emphasize aesthetics from the street. Parking lot landscaping would count towards the total landscaping requirement and pervious surfaces used for walkways and patio areas may count for up to 20% of required landscaping.

The revised regulations will, over time, increase the amount of street-oriented landscaping in the City's non-residential areas improving aesthetics; increasing the canopy cover; and improving stormwater management. It will also bring the City's requirements in line with other cities in the DFW.

Parking Lot Landscaping and Screening:

The CZO currently has a requirement that surface parking lots visible from a public street be screened using vertical landscaping. There is currently no landscape requirement for the interior of surface parking lots.

The draft landscape regulations propose that a minimum of 7% of the interior of a parking lot be covered by landscaping. This would require landscape islands at the terminus of every parking row, and one shade tree per landscape island. This landscaping will count toward the overall landscape requirement for a lot. This requirement would not apply if the proposed lot contained 15 or fewer parking spaces.

Parking lots are encouraged to be located at the rear of the property so that they are not visible from the public street. Where this is not possible and a parking lot is visible from a public right of way a landowner would have the option of using either a solid hedge, a berm or a short masonry wall along the side of the parking lot that is visible from the public right of way. The screening options provided are intended to prevent headlight glare onto the street from cars within the parking lot, and to improve aesthetics.

An exception to the parking lot landscaping requirement may be granted to warehousing or manufacturing uses where room is needed for trucks to maneuver. When this is the case parking lots will need to be screened from view.

Artificial Lot Line Delineation:

Currently the CZO does not have provisions for delineation of artificial lot lines. A section on this has been added applying to multi-family and non-residential development on lots two acres in size or greater. This will provide flexibility for developers working on larger tracts of land.

Buffering:

The current regulations require a minimum 6ft masonry fence between one or two-family residential and multifamily or non-residential uses. The draft landscape regulations expanded the required buffer as per City Councils request and added a requirement of a row of shade trees 25ft apart on the side of the multifamily or non-residential use. As the shade trees mature, they will add an additional visual buffer between the residential and non-residential use.

Sustainable Design and Landscape Enhancements:

Sustainable landscape design and landscape enhancements are encouraged for multi-family and non-residential uses and may make a lot eligible to reduce the total site coverage requirement by five percent, at the discretion of the City Manager or Designee. The five percent reduction will provide flexibility for landowners when designing a lot. A greater reduction in required landscaping may be granted with approval from the Planning and Zoning Commission and City Council.

To receive a reduction in the site coverage requirement the landscape design will need to demonstrate that the objectives of the landscaping regulations are attained, while incorporating two (or more) of the following:

- The retention of a minimum of 30 caliper inches of existing trees on the lot, each with a minimum caliper size of 6". To qualify trees shall be in a healthy growing condition as confirmed by an arborist.
- Use of native grasses in place of turf on any permeable surface not occupied by trees, shrubs, planting beds, signs, walkways, patios, or other permitted fixtures.
- Use of permeable pavers in no less than 30% of paved areas including patios, walkways, and drives.
- Inclusion of public art which is visible from the street and accessible to the public.
- Public open space areas with pedestrian-friendly facilities such as plazas, water features, seating areas, etc. open to the public.
- Conservation Easements, being an agreement between the developer and the City of Farmers Branch for the purposes of preserving natural, undisturbed vegetation.

Plant Materials:

The draft landscape regulations include a revised Recommended Plant List. The revised list has been expanded to be more comprehensive in nature, reflect all plant types (trees, shrubs, vines), and have a focus on local sustainable species. The list is reflective of best practices in the region, and was compiled through consultation with the staff arborist, landscape and tree preservation subcommittee members and with reference to the Texas A&M AgriLife Water University's top shade and ornamental trees for North Texas guide. This will improve the sustainability and survival rate of landscaping installed.

Next Steps:

In order to complete the amendment to the landscape regulations (Section 4.1) of the CZO, the following steps will be taken:

- The draft regulations will be presented to City Council for discussion and feedback. The draft will be revised in accordance with feedback received.
- The public hearing process will be initiated for amending the landscaping regulations within the CZO.

Staff is seeking feedback from the Planning & Zoning Commission on the draft landscape regulations of the CZO.