

Date: 4/15/25

To: Dylan King, Eryka Thorley, and Emma Marino (Town of Erie)

From: Victoria Arling and Kerry Miller (WaterNow Alliance) and Chelsea Benjamin (Western Resource Advocates)

Subject: Engage Erie Website Content (Draft)

Project: Project Accelerator: Water Efficient Landscape Ordinance Development

Task Summary

WaterNow Alliance (WaterNow) and Western Resource Advocates (WRA) drafted content for the “Water Efficient Landscape Ordinance Update” webpage, which will be included on the Engage Erie website. This webpage will provide information to Erie residents about the proposed ordinance changes, an estimated project timeline, and provide a platform for residents to post questions and engage with Erie staff regarding the code updates. The webpage content was written according to the July 2025 version of the draft ordinance and will be updated pending additional changes from Erie staff and legal review.

Website Outline:

- Engage Erie Webpage Headers
 - Water Efficient Landscaping Ordinance Development
 - Why Now?
 - Why Prohibit Cool-Season Turfgrass?
 - What Requirements Will the Updated Ordinance Include?
 - How Do I Stay Informed?
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- Right Sidebar Headers
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Engage Erie Webpage Content (Draft):

Water Efficient Landscape Ordinance Update



[Banner image of water efficient landscaping]

Water Efficient Landscaping Ordinance Development

The Town of Erie is currently updating [Unified Development Code Section 10.6.4 Landscaping, Screening, and Fencing](#) to ensure new development and qualifying redevelopment have landscapes that save water and better reflect the natural landscapes of the Front Range.

Erie's [Water Efficiency Plan](#) sets goals to save and protect Erie's water for our current and future residents. By 2030 Erie hopes to reduce its water use by 10% to reach a target goal of 115 gallons per capita per day (gpcd). Reducing outdoor water use is a key strategy to achieving this goal. One way to reduce water use is to reduce the demand for outdoor watering in landscapes by encouraging and/or requiring sustainable landscaping practices for new and redevelopment projects.

Erie has several [water efficiency rebates and programs](#) available to residential and non-residential customers, including: a turf replacement rebate program, Garden In A Box, outdoor sprinkler consultations, and rebates on smart irrigation controllers, high-efficiency nozzles, rain barrels, and drip lines.

While Erie's current landscape ordinance includes some water efficient landscaping standards, the update will strengthen and clarify these requirements – ensuring that key best practices are included for new and redevelopment projects. The updated ordinance will also ensure these standards reflect the most up-to-date research and technology, allowing Erie to increase water savings. Creating sustainable landscaping standards is an impactful way to further reduce outdoor water use in Erie and preserve our water as a resource for future generations. In addition to reducing landscape water demand in new and redevelopment, the proposed landscape code will enhance the visual quality of Erie's landscapes, reduce stormwater runoff preserving higher water quality, protect and expand the Town's tree canopy, create green space essential for community health and well-being, and promote biodiversity and pollinator habitat.

Why Now?

Colorado is a dry state, averaging only 15 inches of precipitation each year. As we continue to experience drought and warmer seasons, water conservation has become more and more

important. According to the 2023 Colorado Water Plan, if nothing changes, Colorado communities may see a gap between supply and demand of 230,000-740,000 acre-feet of water each year by 2050. That's enough water to meet the needs of 460,000 to 1,480,000 homes a year. Local water conservation efforts, such as creating water efficient landscaping ordinances, have the potential to help reduce the projected water supply and demand gap while creating lush, colorful, and resilient landscapes that help to reduce urban heat island effects.

The ordinance update will bring Erie into compliance with [SB24 – 005: Prohibit Landscaping Practices for Water Conservation](#), which bans the installation of nonfunctional turfgrass on all new and redeveloped nonresidential properties on and after January 1, 2026. It also brings Erie into compliance with HB25-1113 – Limit Turf in New Residential [Development](#) which expands the prohibition of nonfunctional turfgrass to multi-family properties, prohibits nonfunctional artificial turf on CII and multi-family properties, and asks communities to limit cool-season turfgrass in some way on all residential properties by January 1, 2028.

Why Prohibit Cool-Season Turfgrass?

Kentucky bluegrass, the most common grass species installed in Colorado, requires significant amounts of irrigation water to survive in our climate (approximately 24-26 inches per year). Other cool-season turfgrasses, such as tall fescue and perennial ryegrass, exhibit similar irrigation requirements (20-22 inches/year). By contrast, native or warm-season turfgrasses and native plants such as buffalo grass, and blue grama require only about 8-10 inches of supplemental irrigation per year, or upwards of a 50% water savings when compared to the water requirements of Kentucky bluegrass.

To ensure the Town of Erie uses its water supply as efficiently as possible, the ordinance update does not permit the installation of cool-season turfgrass that use more than twenty (20) inches of water per growing season in new development and redevelopment meeting certain thresholds. Native and warm-season turfgrasses, called “alternative turfgrasses” in the ordinance, will be permitted but may not exceed 30% of the total landscaped area for non-residential properties and 50% of the total landscaped area for single-family, duplex, and townhome properties.

Recognizing the opportunity to grow more efficiently by reducing cool-season turfgrass, many communities across the Front Range are adopting water efficient landscaping codes that limit cool season turfgrass in new development and redevelopment. For comparison, the below-listed municipalities limit turfgrass in new development to the following:

Table 1: Cool-season Turfgrass Limits in Colorado Municipal Codes

| Municipality | Cool Season Turfgrass Limit |
|-----------------|---|
| City of Aurora | No non-functional, cool season turfgrass in common areas, curbside landscapes, and golf courses. Prohibits turf in front yards, and limits turf to 45% or 500 sq. ft. of a backyard. |
| City of Boulder | All new landscape areas are required to limit the total amount of high-water use turfgrass to 25% |

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|-----------------------------|---|
| | and the total amount of high-water use zones to 50%. Cool season turf is limited to high use areas with high visibility or functional needs. Turfgrass is banned on slopes or berms at a 4:1 slope or greater and in areas with any one dimension less than 10 feet in width, unless a high-efficiency irrigation system is in place. |
| City & County of Broomfield | Cool season turfgrass is not allowed. Low water turfgrass is limited to 30% of landscapes across property types. |
| Castle Rock | Nonfunctional turfgrass is prohibited in all non-residential landscapes. Only up to 500 sq. ft of lower water turfgrass is allowed (<19 inches per growing season) in backyards, it is prohibited in front yards. |
| City of Edgewater | Cool season turfgrass is limited to 25% in single family homes. It is not allowed on commercial, industrial, and institutional properties. |
| Thornton | Single family homes are required to limit high-water turfgrass to 50% in public and private areas. Turf is banned on slopes of 6:1 or greater. |
| Westminster | Turfgrass is limited to 50% of landscapes. |

What Requirements Will the Updated Ordinance Include?

The new ordinance would establish water efficient landscaping standards for new development and certain redevelopment projects. The standards would include:

- Prohibiting cool season turf grass on all properties (Except for some active recreation areas).
- Limiting the use of alternative turfgrass to:
 - 50% of the landscaped area on single-family, duplex, and townhome residential properties,
 - 30% of the landscape area on non-residential properties,
 - Recreational use areas or other spaces that are regularly used for civic, community, or recreational purposes on multi-family properties.
- Requiring all property types, except for single-family and duplex dwelling units, to use technologies that maximize irrigation efficiency, including installing smart irrigation controllers to ensure that plants are not overwatered. These requirements are encouraged for single-family and duplex private lots.
- Establishing fire wise landscaping requirements.
- Requiring at least 75% of all annuals and trees, and 100% of shrubs, perennials, groundcovers, and ornamental grasses used to landscape each site be water efficient and selected from an approved plant list.
- Prohibiting the use of artificial turf in landscaped areas, except for athletic fields of play.

The proposed landscape ordinance will not apply to existing landscapes in Erie. The ordinance is applicable to all new residential and non-residential development projects, as well as new or expanded parking lots. Only redevelopment that requires a building permit, plan check, or site plan, involves

replacing an entire structure, or the disturbance of more than 50% of the total landscaped area will be required to comply with the ordinance.

The updated code is organized into different sections that pertain to different property and development types in Erie. These sections currently include:

- Purpose
- Applicability
- Landscape and irrigation system design plans
- General landscaping requirements and standards
- Additional landscaping requirements by property type
 - Rights-of-way, medians, transportation corridors
 - Single family and duplex dwelling units
 - Multi family dwelling units
 - Nonresidential
 - Parking lot landscaping
 - Stormwater facilities
- Guarantee of installation
- Maintenance
- Screening
- Fencing and walls

How Do I Stay Informed?

This page will be updated regularly as the Water Efficient Landscape Ordinance update moves forward. Please check back for the latest information, and feel free to contact the Sustainability Division with any questions.

Ask Questions about the Water Efficient Landscape Ordinance Update

(Erie residents will have the opportunity to ask the Sustainability team questions and view answers to other residents' questions in this section)

Right Side-Bar Content

Community Engagement Opportunities

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Timeline

Research and Initial Draft

- Town staff and consultants reviewed Erie's current landscape ordinance, researched best practices, and developed a working draft of proposed updates.

Community Engagement

- Erie is currently gathering input from residents, developers, and the broader community. This included presenting to a working group meeting with homebuilders and developers in June 2025.

Town council Study Session

- The first draft of the updated Water Efficient Landscape Ordinance will be presented to Town Council on December 2, 2025. Council may provide direction or request revisions.

Town Council Formal Review

- Council presentation during a formal meeting includes a public hearing and opportunity for comment and potential adoption

Approved and Effective

- Once adopted by Town Council, the updated ordinance will be published and go into effect on a set implementation date, applying to new development and redevelopment projects that meet certain thresholds.

FAQ

(All FAQs in the FAQ factsheet will be included in this section)

Key Terms

Document Library

- Existing ordinance
- Redlined ordinance
- Code Explainer
- FAQ Sheet

Contact Us

Do you have a question about the ordinance update? Let us know!

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