Memorandum

To: **Planning Commission**

From: **Eugenia Akiyom, Associate Planner of Community Development Department**

Date: **October 29th, 2026**

Re: **Landscape and Water Conservation**

Introduction

This item is a continuation of the Planning Commission's discussion of landscape and water efficiency standards. At its August 5, 2026 meeting, the Commission reviewed the staff report and discussed potential amendments to Chapter 10-18. The Commission did not direct staff to prepare ordinance amendments at that time. Instead, the Commission requested additional research and information on several topics before determining whether amendments to Chapter 10-18 should move forward.

The discussion focused primarily on the potential regulation of nonfunctional irrigated grass in commercial areas; the appropriate treatment of artificial turf; and whether additional irrigation standards would be practical and effective. The Commission also requested additional information regarding the Washington County Water Conservancy District lawn-rebate program.

The table below summarizes the Commission's discussion, the additional information obtained by staff, and potential questions for further Commission direction. Staff suggests that the Commission discuss each item in turn, then identify which items, if any, staff should take forward into draft ordinance language.

Discussion Items

Discussion Item	Commission Discussion and Additional Research	Questions for Planning Commission
1. Nonfunctional grass in commercial areas	Commissioners noted that Springdale's visitor-serving businesses may have legitimate lawn areas for weddings, outdoor events, farmers markets, picnicking, outdoor dining, play, and similar social or recreational uses. The Commission did not support establishing a maximum lawn area at this stage. Water-wise landscaping guidance recognizes turf as an appropriate landscape material where it serves a real function, including recreation, regular pedestrian traffic, and temperature, noise, or dust mitigation. The same guidance advises against turf in areas where its only use is ornamental or where the only regular traffic is a lawn mower. Rather than limiting lawn area	Does the Commission wish to direct staff to prepare a definition of "functional lawn area" for commercial development? If so, should the definition recognize event lawns, outdoor dining, picnic areas, farmers markets, play areas, and other intentionally designed social or recreational

	by a fixed percentage or square footage, staff could develop standards requiring a commercial applicant to identify the intended function of a proposed lawn area on the landscape plan. The applicant could also be required to provide site-design features appropriate to that function, such as pedestrian access, seating, tables, play equipment, pathways, or an event-space layout.	spaces as potentially functional uses?
2. Heat, shade, habitat, and landscape character	It was noted that grass can reduce heat and may offer some habitat value. Other comments noted that trees, shrubs, and water-conserving landscaping can also provide shade, visual interest, and habitat. A commercial-lawn standard would not require the replacement of grass with bare rock or hardscape. Water-wise landscaping can include shade trees, shrubs, groundcovers, native and drought-tolerant plants, mulch, and other living landscape material. These features can contribute to shade, heat-island reduction, erosion control, and habitat while requiring less irrigation than large ornamental turf areas.	If staff prepares functional-lawn standards, does the Commission wish to emphasize that landscape plans should retain living plant material, shade, and visual compatibility with Springdale's setting?
3. Artificial turf	The Commission requested additional information on artificial turf materials, appearance, durability, UV protection, permeability, heat, area limits, and environmental effects. Staff research indicates that artificial turf is manufactured from polyethylene, polypropylene, nylon, and blended fibers. Because overall performance depends on the complete product system, including backing, infill, drainage, installation, sun exposure, and maintenance, staff does not suggest regulating artificial turf by fiber type alone. A material-specific restriction could exclude blends that perform well in a particular installation. The research supports regulating visible artificial turf through objective design and performance standards instead. Turf visible from a street or adjoining property could be limited to natural grass-like shades of green and brown; be manufactured with UV protection; be installed using permeable materials that allow water and air to pass through; and be maintained in good condition. If visible turf becomes faded, damaged, torn, warped, or otherwise degraded, replacement or removal could be required. Staff also found that "heat-resistant" turf is not a single, consistently defined product standard. Products vary in fiber construction, infill, backing, and heat performance. Artificial turf can reduce irrigation demand, but it is not equivalent to a living water-wise landscape. Utah State University identifies concerns regarding increased runoff, reduced	Does the Commission support replacing the current visibility prohibition with the standards outlined in the staff conclusion?

	rainfall capture and infiltration, microplastics, and possible leaching of chemicals and metals. The Water Conservancy District allows permeable artificial turf as a component of a qualifying water-efficient conversion, but still requires living plant cover and other water-efficient landscape measures. If the Commission wishes to allow artificial turf visible from off site, staff suggests removing the current blanket visibility prohibition and replacing it with standards requiring: (1) natural grass-like colors; (2) permeable installation; (3) UV protection; (4) maintenance and replacement of degraded material; (5) continued compliance with the Town's living landscape requirements; and (6) a maximum artificial-turf area of 30 percent of the total landscape area. This would allow artificial turf as a limited landscape option while preventing it from becoming the dominant landscape treatment or a substitute for trees, shrubs, and groundcover	
4. Irrigation systems	The Commission requested additional information on smart irrigation controllers, efficient irrigation for turf and planting beds, deep watering for trees, potential costs and practicality, and whether more specific standards would require detailed irrigation plans. The existing Code already requires irrigation systems to efficiently water landscaped areas and avoid overspray, overflow, and overlap between landscape zones. Weather-based smart irrigation controllers use weather and site conditions to adjust irrigation schedules rather than operating solely on a fixed clock. WaterSense-labeled controllers are available for both residential and commercial landscapes, including larger facilities. The Washington County Water Conservancy District currently offers an incentive of up to $100 for eligible WaterSense smart controllers. Turf, trees, shrubs, and planting beds have different irrigation needs. Turf typically needs more frequent and shallower watering, while trees and shrubs need less frequent but deeper irrigation. Water-wise guidance recommends placing turf on separate irrigation zones from trees, shrubs, and other landscape plants. Drip irrigation is generally well suited to trees and shrubs because it can apply water at the root zone. For trees, the goal is deep root development rather than a particular irrigation product. Staff could consider performance-based language requiring irrigation to	Does the Commission wish staff to consider limited performance-based irrigation standards for new commercial landscaping, such as: Separate irrigation zones for turf and non-turf plant material; Efficient irrigation of trees, shrubs, and planting beds at the root zone; Weather-based smart controllers for larger commercial landscape projects; and Continued prohibition of overspray, overflow, and runoff? Or, does the Commission prefer to retain the existing general irrigation standard without additional requirements?

	support deeper, less frequent watering of trees and shrubs, rather than requiring deep-watering stakes or a particular emitter type.	
5. Irrigation-plan submittals	Requiring detailed irrigation plans would provide a more direct means to verify compliance with specific irrigation standards. However, such a requirement could increase design costs, add complexity to the Design Development Review process, and require staff review of technical irrigation details not currently included in landscape plans. Some requirements could be verified through landscape-plan notes, equipment specifications, or a limited irrigation schematic rather than a full engineered irrigation plan.	If the Commission wishes to add irrigation standards for new commercial development, should staff evaluate a limited irrigation narrative or schematic rather than a detailed irrigation-plan requirement?

Requested Direction

Staff requests that the Planning Commission review the discussion items above and provide direction on the following:

1. Whether staff should prepare draft ordinance language regulating nonfunctional irrigated lawn in new commercial development and substantial commercial landscape redevelopment;
2. Whether staff should develop a definition of functional lawn area that may include documented event, dining, picnic, play, recreational, or similar social uses;
3. Whether artificial turf should remain a separate research item before staff proposes an amendment to the current visibility prohibition;
4. Whether staff should evaluate limited, performance-based irrigation standards for new commercial landscaping; and
5. Whether the Water Conservancy District lawn-rebate program should remain a future consideration rather than a primary driver of the Town's ordinance development.

Research Resources

Utah State University — *Water-Wise Landscaping: Practical Turfgrass Areas*
Utah State University — *Water Quality Impacts from Artificial Turf and Xeriscaping*
EPA WaterSense — *Weather-Based Irrigation Controllers*
Washington County Water Conservancy District — *Installation and Maintenance*
Washington County Water Conservancy District — *Southern Utah Watering Guide*