



**Date:** January 11, 2021

**To:** Wendell Davis, County Manager  
**Through:** Jay Gibson, General Manager  
**From:** Sara M. Young, AICP, Planning Director  
**Subject:** *Landscape Manual for Durham Revisions*

### **Summary**

The Planning Department staff have drafted proposed changes to the *Landscape Manual for Durham*, in conjunction with City Parks and Recreation, Stormwater and Urban Forestry, as well industry partners and members of the Durham Environmental Coalition. This memo provides a brief description of the proposed revisions.

### **Recommendation**

Staff recommends that the Board of Commissioners approve the proposed revisions.

### **Background**

The *Landscape Manual* applies to all new development governed by the permitting process defined by the Unified Development Ordinance (UDO), and is a compilation of the latest accepted horticultural practices. The information is designed as a supplement to landscaping requirements set forth in the UDO, and it is meant to be used by development and design professionals, landscape contractors, individual citizens, and Planning Department staff to maximize the chances for success of newly installed landscape planting. Last year, members of the department were tasked with updating the *Landscape Manual*, which was originally adopted in December of 2005 and was last revised in April of 2013, in order to reflect current best industry practices after nearly a decade. Suggested revisions were compiled in conjunction with the Department of General Services-Landscaping and Urban Forestry Division, the Department of Public Works-Stormwater, and the Department of Parks and Recreation, with assistance from the Durham Environmental Coalition and industry partners. The *Landscape Manual Revisions* emphasize Durham County *Strategic Plan* Goal 4 (Environmental Stewardship and Community Prosperity) by encouraging the retention and use of native species, and further restricting invasive species in order to help protect and increase natural habitats, as well as Goal 2 (Health and Well-being for All) by discouraging the unnecessary use of soil additives, which leach into streams and Durham's drinking water. The proposed revisions also further the goal of the "Durham Roadmap to Sustainability" to "protect and restore our natural resources and strives to take an ecosystem approach to conserving biodiversity and ecological integrity in our urban environment," as well as the City's *Strategic Plan* Goal 5: Sustainable Natural and Built Environment, specifically the milestone to work with General Services to update the *Manual* to include additional native plants that encourage infiltrations and

evapotranspiration. The revisions also make needed changes to the approved tree list to further the healthy management of street trees that are maintained by General Services within the right-of-way.

### **Issues**

The current *Landscape Manual* includes eight plant tables across 248 pages, breaking trees and shrubs into hardwood, evergreen, native, and non-native species with multiple columns within each table, and multiple cultivars called out specifically for many species. It is very easy to scroll to the wrong table or look in the wrong column without realizing it, leading to the selection of plants that are not allowed for the proposed location and purpose. The current version provides suggestions for drought-resistant plants, but does not adequately address environmentally-friendly planting practices and insufficiently limits known invasive species that can threaten natural habitats in the City and County. It also provides both recommended and required best-practice planting techniques, whereas all of these techniques are techniques that should be followed for the best potential success rate for required plantings for new development. The Department is proposing the following revisions to the *Manual*:

- new formatting of the document for a cleaner look
- consolidated plant charts for ease of use
- removal of the separation of recommended and required techniques
- the addition of “Eco-Tips” to accompany the previous “Water-wise Tips”
- an expanded prohibited plant list, based on recommendations from Urban Forestry staff, the Durham Environmental Coalition, and NC State University

In addition, to support the *Landscape Manual* revisions, staff is also proposing the following UDO text amendments, which will be included in a future Omnibus 16:

- text changes to increase the percentage of native species required to be used in tree replacement and stream buffer areas, also in response to recommendations from the Durham Environmental Coalition
- a certification requirement for planting quality that requires a licensed landscaped architect or licensed landscape contractor to certify that the correct planting techniques, per the *Landscape Manual* and Unified Development Ordinance, were utilized.

The Department has also committed to updating the *Landscape Manual* on a five-year cycle going forward, unless significant industry changes necessitate revisions sooner.

### **Staff Contact**

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### **Attachments**

Attachment A, Draft *Landscape Manual for Durham 2020 Revisions*

Attachment B, *Landscape Manual Checklist for Plant Quality*