

# STAFF REPORT

## Draft Amendments to the Unified Development Ordinance

January 27, 2026 Town Council Meeting



Requested by Planning Committee and Planning Staff:

1. **Amendments to Secs. 8.2.2 *General Landscaping Design Standards, Plant Materials*; and 12.2 *Terms Defined*, to add language permitting the use of artificial turf as a planting material in limited circumstances. The amendments would provide the opportunity for artificial turf to be used within high-activity or heavily trafficked areas where the establishment or long-term maintenance of natural vegetation is impractical, provided it meets applicable drainage and installation standards.**

**Background:** At their September 18, and November 6, 2025, meeting, the Planning Committee directed staff to prepare a new UDO amendment addressing the use of artificial turf on non-residential sites in a manner consistent with N.C.G.S. §143-214.7D (Limitations on Built-Upon Area Requirements). The statute allows artificial turf to be considered a pervious planting material when it is manufactured to allow water to drain through the backing and installed over a pervious surface in accordance with the manufacturer's specifications. The amendments proposed herein satisfy that directive by aligning the UDO with state law and providing limited flexibility for site design in areas subject to heavy use or maintenance constraints.

### 8.2.2 General Landscaping Design Standards

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#### B) *Plant Materials*

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##### 3) *Plant Sizes and Standards*

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- g) Grass shall be planted in species normally grown as permanent lawns in the Town and region. In swales or other areas subject to erosion, solid sod, erosion-reducing net, or suitable mulch shall be used and nursegrass seed shall be sown for immediate protection until complete coverage otherwise is achieved. Grass sod shall be free and clean of weeds and noxious pests or diseases. Ground cover shall be planted in such a manner as to provide 75% complete coverage after two growing seasons.

##### h) *Artificial Turf*

- (i) As an alternative to grass, artificial turf meeting the requirements of N.C.G.S. §143-214.7D may be permitted as pervious where its use enhances site durability, minimizes erosion, or addresses maintenance constraints, provided it is installed to ensure adequate drainage and long-term performance. Artificial turf shall be a natural grass color and shall be limited to areas where the Planning Director or designee determines that natural vegetation is impractical to establish or sustain, including but not limited to:

- (a) Athletic fields;

- (b) Narrow pedestrian corridors between buildings or courtyards;
- (c) Roof terraces;
- (d) Shaded gathering areas;
- (e) Small or confined areas subject to high foot traffic; or
- (f) Common areas intended for a high volume of foot traffic.

(ii) Artificial turf that does not meet the requirements of N.C.G.S. §143-214.7D may be permitted as impervious provided that the total built-upon area does not exceed the limitations in Sec. 5.1 *Table of Intensity and Dimensional Standards*.

(iii) Artificial turf shall be prohibited within required landscape buffers, Resource Conservation Area (RCA), privately-owned play lawns, riparian buffers, floodplains, and any areas prohibited by state law, and shall not be credited toward required landscape materials or minimum planting area calculations.

i) **Existing Installations of Artificial Turf**  
Artificial turf installed prior to January 27, 2026, may remain in place, provided it is maintained in good condition and does not create drainage, erosion, or stormwater compliance issues. Existing artificial turf installations shall be subject to the following provisions:

- (i) **Maintenance.** Existing artificial turf shall be maintained in good condition, free of tears, fading, deterioration, or drainage deficiencies.
- (ii) **Expansion.** Expansion of artificial turf areas beyond their originally installed footprint shall not be permitted except in conformance with current Ordinance requirements.

## 12.2 Terms Defined

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### Artificial Turf

Artificial turf means a surface composed of synthetic fibers designed to replicate the appearance and function of natural grass. It is typically used in locations where natural grass would otherwise be installed, including sports fields, residential areas, and commercial developments.

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### Grass

Grass means natural, living vegetation consisting of perennial turf-forming species suitable for

use as groundcover in lawns, landscaped areas, and open spaces. Grass does not include artificial or synthetic turf.

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**Requested by Planning Staff:**

2. **Amendments to Sec. 8.3.6 Off-Street Parking and Loading, Parking Lot Design Standards, to allow gravel overflow parking for “Church or places of worship”, and “Assembly hall, nonprofit” uses located in the Residential Agricultural (RA) and Rural Residential (RR) zoning districts, subject to specific design and performance standards.**

**Background:** Staff propose amendments to the UDO to provide flexibility for overflow parking at “Church or places of worship”, and “Assembly hall, nonprofit” uses located in the Residential Agricultural (RA) and Rural Residential (RR) districts. These uses often experience peak parking demand during limited times (e.g., services or special events), leading to underutilized paved areas and higher construction costs. The proposed amendments would allow gravel overflow parking, provided it complies with N.C.G.S. 143-214.7D, resulting in a more flexible, rural-compatible solution while maintaining safety and environmental standards.

### 8.3.6 Parking Lot Design Standards

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#### D) *Surfacing and Maintenance*

All off-street parking areas shall be paved and kept in a dust-free condition at all times. Permeable pavement, if used, shall comply with the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality's Minimum Design Criteria in the NCDEQ Stormwater Design Manual.

##### 1) *Exceptions*

Parking for the following shall be gravel or paved and kept in a dust-free condition at all times:

- a) All uses in the CB Conservation Buffer zoning district;
- b) Athletic Fields only under the category of “Entertainment, ~~O~~outdoor” where allowed;
- c) Uses associated with Landmark and other historic structures. Exposed aggregate concrete, or similar, may be used for paving and railroad ties or landscape timbers may be used in lieu of concrete wheel stops;
- d) Land clearing and inert debris landfills; and
- e) All Agricultural uses; and
- f) Overflow parking areas serving a “Church or place of worship” or an “Assembly Hall, nonprofit” use that is located within the Residential Agricultural (RA) or Rural Residential (RR) zoning district, provided the overflow area does not exceed 25% of the total number of required or provided parking spaces onsite, whichever is greater, and complies with the gravel construction standards listed below.**

2) In order to be considered pervious, gravel parking areas shall be constructed and maintained in compliance with N.C.G.S. 143-214.7D, including all applicable stormwater, sedimentation, and erosion control requirements, and shall remain in a stable, dust-free condition. Otherwise, gravel parking shall at a minimum meet the following specifications:

- a) Compacted Subgrade;
- b) 6 Inches Aggregate Base Course;
- c) 1.5 Inches #78M Stone; and
- d) Drive aisles must be repaired or replaced with #78M Stone every six (6) months.

3. **Amendments to Sec. 8.3.9.C Off-Street Alternatives, Shared Parking, Table 8.3-8: Shared Parking Demand by Land Use and Time of Day**, to amend the required number of weekend daytime parking spaces for the “Medical/Dental Office” and “Bank” land use categories to better reflect observed demand patterns and ensure consistency with current parking utilization standards

**Background:** Staff propose to amend this section of the UDO to update the shared parking requirements of Table 8.3-8: *Shared Parking Demand by Land Use and Time of Day*, which currently requires 100% of the required parking spaces for the “Medical/dental office” and “Bank” uses. The new standards of 10% for “Medical/dental offices” and 5% for “Banks” more accurately reflect realistic weekend demand.

#### 8.3.9 Off-Street Parking Alternative

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C) *Shared Parking*

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Table 8.3-8: Shared Parking Demand by Land Use and Time of Day

Land Use	Weekday		Weekend		Nighttime
	Daytime (6am-5pm)	Evening (5pm-12am)	Daytime (6am-5pm)	Evening (5pm-12am)	(12am-6am)
Residential	60%	100%	80%	100%	100%
Office/warehouse/ industrial	100%	10%	10%	5%	5%
Retail	60%	90%	100%	70%	5%
Restaurant	70%	100%	100%	70%	10%
Hotel/motel	75%	100%	75%	100%	100%
Entertainment	40%	100%	80%	100%	10%
Church or place of worship	10%	10%	100% during regularly scheduled worship/ service times, including 1 hour before and after such times; otherwise 10%	10%	5%
Bank	100%	5%	100% <u>5%</u>	5%	5%
Health/fitness centers and spas	70%	100%	80%	60%	5%
Medical/dental office	100%	50%	100% <u>10%</u>	5%	5%

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4. **Amendment to Sec. 2.3.6.C.1 *Site Plan, Exemptions*, to clarify that all developments qualifying as “exempt” under this section shall obtain administrative approval of an Exempt Site Plan from the Planning Director prior to the commencement of any construction activity, unless otherwise expressly exempted by the provisions of this UDO.**

**Background:** Staff propose to amend Sec. 2.3.6.C.1 of the Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) to ensure consistent application of site plan requirements. Under current language, exempt developments are not required to submit a standard site plan; however, ambiguity exists regarding whether administrative approval is necessary before construction begins. This amendment explicitly requires that exempt developments secure administrative approval of an Exempt Site Plan from the Planning Director prior to construction, unless otherwise expressly exempted by the provisions of the UDO. The change eliminates uncertainty surrounding the term “administrative approval,” promotes uniform interpretation, and strengthens compliance with the Town’s development review process.

### 2.3.6 *Site Plan*

#### C) *Exemptions*

- 1) Any development or activity that is exempt from site plan review pursuant to Subsection 2.3.6.C.2.b., d., e., f., g., h., i., or j. below shall not be undertaken without an administrative approval of an Exempt Site Plan by the Planning Director. Any proposed expansion exempt under 2.3.6.C.2.g. must meet all applicable provisions of this Ordinance to the extent of the expansion and not increase any nonconformity. The application for administrative approval shall be in a form approved by the Planning Director

#### **PLANNING STAFF RECOMMENDATION:**

Planning staff recommend approval of the proposed amendments.

#### **PLANNING BOARD RECOMMENDATION:**

The Planning Board received a presentation as a new business item during their January 12, 2026, meeting, and voted unanimously to recommend approval.