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MEMORANDUM

DATE: March 28, 2022

TO: Mayor Arndt and City Councilmembers

FROM: Katie Collins, Water Conservation Coordinator [Signature] 3/29/2022
Jesse Schlam, Senior Environmental Regulatory Specialist [Signature] 3/29/2022
Abbye Neel, Interim Water Conservation Manager [Signature] 3/29/2022
Gretchen Stanford, Customer Connection Deputy Director [Signature] 3/29/2022

THROUGH: Kelly DiMartino, Interim City Manager [Signature] 3/30/2022
Kendall Minor, Utilities Executive Director [Signature] 3/30/2022

RE: Xeriscape and Soil Amendment Council Priorities Update

Bottom Line

Utilities staff take pride in delivering exceptional services and continue to look for opportunities to further promote water-wise principles. The purpose of this memo is to:

- 1) Provide an update on work that supports the three topic areas included in the 2021-23 Xeriscape Council priority: increase rebates, increase education, and less green lawns with new development.
2) Provide an update on work that supports the 2021-23 Soil Amendment Council priority that calls for effective soil amendment policies and compliance.

Xeriscape Rebates

Since 2016, the Xeriscape Incentive Program (XIP) has reduced outdoor water use by providing rebates to Utilities water customers who convert from high-water (i.e., Kentucky bluegrass) to low-water landscapes, such as shrub beds, water-wise turfgrasses, permeable hardscaping and more. Nearly 300 projects have been completed and 350,000+ square feet of high-water landscape have turned water-wise through the program.

In 2020, the commercial XIP incentive was added with the help of outside grant funding to serve Utilities commercial water customers. Since inception, 19 commercial projects have been installed across 650,000 square feet. Another 12 projects are scheduled to be completed by the end of the year.

Participants of XIP are required to certify loosening of soil and incorporation of a soil amendment with a notarized soil amendment certificate, pursuant to Ordinance No. 084, 2003.



An example of a 2021 Xeriscape Incentive Program project in midtown.

XIP continues to be funded by the Water Conservation budget, state, and federal grant funding, and a 2021 awarded BFO enhancement offer.

In partnership with Nature in the City, successful Xeriscape projects can be found by using the self-guided Fort Collins [Garden Tour](#) via an interactive story map. Garden ‘tourists’ are also encouraged to check out the gardens onsite.

[Garden In A Box](#) helps take the guesswork out of landscape design for XIP and non-XIP residents alike. Utilities, Nature in the City and Fort Collins-Loveland Water District partner with Resource Central to offer discounts on do-it-yourself perennial garden kits allowing residents to easily save water and beautify their landscape. New in 2022, Utilities has offered a limited number of \$100 discounts to income-qualified water customers.

Xeriscape Education

Utilities provides and supports numerous xeriscape education opportunities each year:

- **XIP Basics** – XIP participants are required to attend this class to learn how to efficiently water landscapes. Class content has changed over the years, but customer feedback remains overwhelmingly positive. Since 2016, over 500 people have joined us for XIP classes.
- [Xeriscape Garden Party](#) – This June marks the 20th annual event, and we will be celebrating all month long - both in-person on June 18 at the Xeriscape Demonstration Garden and online via webinars and virtual resources. This event typically welcomes approximately 400+ people in-person. In 2021, during the first ever virtual Garden Party, over 7,000 people engaged with content throughout the monthlong event.
- [Xeriscape Demonstration Garden](#) – In recent years, nearly 50 new species were planted, and educational signage was updated. The garden has a history – at the time of installation, it was only the second Xeriscape Garden in the world! Today, it continues to be an important resource showcasing the methods, plants, and materials for low-water gardening.
- [City of Fort Collins Plant List](#) – Published in May 2021, this educational tool was developed through a collaboration of several City departments. The plant list resource is now the most



comprehensive and information-rich list of Fort Collins native plants to date and is intended for a wide audience - from the small plot gardener to the large-scale developer.

- **Gardens on Spring Creek Adult Education** – Utilities continues to partner with the Gardens on Spring Creek to subsidize courses focused on water-wise landscapes and irrigation.

Less green lawns with new development

Effective January 1, 2022, **Water Supply Requirements** are helping to move new development toward low-water landscapes. The new fee structure is more closely tied to landscape water requirements such that development fees are less for landscapes that use less water.

Soil Amendments

In addition to over 250 soil amendment certificates received through the Xeriscape Incentive Program, Utilities has inspected and collected over 2,300 soil amendment certificates on development projects over the past five years. The soil amendment program has been providing online resources and guidance to developers, builders, landscapers, and residential customers online since June 2012 welcoming 3,542 unique visitors. To spread awareness and compliance of the soil amendment ordinance, the program provides brochures in the field and at the building department.

Next Steps

Staff continues to be focused on identifying program efficiencies that reduce barriers to participation. A new pilot of the Xeriscape Incentive Program aimed at getting more rebates to businesses and households will be offered this fall. A continuing enhancement offer for the Xeriscape Incentive Program will be submitted for the 2023-2024 budget cycle.

Staff is working towards providing an **update to xeriscape and soil amendment regulations**. Land-use consultant Clarion Associates has been hired to research and benchmark the City's current xeriscape and soil amendment codes against peer communities to help understand gaps and opportunities. Public outreach on proposed changes, including discussions with the other major water districts, is scheduled for summer 2022. Staff will present proposed regulations to Council for comment at the Oct. 11 work session.

Coming Up

- **XIP Basics** - April 5 and May 7 - Register at fcgov.com/xip
- **Xeriscape Garden Party** – June 18, from 9 a.m.-noon at 300 Laporte Ave. - fcgov.com/garden-party
- **Oct. 11 work session** - Council will be asked to weigh in on proposed xeriscape and soil amendment regulations.