

CITY OF PALM DESERT STAFF REPORT

MEETING DATE: September 26, 2024

PREPARED BY: Julia Breyer, Management Analyst
Martin Alvarez, Director of Public Works

SUBJECT: RESOLUTION TO APPROVE THE ARTIFICIAL TURF/SYNTHETIC
GRASS ADMINISTRATIVE POLICY NO. PW-001

RECOMMENDATION:

Adopt a Resolution entitled, "A RESOLUTION OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PALM DESERT, CALIFORNIA, ADOPTING ADMINISTRATIVE POLICY NO. PW-001 TO PROHIBIT THE USE OF ARTIFICIAL TURF/SYNTHETIC GRASS IN PUBLIC RIGHTS-OF-WAY."

BACKGROUND/ANALYSIS:

On December 14, 2023, the City Council received a study session presentation regarding the use of artificial turf/synthetic grass. During that meeting, the City Council discussed concerns regarding artificial turf/synthetic grass and directed staff to conduct research and return with a policy at a future meeting.

In 2016, Senate Bill 676 (SB 676) was adopted, encouraging the transition to landscape alternatives that use less water, such as artificial turf/synthetic grass. However, in October 2023, SB 676 was amended and approved by the Governor, stating that artificial turf/synthetic grass is no longer an acceptable form of drought-tolerant landscaping. Significant environmental issues have been identified with these installations, including water and soil pollution from synthetic grass and artificial turf debris, increased stormwater runoff from insufficient ground percolation, and a lack of recyclability. Pursuant to Government Code section 53087.7, cities may prohibit the installation of artificial turf/synthetic grass on residential property.

Government Code Section 53087.7:

- (a) A city, including a charter city, county, or city and county, shall not enact any ordinance or regulation, or enforce any existing ordinance or regulation, that prohibits the installation of drought-tolerant landscaping using living plant material on residential property.
- (b) For the purposes of this section, "drought-tolerant landscaping" shall not include the installation of artificial turf/synthetic grass.

Following feedback from the City Council and additional research, City staff developed an Artificial Turf/Synthetic Grass Administrative Policy. The policy states that the City will no longer utilize artificial turf/synthetic grass in public rights-of-way, including medians, parkways, landscaped areas around public facilities, and City parks. Artificial turf/synthetic grass acts as a barrier, limiting the absorption of groundwater and leading to pooling and increased runoff during storm events. Additionally, artificial turf/synthetic grass products may contain plastics, nylon, and crumb rubber materials that degrade over time, potentially leaching into the environment and harming the City's ecosystem and watershed.

Artificial turf/synthetic grass is not recyclable and may contribute to plastic pollution and increased waste in landfills. Biodiverse landscapes containing native plants and vegetation help communities by strengthening the local ecosystems and building climate resilience.

Currently, the only remaining section of artificial turf/synthetic grass in the City is in the median at El Paseo and San Pablo. This artificial turf/synthetic grass will be replaced once it reaches the end of its anticipated lifespan, which the City expects to occur within the next 1 to 2 years. In preparation for this, City staff are developing a comprehensive landscape master plan that will address medians throughout the City, including the area currently featuring the artificial turf. This plan will guide the replacement and enhancement of this median with a new, sustainable solution.

The administrative policy specifically applies to City public rights-of-way, medians, parkways, landscaped areas around public facilities, and City parks. It also reinforces the City's commitment to water conservation and environmental preservation. Therefore, City staff recommends that the City Council adopt the resolution to approve the artificial turf and synthetic grass policy.

Legal Review:

This report has been reviewed by the City Attorney's office.

Appointed Body Recommendation:

At the February 27, 2024, and August 26, 2024, Resource Preservation and Enhancement Committee meetings, the Committee reviewed and supported the recommendation for City Council to adopt the resolution to approve the artificial turf/synthetic grass policy.

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

There is no financial impact associated with the adoption of the resolution and approval of the administrative policy.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Resolution
 - a. Exhibit A, Administrative Policy (PW-001)