

## CITY COUNCIL OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE MINUTES

May 8, 2013

The City Council Oversight Committee of the City of Norman, Cleveland County, State of Oklahoma, met at 5:30 p.m. in the City Council Conference Room on the 8th day of May, 2013, and notice and agenda of the meeting were posted in the Municipal Building at 201 West Gray 48 hours prior to the beginning of the meeting.

PRESENT:	Councilmembers Castleberry, Jungman, and Chairman Kovach
ABSENT:	Councilmembers Lockett and Spaulding
OTHERS PRESENT:	Ms. Amanda Nairn, Chair, Environmental Control Advisory Board Ms. Joy Hampton, <u>The Norman Transcript</u>
STAFF PRESENT:	Ms. Susan Connors, Director of Planning and Community Development Mr. Terry Floyd, Development Coordinator Ms. Janay Greenlee, Planner II Ms. Leah Messner, Assistant City Attorney Ms. Syndi Runyon, Administrative Assistant IV

Item 1, being:

### DISCUSSION REGARDING THE USE OF NATIVE LAWN GRASSES TO FURTHER WATER CONSERVATION EFFORTS.

Chairman Kovach said millions of gallons of water is used every year on lawns and allowing developers to plant native and drought resistant plants and grasses will lessen the impact of water usage in the future.

Ms. Susan Connors, Director of Planning and Community Development, said Council requested a report on water conservation and native grasses that could be recommended for lawns. She highlighted five varieties of native grasses that can be used on commercial or residential properties, i.e., Bermuda grass; Fescue; naturally occurring weeds (clover, vetch, crab grass, geranium, dandelions); Buffalo grass; and Habiturf.

#### BERMUDA GRASS

Bermuda grass is a full sun grass that can be planted most anytime of the year; is a moderate water user; and is fairly drought and heat tolerant. There is a tendency to overwater Bermuda due to its response to dormancy in cycles of drought and extreme heat, is very invasive and requires control measures to keep out of landscape beds and fertilizer and herbicide application needs to be increased to keep it free of weeds and increase “the green.”

#### FESCUE

Fescue grows well in the shade or semi-sun, can be planted in the fall, is moderately easy to establish, and uses moderate watering. It does not tolerate extreme heat and full sun locations and needs to be maintained with higher use of fertilizer and herbicide applications.

### NATURALLY OCCURRING PERENNIALS (clover, vetch, crab grass, geranium, dandelions)

Naturally occurring perennials will survive in full sun to shade locations, but most people view these species as weeds and apply herbicides to kill them out. They can survive in drought and extreme heat conditions with minimal water.

### BUFFALO GRASS

Buffalo grass is a native short prairie grass that grows easily and is basically easy to care for. It must be maintained at six inches to survive; requires low water use; has extreme tolerance to drought and heat; aesthetically resembles a short grass prairie; and requires no fertilizer or herbicide application. Buffalo grass should not be planted near Bermuda grass as Bermuda grass has a tendency to take over.

### HABITURF

Habiturf is a mix of three native prairie short grasses (buffalo, blue grama, and curly-mesquite) and has the same characteristics of buffalo grass.

Chairman Kovach asked what requirements are placed on developers and subsequent Property Owner Associations (POA) in relation to what to plant in greenspaces and maintenance of that greenspace. Ms. Connors said POA's are required to maintain common green areas, but the City does not dictate any specific type of landscaping or grass.

Chairman Kovach said a constituent contacted him about Habiturf and how it required minimal water. He asked if Staff had further information on Habiturf and Ms. Janay Greenlee, Planner II, said Habiturf does not need to be irrigated like Bermuda grass and too much water will kill it out. She said people have a tendency to want to use herbicides and fertilizers which will kill native grass. She said Habiturf is available as a seed that needs to be established, which takes more preparatory work prior by removing native perennials or Bermuda grass. She said it will be hard to recommend planting Buffalo grass if there is any outlying perimeter of Bermuda. She said a possible locations for the use of Buffalo grass and Habiturf are parking lot islands. She said this would reduce the amount of watering and mowing that needs to be done since both grasses are type of prairie grass that need to be maintained at a height of least six inches to survive with minimal water. She said POA's interested in these grasses will need to be educated on what locations are best suited for growing them. Chairman Kovach said although the grass is taller, it still gives that green, soft carpet feel when walked on.

Ms. Amanda Nairn, Chair of the Environmental Control Advisory Board (ECAB), was concerned that people planting one of these types of prairie grasses would be fined or cited for the grass being too long. Ms. Connors said grass has to be a minimum of twelve inches before it is a code violation; however, the City does receive numerous complaints on grass that is only four inches high so there may be complaints, but no violations. She said it would require education.

Chairman Kovach said islands in parking lots are a viable location, but medians are another example. He said the City is responsible for watering and maintaining most medians and felt this would be a great location for prairie grass. He said the City should set an example by planting native plants and grasses in medians that can survive primarily on their own. Chairman Kovach asked if the City could make allowances for businesses that plant native grasses in parking lots by waiving irrigation requirements and Ms. Connors said the requirement could be modified to be consistent with ensuring the native grass was kept alive, but to get grass rooted, it needs to be watered. Ms. Greenlee said developers must submit a three year landscaping maintenance bond, which is half of the cost of their installation and plant materials and after three years the

City checks to make sure the landscaping is doing well before returning the maintenance bond. She said this is a way to ensure people take care of the grass or plants when they do not have an irrigation system. Chairman Kovach said planting native grasses could reduce the cost of landscaping as well as the cost of the bond. She said the City recently allowed a business to use native rock, native grasses, and trees in their landscaping without irrigation.

Chairman Kovach asked members how they felt about Staff working on modifying the requirements to give the option of planting native grasses and plants and members did not have a problem with developers and businesses having an option. Councilmember Castleberry said anything the City can do to encourage planting native grasses and plants is great, but he did not want to require it.

Ms. Greenlee said public education is the key to getting the process started. Councilmember Castleberry agreed and said people also need to be educated that Bermuda does not need to be watered as much as they think. Ms. Joy Hampton, The Norman Transcript, said she was walking through her neighborhood recently and someone had sprinklers on right after a rain and the sprinklers were pointed at and spraying the driveway. Ms. Greenlee said Planning Staff has been discussing ways to educate people on utilizing irrigation systems.

Chairman Kovach suggested putting together an educational video on “maintaining lawns during a drought” to be played on Channel 20 and the website. He said a lot of people do not understand that overwatering grass is a waste of resources and money.

Ms. Nairn said “public education” is a buzzword used frequently, but what does it mean exactly. She asked how the City accesses a group of people who are not interested or do not pay attention to City government. She said there are tons of articles in the local newspaper all the time, but not everyone gets the newspaper. She said ECAB has worked on the challenge of public education for years and have not accomplished much. Chairman Kovach said a video would allow the information to get out into social media to be shared, which encompasses a different group. He felt getting information to the school system is one way to change mindsets. He said the school system became involved in educating children on recycling and that has had a great impact so if children were educated on landscaping, lawns, and irrigation then that could have an impact as well.

Ms. Hampton said incentives could be given to people for using native grasses and plants. She said an incentive could be an award for best lawn or landscaping. She said Owasso, Oklahoma, hired a Neighborhood Coordinator that worked with aging neighborhoods, at-risk neighborhoods, etc., and brought the neighborhoods together. She said the City of Norman could form a citizen’s group to help neighborhoods in peril. She said when lawns are not mowed, when windows are broken, when things look shoddy then people flee those neighborhoods and the neighborhoods begin to deteriorate more. She said a Neighborhood Coordinator could tackle those types of problems and get neighborhoods organized. Chairman Kovach said the City of Norman Police Department works with voluntary neighborhood associations and Neighborhood Watches. He said it would be nice to have a master list of POA’s to contact and Ms. Nairn said ECAB could work on putting a list together. ECAB also discussed hosting a “Water Wise Yard of the Month” contest to highlight lawns and landscaping that use native plants and grasses. Ms. Connors said while there is no POA master list there are a couple of agencies that manage properties for POA’s and she could get that information for ECAB. Councilmember Castleberry said most newer developments have POA’s that send out newsletters and emails to property owners and felt the City could try to obtain information through those avenues.

#### Items submitted for the record

1. Memorandum dated May 2, 2013, from Susan Connors, Director of Planning and Community Development, to Council Oversight Committee

Item 4, being:

MISCELLANEOUS DISCUSSION.

None

ADJOURNMENT.

The meeting adjourned at 6:00 p.m.

ATTEST:

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City Clerk

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Mayor