FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Water Efficient Landscape Ordinance Update

Q: What is in the ordinance update?

A: Erie's current landscape ordinance offers some guidance on water-efficient landscaping, but does not require it. The updated ordinance will integrate the use of water-efficient plants and irrigation systems mandatory for new development and certain redevelopment projects. These updates will reflect the latest water-saving technologies and best practices, helping Erie become more water resilient while still supporting vibrant and resilient landscapes.

Q: Who will this apply to?

A: The updated ordinance will apply only to:

- All new construction, including residential and non-residential, that are to be constructed by a developer or property owner;
- Total redevelopment of a parcel, including demolition and new construction;
- A construction project that:
  - Requires a building permit or site plan, and
  - Disturbs more than 50% of the existing landscaped area.
- New or redesigned parking lots with 10 or more spaces.

Existing landscapes that are not being redeveloped are not affected by the ordinance

Q: Why is the Town doing this?

A: Water conservation is a top priority for Erie. The Town aims to reduce water use by 10% to meet a target of 115 gallons per person per day (gpcd) by 2030. As Erie continues to grow, requiring low-water plants and efficient irrigation in new development and redevelopment is one of the most effective ways to reduce outdoor water use. These waterwise landscapes also lower water bills, support local ecosystems and pollinators, and reflect the natural beauty of Colorado's Front Range.

Q: Will reducing grass make Erie hotter?

A: No. When designed well, water-efficient landscapes with living plants and trees, cool the environment just as well as cool-season turfgrass. A study from the Desert Research Institute found that low-water landscapes can offer similar daytime cooling benefits — as long as they include vegetation rather than just rocks or mulch.

Q: How will this impact how Erie looks?

A: Established landscapes that aren't being redeveloped will stay the same. The ordinance doesn't ban lawns — it only prohibits Kentucky bluegrass and other cool-season turf species that require more than 20 inches of water per growing season.

- Single-family homes can still have turfgrass, but are limited to 50% of the landscaped area, and it must be low-water turf (under 19 inches per season), such as blue grama or buffalo grass.
- At least 75% of annuals and trees, and 100% of shrubs, perennials, and grasses must be water-efficient species.

Water efficient landscaping doesn't mean just rocks and cacti. It includes native and climate-adapted plants arranged for both beauty and efficiency — with vibrant colors, shade, and habitat for pollinators. The goal is to create functional, attractive outdoor spaces that are well-suited to our climate.

Q: Will this make new homes in Erie more expensive?

A: Waterwise landscapes can cost more to install up front than traditional turf lawns. However, these landscapes typically increase home value and significantly reduce water bills, saving homeowners money over time.

Water-wise native plant garden in front of a Denver, CO residence. Picture Source: Resource Central

Q: Once water efficient landscapes are installed, what will prevent people from replacing those with traditional grass lawns again?

A: In most Western cities, this hasn't been a widespread issue. A study from the Los Angeles Metropolitan Water District found that only 0.6% of homes reverted entirely back to turf — often when homes were sold. In Erie, the updated ordinance would restrict the reinstallation of cool-season turf in redeveloped landscapes. Plus, Erie can use water budget pricing to discourage reconversion — charging lower rates for low-water use and higher rates for excessive irrigation. Water efficient yards use far less water once established, so residents have a financial incentive to keep them. Even if a homeowner tries to bring back turfgrass, only up to 50% of the landscape can be replanted with approved low-water grasses.