

SB24-005 Potential Cost-Implications

We asked developers/designers/landscape community questions through email and through phone conversations about the potential cost implications, and these are the general responses:

Q1: What are the primary concerns for implementing new water-saving designs?

- The main concerns are design costs and utility setbacks, particularly with water meter placement requirements (15 feet from any structure). These constraints can limit the adoption of water-saving designs.
- There are additional concerns surrounding 75% of living material coverage requirements in parkways. Developers believe it will be challenging to achieve, given utilities' setbacks and limited planting options. Parkway will require additional design prior to submitting the project.
- Probably City approval for a water-wise planting palette that does not heavily rely on turf and may be inconsistent with current codes (but you are addressing this!).
- Typically, developers see the initial install cost of projects go up when implementing new water-saving designs, as the plant material is always more specific and therefore more costly. Additionally, many places that have implemented water-saving designs require additional, specialized irrigation parts, such as drip head indicators or specialized irrigation clocks (specifically smart clocks). While water-saving designs help with water usage, the initial design and requirements can increase the cost of a job by upwards of 20% due to the additional materials needed.
- One primary concern for this company is that artificial turf may be wrongly excluded from water-saving initiatives or even restricted, despite its proven benefits. Artificial turf significantly reduces water usage and has clear environmental benefits, offering a sustainable alternative to traditional landscaping. It also offers additional ecological benefits beyond water conservation, including reduced chemical use and lower emissions from maintenance equipment.

Q2: How do upfront design costs impact the adoption of water-efficient landscaping?

- Upfront costs aren't necessarily higher, but design constraints (like setbacks) can affect the overall design. HOAs installing synthetic turf and drip lines have found costs comparable to and even cheaper than traditional grass lawn installation and maintenance.
- Design costs throughout the project approval process are of concern. New landscape requirements, especially surrounding parkways, will require more billable design hours from developers and landscape architects.
- A developer considers the long-term cost savings in terms of less water used; it is just a matter of considering that fact when preparing a budget or project proforma.
- If water calculations are necessary, that math does take time to get together, meaning that design fees go up. Many designers are per hour opposed to per design, which means adding

in water calculation tables, diagrams, and more in-depth design details can double the design cost on a singular home/project.

- This company indicates that artificial turf offers a more sustainable and cost-effective solution over time. It eliminates the need for irrigation, mowing, and fertilizing. This leads to substantial savings in water bills and maintenance costs. These long-term financial and environmental benefits make artificial turf an attractive option for water-efficient landscaping.

Q3: Who is typically responsible for maintenance costs in water-saving projects?

- HOAs are typically responsible for maintenance costs in open spaces, which are reportedly low due to water-saving measures. Property owners are generally happy, except for the lack of trees in some areas.
- Speaking strictly from LHA's perspective as a landlord, they are responsible for the maintenance costs.
- Another developer said that the maintenance falls upon the builder until it is turned over to the HOA, and then they shoulder that burden.
- Maintenance costs are typically the responsibility of homeowners or property owners. However, the broader community benefits from the use of artificial turf. A single artificial turf field can save up to 2.7 million gallons of water annually compared to an irrigated sand-based grass field. Additionally, it eliminates the need for lawn chemicals, reducing chemical runoff into local water sources.

Q4: What long-term benefits do water-efficient designs offer in terms of irrigation costs?

- Long-term benefits include reduced water usage and infrastructure costs (e.g., no pop-up irrigation systems). Drip lines are used instead, which are more cost-effective.
- Developers have mentioned that the cost difference between permanent and temporary irrigation systems may be minimal.
- Over time, the cost savings of using less water are easily demonstrable. As costs continue to rise for both potable and non-potable water sources, this will be even more of a no-brainer.
- A landscape company mentioned that they typically install homes/commercial projects; they do not see a significant impact of the cost savings for water-efficient designs. Still, they do know it benefits their customers in the long run and ideally helps with the cost savings of another project down the road.
- This artificial turf company indicates that it dramatically reduces irrigation costs. Beyond water savings, it also eliminates the need for mowing and fertilizing. It is a low-maintenance and cost-effective solution. Over time, these savings contribute significantly to both individual and community resource conservation.

Q5: Are there any specific industry perspectives on balancing initial costs with future savings?

- Initial costs can be reduced, especially with lower water tap fees (previously 40% of tap fees went to irrigation). The industry needs to prove the effectiveness of these designs over time, but universal adoption could lead to significant cost savings.
- It is possible that a market-rate developer that wants to stabilize and then sell/flip an asset may have a different perspective due to a different business model. However, demonstrable savings over time in terms of water cost should be a motivator in either case.
- Currently, this landscape company has not done a deep dive analysis of their projects, which are mixed between traditional and water-efficient, so unfortunately, they do not have any specifics for this question.
- One company indicated that the ongoing savings offered by artificial turf are substantial. Natural grass demands year-round maintenance—including watering, mowing, fertilizing, and seasonal treatments—all of which add up. In contrast, artificial turf requires relatively minimal upkeep and reduced water usage, making it a more economical and environmentally sustainable option in the long run.