

TRANSPORTATION AND DEVELOPMENT
COMMITTEE AGENDA: June 9, 1994

ITEM #6

CITY OF SAN JOSE - MEMORANDUM

TO: Transportation and
Development Committee

FROM: Ralph A. Qualls, Jr.
Director of Public Works

Wayne K. Tanda
Director of
Streets and Parks

SUBJECT: Median Island
Landscape Program

DATE: May 27, 1994

APPROVED: *[Signature]*

DATE: 6/7/94

COUNCIL DISTRICT: City-Wide

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Transportation and Development Committee approve the following plan of action for the City Council regarding the Median Island Landscape Program:

1. Approve a median island landscape program with two levels of median island development distinguished by the source of funding for maintenance -

Type 1: City-Maintained Standard will include trees and paved surfaces only; exemptions would permit shrubs and ground covers at Downtown sites.

Type 2: Assessment District-Maintained Standard will include trees, shrubs, ground cover, and/or paving materials.
2. Approve a four-step process for developing a master plan for implementing median island landscape projects over the next five fiscal years.
3. Approve a standard of landscape development for park strips and back-up strips consistent with the City's water conservation policy and dedicated resources to maintain and protect such sites.

BACKGROUND

On June 21, 1983, the City Council approved a policy which required that all new median islands and back-up strips along major thoroughfares be planted rather than paved. Based on a study and analysis by the Public Works Department and the then Neighborhood

Maintenance Department, the City Council selected, as a goal, that all median islands and back-up strips be planted with trees and shrubs that are supported by automatic irrigation systems.

The landscaping of median islands has been accomplished over the years by four different processes:

1. When major thoroughfares are funded and constructed through the Capital Improvements Program, median island landscaping is included in the project, as required by current adopted City policy;
2. When private developers are required to improve the street frontage adjacent to their project, median island landscaping is included where applicable, as required by current adopted City policy;
3. When traffic safety or operational improvements are funded and constructed through the Capital Improvement Program, median island landscaping is included where applicable; and
4. The construction of median island landscaping on existing major thoroughfares has been accomplished through the program known as the Median Island Landscaping (MIL) in the Capital Improvement Program.

The MIL program was in effect from fiscal year 1984-85 until fiscal year 1987-88. The program was temporarily suspended in fiscal year 1987-88 due to budgetary deficiencies.

In fiscal year 1990-91, restoration of the improvement program was considered and one-time funding was approved. The adopted 1990-91 Capital Improvement Program approved \$1,500,000 for median island landscaping. However, due to an ongoing drought, planning for such landscape improvements was put on hold.

In fiscal year 1993-94, master planning for median island landscaping is under way again. The proposed 1994-95 Capital Budget designates \$1,457,000 in funds for landscaping unspecified median islands. The proposed Capital Improvement Program for years 1995-99, designates \$350,000 for landscaping in each of the following four years, for a total proposed five-year budget of \$2,857,000.

Exhibit A is an inventory of existing landscaped median islands on major thoroughfares.

Maintenance of landscaped median islands was the responsibility of the former Streets and Traffic Department until fiscal year 1992-93. Late in fiscal year 1992-93, the parks maintenance component of the former Recreation, Parks, and Community Services Department was merged with street maintenance responsibilities under the newly titled Streets and Parks Department.

The Streets and Parks Department is responsible for the maintenance of landscaping in public parks and in street right-of-ways. Maintenance of median islands by the City is funded primarily from the general fund. The exception is median islands within an assessment district, which are maintained by the City with funding from the assessment district.

ANALYSIS

The purpose of this memorandum is to present a case for the establishment of a new standard of landscape development for median islands and back-up strips maintained with City general funds ("City-maintained"), given limited resource availability. Resources include water, maintenance materials and labor.

Currently, the Streets and Parks Department is maintaining 1,254 acres of park and public facilities lands, 1,430 acres of raw land, and 197 developed acres of street landscape. In the past three years, the parks and landscape staff has been significantly reduced as acreage to maintain has increased. For example, one year ago, there were 28 people to maintain 188 acres of street landscape and, presently, there are 14 people to maintain 197 acres of street landscape. From 1990 to 1994 the parks maintenance staff has decreased from 167 to 141 with the addition of 105 acres of new park land to maintain. The budget for water has been reduced, as well, while the demand has increased. Maintenance of existing landscaped properties is less than adequate with current resources. Additions to the landscaped properties will further strain the existing maintenance resources.

The City of San Jose periodically experiences drought conditions that have an impact on water availability for landscape maintenance. In 1976-77 a drought occurred which inspired a lower level of landscape development in the median islands and back-up strips during and shortly after the drought. Our most recent drought, which began in fiscal year 1985-86 and continued for six years, was severe enough to move the City Council to develop the Water Waste Prevention and Water Shortage Ordinance. That ordinance established standards of use to reduce water waste in the City of San Jose as a continuing practice.

The present standards of median island landscaping were established during a time of abundance. Recent reductions in funding resources and limitations on water resources have strained the City's ability to maintain intensely planted landscapes. The Departments of Public Works and Streets and Parks jointly recommend that the City Council approve a level of landscape improvement for city-maintained median islands in keeping with the resources available at this time. Should the City consider the allocation of additional resources in the future, staff would recommend that city-maintained median island landscapes meet the same standard proposed for landscapes funded by assessment districts.

Recommendation No. 1

It is recommended that city-maintained median island landscapes focus on the dominant planting feature of street landscapes - trees, and

rely less on the ground level plantings that are expensive to maintain. Trees are the strong character element of streetscapes. Highly regarded major thoroughfares are often characterized by the definition given by mature street-side and median trees and the shade provided by tree canopies.

Placing the planting emphasis on trees and eliminating the shrub and ground cover elements will greatly reduce the maintenance requirements. Trees acclimate effectively and, when chosen appropriately, require little water and a relatively low level of maintenance. Shrubs and ground covers, however, require a greater proportion of the overall water and maintenance labor and suffer more in the absence of those resources. Such landscapes, poorly maintained due to reduced staff attention, are evident by overgrown shrub masses, thin ground covers, unmanaged weed growth, and under watering, due to water cutbacks or damaged irrigation systems. Additionally, shrub and ground covers tend to "catch" trash from the roadway, which is labor intensive to collect. Shrubs and ground covers greatly increase the cost of maintenance and yet offer little to improve the overall impact that trees give to the streetscape.

While working towards implementing lasting street landscapes, that will be developed appropriately for the level of maintenance to be provided, the Departments of Public Works and Streets and Parks recommend that the City Council approve a median island landscape program with two levels of development, one for sites maintained with City general funds and another for sites maintained with assessment district funds. The level of landscape development would be as follows:

TYPE 1: - THE STANDARD FOR MEDIAN ISLAND LANDSCAPES MAINTAINED WITH CITY FUNDS will include the installation of trees as the only plant material and one or more paving materials as the ground surface treatment. The trees will be served by an automatic bubbler irrigation system. Paving materials could range from compacted decomposed granite at the low end to decorative concrete or pavers at the upper end. Under this standard, median islands could include built-up curb/planters or other special features. The quality of development will be dependent on the funds available for a given project. The savings from not installing the shrubs and ground covers, and the related irrigation system, could be applied to enhanced paving treatment.

Exhibit C illustrates the typical standard of landscape development proposed for Type 1. Examples of the range of improvements are provided in Exhibit E, which also indicates the corresponding estimated construction and maintenance costs.

Exceptions to the restriction on the installation of shrubs and ground covers will be permitted at Downtown sites under the responsibility of the Redevelopment Agency. In such projects, small shrubs may be allowed. In the Downtown locations the paving treatments will be held to a higher minimum standard, such as concrete or stone materials.

TYPE 2: THE STANDARD FOR MEDIAN ISLAND LANDSCAPES MAINTAINED WITH ASSESSMENT DISTRICT FUNDS will include the installation of trees and allow for the installation of shrubs, ground covers and turf materials, as well. The plantings will be served by automatic irrigation systems that will include bubbler systems for the trees and suitable water efficient systems for the other plantings. Type 2 landscapes will also permit the use of paving in combination with or in lieu of the ground level plantings.

Exhibit D illustrates the typical standard of landscape development proposed for Type 2. Examples of the range of improvements are provided in Exhibit F, which also indicates the corresponding estimated construction and maintenance costs.

Recommendation No. 2

The Departments of Public Works and Streets and Parks recommend that the City Council approve a four-step process for developing a master plan for implementing median island landscape projects over the next five years. The Department of Public Works will facilitate the process as follows:

Step 1: Prepare an inventory of existing landscaped median islands and a list of potential median islands to be landscaped.

Staff have completed these two tasks and the lists are attached as Exhibits A and B. Exhibit B, the list of potential median islands to be landscaped, is broken down into two categories - islands with existing curbs and islands with no curbs, but defined by traffic striping. The department will confirm the lists of potential sites with council representatives.

Step 2: Establish criteria for prioritizing the potential median islands to be landscaped.

Staff will prepare a recommended list of criteria for prioritizing future median island projects for City Council consideration in August, 1994.

Step 3: By council districts, develop prioritized lists of median island landscape projects by applying the criteria to the lists of potential median islands to be landscaped.

The department will work with council representatives to prioritize potential projects.

Step 4: Develop a 5-year city-wide plan for implementing median island landscape improvements, on the basis of the prioritized lists, with proposed funds.

Staff will recommend a plan for City Council consideration in September, 1994.

Recommendation No. 3

The Departments of Public Works and Streets and Parks recommend, also, that the City Council approve a standard of landscape development for all park strips and back-up strips, both city-maintained and assessment district-maintained, that is consistent with the City's policy of water conservation and that responds to maintenance concerns.

THE STANDARD FOR PARK STRIP LANDSCAPES that will be maintained with city funds will include street trees served by automatic bubbler irrigation systems. The surface treatment will be decomposed granite paving.

At sites maintained with assessment district funds, the park strips will be planted with street trees and other appropriate plantings, not to exceed 30 inches in height. The landscape may also include paving of decomposed granite. Automatic irrigation systems will serve the plantings, with bubblers at the trees and a suitable water efficient system for the other plants.

THE STANDARD FOR BACK-UP STRIP LANDSCAPES that will be maintained with city funds will include trees and low growth shrubs, with vines adjacent to walls and fences to minimize graffiti opportunities. The plantings will be served by an automatic bubbler irrigation system.

Back-up strips that will be maintained with assessment district funds will be landscaped with trees, low growth shrubs, ground covers, and/or mulch cover. Vines will be planted adjacent to walls and fences. The plantings will be served by an automatic bubbler system for trees and an appropriate irrigation system for the other plants.

Exhibits C and D illustrate the typical standard of landscape development proposed for park strips and back-up strips.

All plantings for median islands, park strips, and back-up strips, whether funded for maintenance by the City or an assessment district, will be selected for water-use efficiency. Overall water conservation is an objective, however, exceptions may be allowed for specific situations where a planting accent is desired.

All landscape plans will be subject to normal city review cycles to ensure adherence to the approved standards.

The Departments of Public Works and Streets and Parks encourage all of the recommendations made above as measures to improve the conditions for adequate development and maintenance of the City's landscaped roadways over the long term.

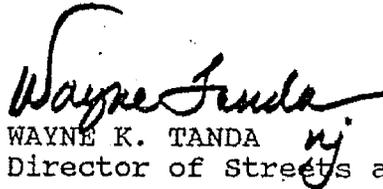
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COORDINATION

This memorandum has been prepared in coordination with the Redevelopment Agency and the Departments of City Planning and Building and Environmental Services.



RALPH A. QUALLS, JR.
Director of Public Works



WAYNE K. TANDA
Director of Streets and Parks

Exhibits

- A - Inventory of Existing Landscaped Median Islands
- B - List of Potential Median Islands to be Landscaped
- C - Recommended Type 1 Median Island Landscape Standard for City Maintained Facility
- D - Recommended Type 2 Median Island Landscape Standard for Assessment District Maintained Facility
- E - Examples of Type 1 Median Island Landscapes and Back-up Strips
- F - Examples of Type 2 Median Island Landscapes and Back-up Strips

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