



COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO

LAND USE AGENDA ITEM

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DATE: December 14, 2022

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TO: Board of Supervisors

SUBJECT

**DEVELOPING THE SAN DIEGO COUNTY NATIVE LANDSCAPE PROGRAM
(DISTRICTS: ALL)**

OVERVIEW

The San Diego region is recognized as one of the most biologically diverse counties in the United States but in recent decades increased threats from new and existing development, wildfire, and the effects of climate change, such as drought and extreme heat, have begun to threaten critical habitat. Native plants, such as those found across the region's micro-climates like the coastal sage scrub, oak woodlands, native grasslands, conifer forests, and desert species, play a critical role in buffering these threats from local wildlife by supporting the health of our region's natural systems, including waterways, air, and soil. Even as the County of San Diego (County) has attempted to balance the need for housing and preservation of open space, the region's development patterns have encroached into open spaces and wildlife corridors over the past several decades, resulting in the loss or fragmentation of native plant habitats near urban and suburban development. Increasing the use of native plants in publicly- and privately-managed landscaping offers an opportunity to preserve and expand these important ecosystems, and protect against further threats from habitat loss, invasive plants and pests, and the effects of climate change, which endanger the viability of the region's native ecosystems and local wildlife.

On May 5, 2021 (7), the Board of Supervisors (Board) directed the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) to collaborate with the San Diego Regional Biodiversity Working Group (Working Group) to "develop a comprehensive Native Plant Landscaping Policy for both public and private property in the unincorporated area, including guidelines, reasonable requirements for County facilities and new developments with accommodations for recreational and other socially desirable uses, incentives for retrofits, and equity-based resources and training to ensure diverse participation among landscaping professionals and residents." The CAO was also directed to engage with a diverse range of interested stakeholders and the public in the development of options and return to the Board by the end of 2021 with options for a new San Diego County Native Plant Landscaping Policy.

The Working Group is a consortium of regional experts in landscape ecology and design, habitat conservation, and San Diego native plants, and includes members from the San Diego Canyonlands, California Native Plant Society, the San Diego Botanic Garden, and more. Staff

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coordination with the Working Group began in June 2021 as they began development of their recommendations for increasing native plants in landscaping across the region. The Working Group met multiple times and coordinated with staff on recommendations, and in May 2022, staff provided a memorandum to the Board with an update on program development, the approach to outreach and coordination with the Working Group, and an updated timeline for staff's return to the Board. In June 2022, the Working Group delivered its final recommendations to provide a vision and scientific support for increasing the use of native plants in landscaping. Through a collaborative process with the Working Group, internal County departments, and external stakeholders, the County of San Diego Planning & Development Services (PDS) has developed a framework for a program that will achieve the objectives outlined in the Board direction while allowing for flexibility in how the program could be implemented over time.

The development of a comprehensive San Diego County Native Landscape Program (Program) would encourage the use of native plants in public and private landscaped areas across the region and result in a range of benefits that include biodiversity and habitat preservation, increased drought tolerance and climate resiliency, soil stabilization, air and water purification, and increased buffering of wildlife corridors which reduces habitat fragmentation. In addition, the Program would support the market for locally produced native plants and technical expertise from landscape architects, designers, and contractors experienced in native plant propagation, installation, and maintenance.

The Program would support existing County plans, programs, initiatives, and policies that champion habitat and water conservation and encourage the use of native plants in landscaped areas, such as the 2018 Climate Action Plan and County Tree Planting Program, Regional Decarbonization Framework, Water Conservation in Landscaping Ordinance, Multiple Species Conservation Program, and Waterscape Rebate Program. The Program also supports recent County initiatives including the Drought and Water Reliability initiative, introduced by District 1 and approved by the Board on September 14, 2022 (6), and the County of San Diego Biodiversity Resolution, introduced by District 3 and approved by the Board on November 16, 2022 (6). These County efforts are highlighted in the Background section and discussed in more detail in Attachment A.

Development of the Program framework included research on best practices in native plant landscaping regulations, incentive programs, educational resources, outreach and engagement with internal County departments and external stakeholders, and coordination with the Working Group. The proposed Program framework, outlined below, reflects the input of the Working Group and other stakeholders and includes Program objectives, ten recommended County-initiated actions to achieve these objectives, and an implementation timeline.

Program objectives describe the anticipated outcomes from Program implementation and include:

- a. Expansion of adaptive and resilient landscapes to buffer natural areas
- b. Support for the County's Landscaping Ordinance outdoor water use reduction goals through the use of native plant landscaping
- c. Support of native wildlife and pollinators through landscaping plant selection, design, and placement

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- d. Support of the local nursery economy and landscaping industry by developing educational materials and strengthening local demand for native plant products and services
- e. Support equity-oriented outreach and Tribal Ecological Knowledge to strengthen personal connections with the local environment
- f. Development of resources that are easily accessible and widely shared across agencies and stakeholders that support the use of native plants in landscaping throughout the entire region

If approved, Program implementation will be separated into three phases to provide opportunities to incorporate knowledge and feedback acquired through previous steps: scoping (Phase I), development (Phase II), and full program rollout (Phase III). During Phase I, the Program's foundational resources (e.g., Native Plant Landscaping Design Manual, Program website and educational materials, and demonstration gardens and requirements for County facilities) will be developed to lay the foundation for future work. Phase II will continue Phase I activities, and also advance initiatives to develop native plant demonstration gardens and educational materials at schools and pilot projects to incentivize native plant landscaping in underserved communities. Phase III marks the beginning of full Program rollout and will focus on incentivizing native plant landscaping throughout the unincorporated area including development of a landscaping professional certification program, an incentive program for the use of native plants in private development, and landscape design templates for residents. Program phasing allows flexibility in how the options can be fiscally and programmatically developed and built upon each other in the future. The timelines and costs for Phase II and III actions will be estimated as the Program is developed.

The below table summarizes the ten recommended County-initiated actions that implement the proposed Program. Shading indicates the timeframe for when an action will be developed and implemented.

Recommended Program Action	Implementation Timeline					
	Phase I			Phase II		Phase III
	FY 22-23	FY 23-24	FY 24-25	FY 25-26	FY 26-27	FY 27-28
1 Develop Native Plant Landscaping Design Manual						
2 Amend Board Policy G-15						
3 Develop Program website						
4 Develop educational materials and resources for residents and professionals						
5 Install school demonstration gardens and develop educational materials						
6 Develop a landscaping professional certification program						
7 Install demonstration gardens at County facilities						
8 Implement landscape retrofit pilot projects						
9 Develop Incentive Program						
10 Develop landscape design templates						

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This is a request for the Board to provide direction to develop the San Diego County Native Landscape Program and input on the Program's objectives, ten County-initiated actions, and implementation framework.

**RECOMMENDATION(S)
CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER**

1. Find in accordance with Sections 15061(b)(3), 15301(h), and 15304(b) that the proposed actions to develop the San Diego Native Plant Landscape Program are exempt from the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines because it can be seen with certainty that there is no possibility that receiving the options and providing direction on the proposed actions may have a significant effect on the environment, and because CEQA does not apply to minor alterations of existing public or private facilities including the maintenance of existing landscaping, or to minor public or private alterations in the condition of land or vegetation such as new gardening or landscaping, which could result from the installation of native plant demonstration gardens and native plant landscaping at County facilities and private property. Subsequent actions would be reviewed pursuant to CEQA and presented to the Board for consideration if they have an environmental impact prior to implementation.
2. Direct the CAO to develop the San Diego County Native Landscape Program that includes Program objectives, the following ten County-initiated actions, and an implementation framework.
 1. Develop Native Plant Landscaping Design Manual
 2. Amend Board Policy G-15
 3. Develop Program website
 4. Develop educational materials and resources for residents and professionals
 5. Install school demonstration gardens and develop educational materials
 6. Develop a landscaping professional certification program
 7. Install demonstration gardens at County facilities
 8. Implement landscape retrofit pilot projects
 9. Develop Incentive Program
 10. Develop landscape design templates
3. Direct the CAO to implement Phase I actions.

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4. Direct the CAO to return to the Board of Supervisors after Phase I with options for implementation of future phases.

EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT

Activities identified within this Board Letter will support County efforts to conserve habitat and protect vulnerable species across the unincorporated area. The San Diego County Native Landscape Program will result in educational resources and incentive programming that are equitable and accessible by ensuring underserved communities are engaged in Program development and implementation, thereby aligning with the Board's Equity Strategic Initiative to reduce disparities and ensure access for all. Throughout implementation, the Program will continue to be informed by community input centered on equity.

Stakeholder outreach in developing the proposed Program actions has focused on transparent and accessible public communication and will continue during Program development and implementation. This includes notices translated into County threshold languages, Spanish simultaneous-interpretation services being available for attendees at County-led workshops, and interpretative services in other languages such as Somali, Arabic, Chinese (Mandarin), Korean, Persian (including Farsi, Dari), Tagalog (including Filipino) and Vietnamese, provided upon request, and translation services for online documents provided by Google Translate.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT STATEMENT

The San Diego County Native Landscape Program will increase environmental sustainability by resulting in practices that improve the preservation of biodiversity, drought tolerance, and climate resiliency, expand the buffer of wildlife corridors, and reduce habitat fragmentation. The Program will be developed with extensive engagement with communities in the unincorporated area most impacted by habitat loss, including within urban and rural underserved communities, wildland urban interface corridors, and high fire-prone areas, to ensure sustainability in equity, economy, and health/wellbeing. Increasing the use of native plants in landscaped areas will contribute to the County of San Diego's Sustainability Goal Six, which is to develop natural and organic land management policies and practices that protect ecosystems, habitats, biodiversity, and soil health throughout the county by protecting native habitats and expanding protected areas.

FISCAL IMPACT

Planning & Development Services

There is no direct fiscal impact as a result of today's requested action to provide direction to develop the San Diego County Native Landscape Program and input on the Program's objectives, ten County-initiated actions, and implementation framework. Proposed Phase I actions will result in estimated costs of \$202,000 from FY2023-24 through FY2024-25, as indicated in the below table. Funding for the costs will need to be identified as part of the annual budget process and will proceed once identified. Planning & Development Services (PDS) will monitor its budget and revenue sources and return to the Board with mid-year action in FY23-24 and FY24-25 to adjust the budget if necessary and/or incorporate in future budgets as funding becomes available. At this time, there is no change in net General Fund cost and no additional staff years.

The timelines and costs for Phase II and III actions will be determined as the Program is developed, and work on these phases will begin once funding is identified. PDS will continue to monitor its

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budget and return to the Board in future Operational Plans beginning FY 2025-26 as funding becomes available.

San Diego County Library

There is no direct fiscal impact as a result of today's requested action. If approved, the development of the proposed Phase I action to install demonstration gardens at County branch libraries will result in estimated costs of \$95,000 for the San Diego County Library (SDCL) and will be funded within their existing budget in FY 2022-23. The funding source is available County Library Fund fund balance. At this time, there is no change in net General Fund cost and no additional staff years.

Department of General Services

The maintenance of native plant demonstration gardens at County facilities will likely result in additional operational costs, which the Department of General Services (DGS) will determine and maintain through existing landscape contracts.

The annual estimated fiscal impact for the Program implementation for Phase I implementation is as follows:

Phase I			Phase II		Phase III
FY 22-23	FY 23-24	FY 24-25	FY 25-26	FY 26-27	FY 27-28
SDCL: \$95,000	PDS: \$100,000	PDS: \$102,000	To be determined	To be determined	To be determined
Phase Total:	\$297,000				

BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT

The San Diego County Native Landscape Program supports the local economy through actions that will increase the awareness of and demand for native plants in landscaping across the region. This demand will support existing San Diego regional markets for locally produced nursery stock and technical expertise in native plant propagation, installation, and maintenance from landscape architects, designers, and contractors in the landscaping industry.

ADVISORY BOARD STATEMENT

Informational presentations were provided to the Community Planning and Sponsor Group (CPSG) chairs on December 4, 2021, and September 17, 2022. Individual presentations were not requested by any CPSGs, nor was formal action taken by any CPSG.

BACKGROUND

The San Diego region is recognized as one of the most biologically diverse counties in the United States but in recent decades increased threats from new and existing development, wildfire, and the effects of climate change, such as drought and extreme heat, have begun to threaten critical habitat. Native plants, such as those found across the region's micro-climates like the coastal sage scrub, oak woodlands, native grasslands, conifer forests, and desert species, play a critical role in buffering these threats from local wildlife by supporting the health of our region's natural systems, including waterways, air, and soil. Even as the County of San Diego (County) has attempted to balance the need for housing and preservation of open space, the region's development patterns

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have encroached into open spaces and wildlife corridors over the past several decades, resulting in the loss or fragmentation of native plant habitats near urban and suburban development. Increasing the use of native plants in landscaping offers an opportunity to preserve and expand these important ecosystems, and protect against further threats from habitat loss, invasive plants and pests, and the effects of climate change, which endanger the viability of the region's native ecosystems and local wildlife.

On May 5, 2021 (7), the Board of Supervisors (Board) directed the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) to collaborate with the San Diego Regional Biodiversity Working Group (Working Group) to "develop a comprehensive Native Plant Landscaping Policy for both public and private property in the unincorporated area, including guidelines, reasonable requirements for County facilities and new developments with accommodations for recreational and other socially desirable uses, incentives for retrofits, and equity-based resources and training to ensure diverse participation among landscaping professionals and residents." The CAO was also directed to engage with a diverse range of interested stakeholders and the public in the development of options and return to the Board by the end of 2021 with options for a new San Diego County Native Plant Landscaping Policy.

Staff coordination with the Working Group began in June 2021 as they began development of their recommendations for increasing native plants in landscaping. The Working Group met multiple times and coordinated with staff on recommendations, and in May 2022, staff provided a memorandum to the Board with an update on program development, the approach to outreach and coordination with the Working Group, and an updated timeline for staff's return to the Board. In June 2022, the Working Group delivered its final recommendations to provide a vision and scientific support for increasing the use of native plants in landscaping. The County of San Diego Planning & Development Services (PDS) worked with the Working Group, internal County departments, and external stakeholders to create a framework that would best respond to the Board's request for options for a new San Diego County Native Plant Landscaping Policy. During this collaborative process, the Working Group and stakeholders provided input suggesting that, instead of a policy, the development of a program for public and private landscaped areas throughout the region would achieve the objectives outlined in the Board direction while allowing for flexibility in how the program actions could be developed and implemented over time. The Working Group's recommendations and suggested phasing approach, along with best practice research and input from internal and external stakeholders, were used by staff to develop the proposed San Diego County Native Landscape Program (Program) objectives, ten County-initiated actions, and the implementation timeline.

The development of a comprehensive Program would encourage the use of native plants in public and private landscaped areas (e.g., private residences and commercial landscapes) across the region to achieve a range of benefits that include biodiversity and habitat preservation, increased drought tolerance and climate resiliency, soil stabilization, air and water purification, and the buffering of wildlife corridors with native vegetation which reduces habitat fragmentation. In addition, the Program would support the market for locally produced native plants and technical expertise from landscape architects, designers, and contractors experienced in native plant propagation, installation, and maintenance, resulting in stronger demand for these products and services.

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Native Plants in San Diego County

According to the California Native Plant Society, native plants are those that grew and evolved in a location before European contact. Native plants co-evolved with the climate, geology, soils, insects, animals, and other plants within a specific location to form a complex, biodiverse ecosystem. Home to over 1,700 native plant species, San Diego County is recognized as one of the most biologically diverse areas in the United States, having more native plant species than any county and some states. The region's multiple micro-climates accommodate a wide range of native species acclimated to the unique ecological habitats of the region's coast, foothills, mountains, and desert.

Incorporating native plants into landscaping provides a wide range of complementary benefits. Research has shown that the use of native plants in landscaping provides many benefits, including helping to stabilize soil and reduce the need for pesticides, purifying air and water, and providing shelter and food for wildlife. Landscaping with native plants also helps increase drought tolerance, reduces water consumption, improves fire resistance and resilience, and buffers our green spaces against climate change because native plants require less water than non-natives. Native plant landscaping preserves regional biodiversity, especially rare and endangered species found only in the region, provides habitat for native animals, birds, and insects, widens wildlife corridors and reduces habitat fragmentation, limits the establishment and spread of invasive plant species, and reduces the introduction of plant pests and disease on imported, non-native nursery stock.

In addition to these environmental benefits, using native plants in landscaping can provide educational and economic benefits for the region. Increasing awareness of the benefits of using native plants can encourage people to want to care for and protect wildlife habitats. It can also provide opportunities for collaboration, demonstration, and training, such as what is done through programming offered by the Water Conservation Garden. Located in unincorporated Rancho San Diego on the Cuyamaca College campus, Water Conservation Garden programming focuses on water conservation and the sustainable use of related natural resources and features a native plant demonstration garden at the facility. This will help build a sense of regional identity rooted in San Diego County's uniquely rich biodiversity and increase the demand for locally produced native plant stock. According to the County's 2021 Crop Statistics & Annual Report, "Ornamental Trees and Shrubs" nursery products, which include native plant nursery stock, are the second largest economic contributor to the farming industry in the region, with a value of \$382,387,500 in 2021. A comprehensive San Diego County Native Landscape Program that increases demand for locally produced native plant stock would support an important part of the region's agricultural economy.

Native plants are critical to the survival of animals and natural systems in our region. They support healthy air, soil, and clean waterways, and insects that pollinate flowers and agriculture. Currently, native plants are experiencing risks to their natural spread and survival in San Diego County. According to the County's 2011 General Plan, the region's development patterns have encroached into open spaces and wildlife corridors over the past several decades, resulting in the loss of native plant habitats, with some occupying less than 10 percent of their historic range. Since that time, this development trend has continued to cause remaining habitats to become highly fragmented near urban and suburban development, according to the County's Housing Production & Capacity Portal. The introduction and spread of exotic pathogens and invasive species—like Invasive

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Shothole Borers and the Goldspotted Oak Borer—pose significant threats to the region's native and non-native trees alike. Further, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife cites climate change threats including changes in seasonal weather patterns, temperatures, and water availability as endangering local ecosystems' ability to adapt and thrive. Development of the San Diego County Native Landscape Program will help mitigate these risks by adding habitat buffers in developed areas, maintaining plant diversity to help prevent encroachment from invasives and pests, and increasing the quantity and distribution of native plants throughout the region to help facilitate natural propagation.

Related County Programs and Initiatives

The County has existing plans, programs, initiatives, and policies that champion habitat and water conservation and encourage the use of native plants in landscaped areas at private development and County-owned lands. Examples of these County efforts include the 2018 Climate Action Plan and County Tree Planting Program, Regional Decarbonization Framework, Water Conservation in Landscaping Ordinance, Multiple Species Conservation Program, and Waterscape Rebate Program. The Program also supports recent County initiatives including the Drought and Water Reliability initiative, introduced by District 1 and approved by the Board on September 14, 2022 (6), and the County of San Diego Biodiversity Resolution, introduced by District 3 and approved by the Board on November 16, 2022 (6). Collectively these efforts reduce outdoor water use, protect open space, mitigate fire risk, and increase the use of drought tolerant, native plants and trees in the unincorporated area. Related County programs and initiatives are discussed in more detail in Attachment A.

Development of the San Diego County Native Landscape Program

Development of the proposed framework and implementing actions for the San Diego County Native Landscape Program included best practice research of native plant landscaping regulations, incentive programs, educational resources, outreach and engagement with internal County departments and external stakeholders, and coordination with the Working Group.

Research on best practices in native plant landscaping regulations, incentive programs, educational resources, industry expert research, and guidance documents from over 30 jurisdictions and organizations across the nation informed the development of the proposed Program framework and implementing actions that encourage the use of native plants in public and private landscaping.

PDS staff coordinated with subject matter experts from County departments that influence how native plants are currently used in new and retrofit landscaping on County-owned lands. These departments include Agriculture, Weights, and Measures (AWM); San Diego County Fire; General Services (DGS); Parks and Recreation (DPR); and Public Works (DPW). In addition, staff presented to the County's internal *Live Well San Diego* Food System Initiative and Sustainability Task Force working groups to ensure a diverse representation of internal stakeholder perspectives on the Program's framework and implementing actions.

This internal coordination also identified County policies and programs, such as the Landscaping Ordinance and Waterscape Rebate Program or other incentive programs, that could be modified or developed to increase the use of native plants in private development in the unincorporated area.

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Stakeholder Outreach and Public Engagement

Staff used a combination of outreach methods to engage stakeholders in developing the Program's framework and actions. PDS hosted a virtual public workshop in November 2021 with 89 participants to present an overview of the project and receive feedback, followed by a virtual public workshop in August 2022 with 89 participants to receive input on the Program framework and draft actions. Staff also held focused stakeholder meetings, email and phone conversations, and presentations at standing meetings with working groups, including representation of over 30 stakeholder groups from environmental, economic, community, and social equity sectors. Examples of stakeholders engaged include environmental groups, organizations representing development, realty and property management groups, landscaping, agriculture and nursery industries, homeowners and apartment associations, Community Planning Groups/Community Sponsor Groups, tribal governments, non-profit organizations, regional agencies, workforce development entities, and educators. In addition to focused outreach efforts, staff conducted broad public outreach with unincorporated communities to promote the project through updates on the project website (<https://www.sandiegocounty.gov/sustainability/projects/native-plants-policy/>), County social media posts, and the County's Climate Action Plan e-newsletter. To increase language accessibility for non-English speaking stakeholders, all written outreach materials were translated into Spanish and a Spanish interpreter was available at the workshops. Additional languages were available for interpretation and translation upon request. Materials on the project website were available for translation into all County threshold languages using Google Translate.

Feedback from stakeholders indicated strong support for the development of educational and incentive programming. Examples include an informational website, demonstration pilot projects in underserved communities, and residential and landscaping professional training programs to increase awareness of the benefits of using native plants in landscaped areas, including using locally produced nursery stock.

Stakeholders from the agricultural, development, and landscaping industries and residents from the unincorporated area expressed concern about the County establishing new regulations for private development in the unincorporated area as part of this effort. Stakeholders were unsupportive of establishing a prescriptive plant list as part of any guidelines, educational, or incentive programming developed to support the Program. This is due, in part, to the limited local availability of some native plant species and the wide range of environmental conditions found throughout the region that can affect the success of native plants in landscaping. For example, some native plants can survive a wide range of conditions, such as geographic location (i.e., coastal or inland), soil type, or shade, while others have more specific environmental requirements to be successful.

San Diego Regional Biodiversity Working Group

The Working Group is a consortium of regional experts in landscape ecology and design, habitat conservation, and San Diego native plants, including members from the San Diego Canyonlands, California Native Plant Society, the San Diego Botanic Garden, and more. Staff coordinated with the Working Group on best practices and strategies for prioritizing native plants in landscaping as part of the Board's initiative. PDS coordinated with the Working Group by attending bi-monthly Working Group general meetings and facilitating additional small group meetings with the Working Group Co-Chairs to help develop recommendations for the Program.

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The Working Group delivered its final recommendations in June 2022 in a report titled *San Diego County Native Landscape Program* (Attachment B). The report provides a vision and scientific support for establishing a "San Diego County Native Landscape Program" to increase the use of native plants in landscaping that would complement regional conservation goals, support the region's unique biodiversity, and be equitably applied to landscapes throughout the region. According to the report, the main goal of the Program is to establish native plant landscaping in developed areas that will serve as a natural buffer for open space habitat. Recommendations are organized into four topic areas, including key concepts to consider during program development, steps to ensure a regional approach, an outline for community engagement and partnership building, and recommended program elements (Attachment B). The Working Group recommended that the Program be implemented through an iterative, three-phased approach over five or more years to allow for flexibility in how the Program is developed and implemented over time and to help achieve the Program's long-term outcomes.

The Working Group's *San Diego County Native Landscape Program* recommendations and suggested phasing approach, along with best practice research and input from internal and external stakeholders, were used by staff to develop the proposed Program objectives, ten County-initiated actions, and implementation timeline. Staff presented the Program framework, objectives, actions and phased approach to the Working Group in August 2022. The proposed Program framework creates a voluntary program using education and incentives to increase the use of native plants in landscaped areas at private development and showcases the use of native plant landscaping at County facilities.

Summary of the San Diego County Native Plant Landscape Program

The proposed Program framework includes Program objectives, ten County-initiated actions within three primary Program components to achieve these objectives, and an implementation timeline. This framework incorporates input from the Working Group, stakeholders, internal coordination, and best practices research described above.

Program Objectives

Program objectives describe the anticipated outcomes of implementing the Program. These include:

- a. Expansion of adaptive and resilient landscapes to buffer natural areas
- b. Support for the County's Landscaping Ordinance outdoor water use reduction goals through the use of native plant landscaping
- c. Support of native wildlife and pollinators through landscaping plant selection, design, and placement
- d. Support of the local nursery economy and landscaping industry by developing educational materials and strengthening local demand for native plant products and services
- e. Support equity-oriented outreach and Tribal Ecological Knowledge to strengthen personal connections with the local environment
- f. Development of resources that are easily accessible and widely shared across agencies and stakeholders that support the use of native plants in landscaping throughout the entire region

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Program Components

Program objectives can be achieved through ten County-initiated actions that focus on policy, education, and incentives to increase native plants in landscaping. As described below, the development and implementation of these actions will be informed by Tribal Ecological Knowledge and input from residents and professionals representing underserved communities to incorporate indigenous landscape management education and emphasize Program accessibility and equity. Staff recommends the Board consider the following ten actions for Program development:

Policy

1. Develop Native Plant Landscaping Design Manual
 - This document would serve as an appendix to the County's Landscaping Ordinance and would:
 - a. Outline native plant landscaping objectives for San Diego County
 - b. Establish native plant landscaping definitions, design and installation best practices, and recommended installation parameters
 - c. Incorporate Tribal Ecological Knowledge on indigenous uses of native plants
 - d. Demonstrate how native plant palettes can help meet the Landscaping Ordinance outdoor water use reduction requirements
 - e. Identify priority areas for the application of native plant landscaping to support Program objectives and regional conservation goals
2. Amend Board Policy G-15
 - Board Policy G-15, "Design Standards for County Facilities and Property," would be amended by the end of 2023 to:
 - a. Require native plant landscaping at new County facilities and in major County facility landscape retrofits when feasible
 - b. Demonstrate commitment to Program objectives and drive demand for locally sourced nursery stock

Education

3. Develop a Program website
 - A Program website would be developed to serve as a regional, online educational and training resource and:
 - a. Provide links to Program documents and resources
 - b. Include language-accessible content
 - c. Offer dedicated native plant landscaping education and promotion materials for residents, regional partners, and other agencies to use in their jurisdictions
 - d. Provide an opportunity for the public to report and track wildlife drawn to their own native gardens as part of a community science wildlife monitoring initiative
4. Develop educational materials and resources for residents and professionals
 - These instructor-led and web-based educational materials would be developed and delivered collaboratively with regional partners (e.g., San Diego County

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Water Authority, The Water Conservation Garden, California Native Plant Society) to:

- a. Provide language accessible training materials for residents and landscaping professionals in the County's threshold languages
 - b. Educate on the design, installation, maintenance, and propagation of native plants
5. Install school demonstration gardens and develop educational materials
- A funding structure for a network of school demonstration gardens and educational materials would be developed collaboratively with local school districts and other partners to:
 - a. Provide nature and ecological education for school-aged children on native plants, gardening, and conservation goals
 - b. Strengthen a sense of place and regional identity rooted in San Diego County's biodiversity
6. Develop a landscaping professional certification program
- Collaborate with regional partners such as community colleges and/or regional organizations that offer professional training services to develop a certification program to:
 - a. Recognize local landscaping professionals trained in native plant landscaping design and maintenance
 - b. Develop a list of certified professionals that would be available from the Program website
7. Install demonstration gardens at County facilities
- Educational native plant demonstration gardens at County facilities such as libraries, parks, or other major County facilities in public locations would be installed to:
 - a. Help the public understand the benefits of using native plants in landscaping
 - b. Provide examples of how native plants can be incorporated into landscaping
 - c. Build public Program awareness

Incentives

8. Implement landscape retrofit pilot projects
- These pilot projects would follow the Native Plant Landscaping Design Manual and:
 - a. Pilot test programmatic and incentive options that will encourage native plant landscaping at private properties in priority locations in the unincorporated area
 - b. Identify potential pilot sites within urban and rural underserved communities, wildland urban interface corridors, and high fire-prone areas
9. Develop Incentive Program
- A San Diego County Native Plant Landscape Incentive Program would be developed to:

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- a. Incentivize native plant landscaping for private development in the unincorporated area, such as offering rebates for converting lawns to native vegetation
10. Develop landscape design templates
- Landscape design templates and a web-based tool for integration into the Program website would be developed to:
 - a. Offer residents easy-to-use, tailorable design plans for installing native plant landscaping
 - b. Provide templates for landscaping in the defensible space zone in fire-prone areas, along wildlife corridors, and to establish pollinator habitats, among other examples

Program Implementation

Program implementation is separated into three phases: scoping (Phase I), development (Phase II), and full program rollout (Phase III). During Phase I (FY 2022-23 – FY 2024-25), the Program's foundational resources (e.g., Native Plant Landscaping Design Manual, Program website and educational materials, and demonstration gardens and requirements for County facilities) will be developed to lay the foundation for future work. Phase II (FY 2025-26 – FY 2026-27) will continue Phase I activities, and also result in the development of native plant school demonstration gardens and educational materials and the creation of demonstration pilot projects to incentivize native plant landscaping in underserved communities. Using the lessons learned from the implementation of Phase I and Phase II actions, Phase III (FY 2027-28) will focus on incentivizing native plant landscaping throughout the unincorporated area, including developing a landscaping professional certification program, an incentive program for private development, and landscape design templates for residents. Phase III will mark the beginning of the full Program rollout, with all actions being developed and underway.

Across all phases, staff will continue broad outreach and engagement with stakeholders and conduct focused coordination with community advisors represented by native plant experts, landscaping professionals, and residents and business owners, including those from underserved neighborhoods in rural, urban, and tribal communities. Community advisors would have the opportunity to sign up for this volunteer advisory group through the Program website and would participate in advisory meetings with staff as needed to discuss Program development and identify important native plant landscaping resources, examples, and lessons learned from the field. This community and professional input will help inform the development of educational resources and support Program development over time.

Today's request is for the Board to provide direction to develop the San Diego County Native Landscape Program that includes the proposed Program objectives, ten County-initiated actions, and implementation framework. To allow flexibility in how the actions can be fiscally and programmatically developed and built upon each other in the future, the known estimated timeline and costs are included for Phase I actions and identified for inclusion in future Fiscal Year Operational Plans. The timelines and costs for Phase II and III actions will be estimated as the Program is developed and included in future Operational Plans beginning FY 2025-26. Staff recommends a return to the Board after Phase I on implementation progress and options for

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implementation for future phases. There will be no additional staff costs when using the recommended phasing approach if approved.

The below table summarizes the recommended Program actions with proposed phasing and costs. Estimated costs are identified in the Fiscal Year where costs will be incurred, and shading indicates the timeframe for when an action will be developed and implemented.

Recommended Actions for Board Consideration to Develop the San Diego County Native Landscape Program								
Recommended Program Action	Responsible Department	Implementation Timeline						Estimated Cost
		Phase I			Phase II		Phase III	
		FY 22-23	FY 23-24	FY 24-25	FY 25-26	FY 26-27	FY 27-28	
1 Develop Native Plant Landscaping Design Manual	PDS							\$100,000
2 Amend Board Policy G-15	DGS							No additional costs
3 Develop Program website	PDS							No additional costs
4 Develop educational materials and resources for residents and professionals	PDS, DPW							\$102,000
5 Install school demonstration gardens and develop educational materials	PDS							To be determined
6 Develop a landscaping professional certification program	PDS							To be determined
7 Install demonstration gardens at County facilities	SDCL, DGS, DPR							\$95,000*
8 Implement landscape retrofit pilot projects	PDS							To be determined
9 Develop Incentive Program	PDS							To be determined
10 Develop landscape design templates	PDS							To be determined

*The maintenance of native plant demonstration gardens at County facilities will likely result in additional operational costs, which DGS will determine and maintain through existing landscape contracts.

ENVIRONMENTAL STATEMENT

Pursuant to Section 15061(b)(3) of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), CEQA applies only to projects that have the potential for causing a significant effect on the environment. It can be seen with certainty that there is no possibility that receiving the options and providing direction on the proposed actions to develop the San Diego County Native Plant Landscape

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Program may have a significant effect on the existing environment and thus are exempt from CEQA. The installation of native plant demonstration gardens and native plant landscaping at County facilities and private property are exempt from the provisions of the CEQA Guidelines in accordance with Sections 15301(h) and 15304(b) because CEQA does not apply to the minor alterations of existing public or private facilities or topographical features, including the maintenance of existing landscaping and native growth, and because minor public or private alterations in the condition of land or vegetation such as new gardening or landscaping, including the replacement of existing conventional landscaping with water efficient or fire resistant landscaping, are exempt. Subsequent actions, if any, would be reviewed pursuant to CEQA and presented to the Board for consideration if they have an environmental impact.

LINKAGE TO THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO STRATEGIC PLAN

Today's proposed action to provide direction to develop the San Diego County Native Landscape Program and input on the Program's proposed framework supports the Sustainability, Equity, Community, and Justice Initiatives in the County of San Diego's 2022-2027 Strategic Plan through programs that: actively address climate change; protect and promote our natural and agricultural resources, diverse habitats and sensitive species; cultivate a natural environment for residents, visitors and future generations to enjoy; focus on policy, systems, and environmental approaches that ensure equal opportunity for health and wellbeing through partnerships and innovation; provide programs and services that enhance the community through increasing the wellbeing of our residents and our environments; and advance equal protection and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies with an urgent focus on communities of color and low-income communities recognizing they historically lacked the same degree of protection from environmental and health hazards.

Respectfully submitted,



SARAH E. AGHASSI
Deputy Chief Administrative Officer

ATTACHMENT(S)

- Attachment A – Summary of Related County of San Diego Programs and Initiatives
- Attachment B – San Diego Regional Biodiversity Working Group Recommendations
- Attachment C – Notice of Exemption
- Attachment D – Action Sheet