

# CITY OF FORT SASKATCHEWAN

## Landscaping Completion Requirements

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### Motion:

That Council direct Administration to bring forward an amendment to the definition of 'Landscaping' in Land Use Bylaw C10-13 to:

**LANDSCAPING** means the preservation or modification of the natural features of a site through the placement or addition of any or a combination of the following:

- (a) Soft landscaping elements **consisting of vegetation** such as trees, shrubs, plants, **gardens**, lawns and ornamental plantings;
- (b) Decorative hard surfacing elements such as bricks, pavers, shale, crushed rock or other suitable materials, excluding monolithic concrete and asphalt, in the form of patios, walkways and paths; and
- (c) Architectural elements such as decorating fencing, walls and sculptures.

### Purpose:

The purpose of this report is to provide Council with information on options to ensure landscaping following residential development is completed in an appropriate period of time and to facilitate possible increases to minimum landscaping standards.

### Background:

At the July 10, 2017 regular Council meeting, Council passed the motion:

That Administration be directed to present Council with a report outlining options for the municipality to ensure landscaping following residential development is completed in an appropriate period of time.

### Topic Identification/Outcome:

The Land Use Bylaw definition for landscaping currently states:

**LANDSCAPING** means *the preservation or modification of the natural features of a site* through the placement or addition of any or a combination of the following:

- (a) Soft landscaping elements such as trees, shrubs, plants, lawns and ornamental plantings;
- (b) Decorative hard surfacing elements such as bricks, pavers, shale, crushed rock or other suitable materials, excluding monolithic concrete and asphalt, in the form of patios, walkways and paths; and

(c) Architectural elements such as decorating fencing, walls and sculptures.

Leaving a yard as bare dirt falls within this definition for landscaping. As such, bare dirt is currently considered acceptable as long as no noxious weeds, as defined in the Community Standards Bylaw, are prevalent. A simple amendment to the Landscaping definition could make bare dirt unacceptable:

**LANDSCAPING** means the preservation or modification of the natural features of a site through the placement or addition of any or a combination of the following:

- (a) Soft landscaping elements **consisting of vegetation** such as trees, shrubs, plants, **gardens**, lawns and ornamental plantings;
- (b) Decorative hard surfacing elements such as bricks, pavers, shale, crushed rock or other suitable materials, excluding monolithic concrete and asphalt, in the form of patios, walkways and paths; and
- (c) Architectural elements such as decorating fencing, walls and sculptures.

Council has the ability to make dirt unacceptable through this amendment. Following the amendment, landscaping completion would be required within 24 months of issuance of the Development Permit, as per existing regulations within the Land Use Bylaw. Prior to increasing the standard, the following should be taken into consideration:

*1. Necessity*

An average 300 houses (not including apartment dwellings) are constructed in Fort Saskatchewan every year. On average, 6 requests to address incomplete landscaping are submitted each year. As such, approximately 98% of new houses are landscaped prior to a request for municipal intervention.

Because most homeowners desire an aesthetically pleasing lot, the majority of landscaping is completed on a voluntary basis. When individual motivation is below the architectural standards, a landscaping deposit required by the developer is used to ensure the work is complete. Increasing the municipal standards for landscaping requirements may address circumstances where personal motivation and subsequently the developer's deposit fails to result in timely completion.

*2. Flexibility*

The preferred method for landscaping, especially in the front yard, generally consists of grass and decorative plantings. However, alternative landscaping, such as xeriscaping, artificial turf, and decorative gardening, is a growing trend. Amending the regulations to prohibit dirt could unintentionally limit homeowner choices.

*3. Affordability*

Shelter is a costly necessity. Ideally, funds are available with minimal to no interruption from start to finish throughout construction. However, a municipal requirement to complete landscaping within a specific timeframe could restrict a homeowner's ability to

direct funds to the area of highest need. This could be a substantial impact, particularly for those on the cusp of affordable homeownership.

Should Council wish to increase the landscaping requirements, an amendment to the Land Use Bylaw would be brought forward following the municipal election.

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Approved by:	Troy Fleming, City Manager	Date: September 6, 2017
Submitted to:	City Council	Date: September 12, 2017