

INDIAN WELLS CITY COUNCIL

November 6, 2025



To: City Council
From: Public Works
Prepared by: Dina Purvis, Interim Public Works Director
Subject: **Highway 111 Drought Tolerant Landscaping Turf Replacement**

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS:

Council **DISCUSSES** proceeding with the implementation of the Highway 111 Drought Tolerant Landscape Project, funded in part through a regional grant from the California Department of Water Resources (DWR), in coordination with the Coachella Valley Water District (CVWD); and

FINDS the project to be exempt from the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Section 15301(c), Existing facilities and 15304(b) Minor Alterations to Land.

BACKGROUND:

During the height of the statewide drought, the Indian Wells City Council directed staff to evaluate opportunities for water conservation along Highway 111, particularly by removing turf. This direction was formalized as a City Council Strategic Plan Goal in Fiscal Year 2023-24 and reaffirmed each year thereafter. The proposed turf replacement program was added as a strategic planning goal to align with regional and state water conservation goals, as well as turf replacement efforts that the City adopted for residential and commercial areas of the community.

In addition, the State of California passed AB 1572 in 2023, prohibiting using potable water to irrigate non-functional turf. Non-functional turf is generally described as grass used for an ornamental nature, such as in medians and parkways. It is separated from functional turf by its use; functional turf is found in parks, golf courses, and sports fields. While not a deciding factor for moving this project forward, it may have future implications for portions of Highway 111 as future water availability may become more scarce.

DISCUSSION:

The City, in collaboration with the Coachella Valley Water District (CVWD), is participating in a regional initiative to promote water conservation and sustainable landscaping practices. The initiative is supported by grant funding from the California Department of Water Resources (DWR) as part of its Urban Community Drought Relief Grant Program. CVWD serves as the primary grant recipient for the region, and the City of Indian Wells is a subrecipient under the agreement. The City has been allocated funding in the amount of \$650,000 to implement the Drought Tolerant Landscape project. The \$650,000 is specifically for construction, with a required match of 25%. Payment of the grant will be made on a reimbursement basis, contingent upon the City's commencement of construction activities.

The Highway 111 Drought Tolerant Landscape Project involves the removal of 4.45 acres of city-owned or maintained turf. Not all areas of Highway 111 are owned and/or maintained by the City. This project will only improve areas that are currently maintained by the City, and only in areas of turf removal. Key components of the project include:

- Removal of existing turf behind the sidewalks on the north and south sides of Highway 111. Removing turf behind the sidewalk and keeping the turf next to the roadway will allow the City to maintain the appearance of its iconic corridor.
- Installation of drought tolerant landscaping in the areas of turf removal, similar to existing portions along Highway 111, and upgrading irrigation systems to smart or drip irrigation technology.
- Application of mulch and other ground cover to reduce evaporation.

In preparation for project implementation, the City issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) for professional landscape architecture services. Following a competitive selection process, David Volz Design was chosen to lead the design phase of the project. The design was guided by the City's existing Landscaping and Highway 111 General Plan Standards and conforms with both. Materials used for the design are based on lush Mediterranean style plantings, very green and colorful, and varying in height. The plant types include new trees, shrubs and ground covers. The materials are not sparsely planted cactus type vegetation that are common in other drought tolerant landscape projects seen throughout the Coachella Valley. Upon completion, the landscape project will uphold the City's reputation for maintaining its iconic and picturesque corridor, a landmark that continues to attract attention and admiration.

Based on the completed design, the construction estimate for the project is over \$5 million. This estimate includes construction, irrigation upgrades, planting, materials, and project management. Given the high estimated cost, Staff is in the process of amending the grant agreement to reflect the use of City's maintenance crew and using the citywide

landscaping contract to greatly reduce cost burdens. If this project moves forward staff would recommend the work be phased to manage costs and allow time to seek additional grant funding.

The areas where turf removal is being proposed are highlighted in Attachment 1. Attachment 2 is a rendering of the proposed improvements designed by David Volz. This design is consistent with other locations in the City where turf was removed and drought tolerant landscaping was installed.

This item has been agendaized to provide the Council the opportunity to further discuss one of its strategic planning priorities, before any additional staff or consultant work is done to advance this project. If Council wishes to move forward with a project, the next step would be to host a community meeting on the proposed improvements. Staff could also complete a small pilot program to have Public Works staff remove some turf and replace with new landscaping to illustrate the proposed improvements, before moving forward on a larger scale.

It is appropriate for Council to discuss and evaluate if this project is still a Council priority and next steps for the project. It also provides Council an opportunity to determine if any additional information is needed before making a determination.

CITY COUNCIL STRATEGIC GOAL:

This project reflects a Council priority and a long-term commitment to sustainability and water conservation. By moving forward now, the City can take advantage of available state funding, reduce irrigation demands, and assist in addressing state and regional water conservation goals.

OPTIONS:

The City Council has the following options.

1. Authorize staff to initiate construction activities for the Highway 111 Drought Tolerant Landscape Project in accordance with the approved plans and grant requirements over a phased implementation. Included in this option, Council could scale back the level of turf removal to fully utilize existing grant funds awarded.
2. Authorize staff to install a test area of the landscape project as designed and bring back to Council for further discussion.
3. Provide staff direction that additional information is needed and bring back for further discussion at a later date.

4. Decide not to move forward with the proposed project at this time and bring back to the Council's 2026 Strategic Planning session for further discussion.
5. Decide not to move forward with the project and instruct staff to maintain the designs, unencumber any unused grant funding, and revisit the project at a later date.

6. Provide alternative direction.

FISCAL IMPACT:

The approved Capital Improvement Budget for this project is \$1,070,000. The grant amount allocated is \$650,000. If construction does not move forward at this time, the City will be required to de-obligate \$650,000 in grant funds.

CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACT (CEQA):

This project has been assessed in accordance with the authority and criteria contained in the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), the State and local CEQA Guidelines, and the environmental regulations of the City. The City acting as Lead Agency, has determined the Drought Tolerant Landscaping Turf Replacement qualifies as being Categorical Exempt from CEQA pursuant to Section 15301(c), Existing facilities and 15304(b) Minor Alterations to Land.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Locations
2. Rendering
3. View Simulations