

5.02: Review Request for an Amendment to the Current Topsoil Standard

City Planner Anderson presented the staff report. He stated that the City has received a written request to consider an amendment to the current topsoil requirement. Presently, the issuance of any Building Permit for a new principal building (residential and commercial/industrial buildings) triggers installation of four inches of topsoil meeting MnDOT's Premium Topsoil Borrow specification, across all disturbed areas not otherwise improved with impervious surfaces (e.g. building, walkways, driveways, etc.). Staff has not prepared any draft ordinance amendment but did want to initiate a discussion with the EPB about what information will be helpful for a future discussion on this topic. He stated that staff received an email this afternoon from PSD, which he provided to the Board prior to the meeting, and stated that PSD would like to leave the topsoil requirement as is and focus more on education on the homeowner level. He stated that part of the concern is that perhaps the first homeowner is aware of the topsoil requirement, however when the property changes ownership the information is not passed on to future owners. He stated that staff continues to research water conservation techniques and it is becoming apparent that the most effective water conservation tool is the smart sensor technology for inground irrigation systems.

Board Member Covart asked what would happen if there is not enough topsoil.

City Planner Anderson stated that presently the City's engineering staff does the topsoil inspection and provided additional details. He stated that if the sod is laid prior to inspection the builder would need to roll back the sod to allow for the inspection.

Board Member Fetterley stated that she would like to see comparisons from other communities. She stated that as a recent homeowner in the community they installed a smart sensor without knowing the requirement of the City. She stated that they have seen a decrease in their water bill after installing that technology. She noted that if builders are installing the smart sensor, there should not be an issue with over watering going forward. She agreed that education of existing homeowners and with the change in ownership of property would be helpful but noted that if the smart sensor is installed that should prevent over watering.

City Planner Anderson stated that the irrigation amendment was done more recently and agreed that the City should not see the issue as much moving forward. He stated that the cost to meet the topsoil requirement for the smaller lots is about \$5,000, while the cost to meet the requirement for larger rural parcels would be higher.

Board Member Madison asked for details on the Capstone request.

City Planner Anderson stated that Capstone is aware of the City requirement. He stated that the City has created a list of pre-approved soil suppliers. He stated that if an alternate supplier is used, the developer/resident would have to have the soil tested.

Board Member Madison asked where the soggy yards are occurring for Capstone.

City Planner Anderson stated that could occur in swale areas that are lower in elevation. He provided additional information on the grading requirement of the City.

Board Member Madison referenced a relation of flat lots that use sump pumps and soggy lawns and asked if there is a requirement for drain tile for flat lots.

City Planner Anderson replied that the City does not have that requirement.

Board Member Fetterley asked if there are unintended consequences that could arise from changing the topsoil requirement.

City Planner Anderson stated that Capstone is not requesting to eliminate the topsoil requirement but is asking to eliminate the MnDOT certified soil requirement and instead use a standard topsoil mix. He stated that standard topsoil would have between one and three percent organic material while the City's specification requires at least five percent organic material. He stated that the perception could be that additional watering is required but did not believe homeowners think along those lines. He stated that in relation to erosion control, that is considered to be met once sod is installed or if grass seed is used, once grass has been fully established. He did not think a change in the topsoil specification would result in greater erosion concerns.

Board Member Fetterley stated that if there is less quality soil, people may water more frequently or not water enough to maintain grass/sod.

City Planner Anderson stated that multiple professors at the University of Minnesota have said that grass does not truly die, as it only goes dormant and once watered again, most will start growing again.

Chairperson Valentine referenced the regulations of neighboring communities and whether they have a soil type specification as well as depth.

City Planner Anderson confirmed that he would obtain that information from neighboring communities prior to the next time this topic is discussed, specifically what the definition of topsoil is, the amount of topsoil that is required, and the manner in which topsoil is required to be applied. He was unsure that any other communities have identified the premium topsoil specification that Ramsey has identified.

City Council Liaison LeTourneau asked if there would be a different definition of base soil for neighboring communities, specifically whether their base soil is also sand or perhaps clay.

Chairperson Valentine agreed that it would be important to compare other communities that have a similar sandy base soil that Ramsey has.

City Planner Anderson stated that Plymouth has clay soils and therefore comparing their requirements to Ramsey's would be like comparing apples to oranges. He agreed that it would be more important to focus on areas like Elk River and Andover as those are similarly growing communities that also have sandy soils. He stated that although Blaine is more developed, they also have sandy soils and perhaps that would also be a good comparison.

City Council Liaison LeTourneau stated that it would also be interesting to find out the other communities' orientation on water conservation. He noted that Ramsey is very orientated towards water conservation and if other communities do not share that concern, they may not have the same requirements. He stated that it is his understanding that Ramsey is handling the majority of the recharge of the aquifer while the discharge is being shared.

Board Member Fetterley referenced the educational standpoint and stated that perhaps there could be brainstorming on the information that would need to be shared. She noted that there are different areas of the community, noting that her property has no topsoil and is mostly sand and some property owners have City water while others have well water and therefore there would need to be different educational information shared to different property owners.

City Planner Anderson stated that the Board previously developed a water conservation toolbox that could be updated and perhaps there could be discussion of time appropriate information shared in the City newsletter and on the website for this topic. He stated that part of the challenge is that the City can make the information available but cannot make people read the information. He stated that perhaps there would be an opportunity to include information in the new resident mailing and packet that is made available to new residents.

Board Member Fetterley asked if the Board could target the irrigation companies that work in this area to assist in education of homeowners. She stated that her family has an irrigation company they work with that actually suggested the smart sensor.

City Planner Anderson stated that existing irrigation systems are not subject to the smart sensor requirement and explained that the intention was that any new systems installed would need to have the sensor.

City Council Liaison stated that the City's Communication Specialist could also possibly assist in the educational component.

City Planner Anderson confirmed that he would likely be working with the Communication Specialist on the educational components.

City Council Liaison LeTourneau asked the timeline of when this would move forward to the Council.

City Planner Anderson reviewed the potential schedule for this item noting that perhaps this would move to the Council in November or December. He stated that if there is any change, his intent would be to implement the change prior to the construction season in 2019.

City Council Liaison LeTourneau stated that he will appreciate the input of the Board Members at the future discussions in order to better represent their opinion when this does move forward to the City Council.

City Planner Anderson confirmed that to be his intention. He noted that the intent tonight was simply to introduce the discussion to the Board and obtain input on what the Board would find helpful for the next discussion.

Board Member Moore stated that it would be helpful to have the information from the City Engineer on the University of Minnesota session he attended regarding topsoil and watering.