



Sandy City Council Office

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MEMORANDUM

April 29, 2025

To: Members of the City Council

CC: Monica Zoltanski, Mayor
Shane Pace, CAO
Dustin Fratto, Council Office Executive Director

From: Cyndi Sharkey, Council Member At-large

Subject: Second Reading: Park Strips in Future Residential Development

Introduction

Over the past 5 years that I have studied and reflected on the use of park strips, it has become clear that Sandy City is facing growing challenges with park strips in residential neighborhoods. Park strips were intended to provide increased aesthetics and additional green space for streetscapes. Increasingly they have shown to be an inefficient use of space and water, costly to maintain and a growing eyesore full of gravel and weeds. My intention in analyzing this issue was to dive into the reasoning for requiring park strips and to really investigate if those reasons proved valid or if there was a better way forward for new residential developments.

Background

Once seen as aesthetic enhancements, park strips have been identified as water wasters. Residents have been encouraged to “flip their strips” but often the result isn’t compliant with code or well maintained. Xeriscaping, while preferred for water conservation, is more labor intensive than grass, is susceptible to weed growth, and is rarely maintained. The result of this has become a sharp increase in code complaints, and mismatched park strips throughout the community that often violate landscaping standards.

Street Trees located in park strips add another layer to this problem. While ideal in thought, street trees are a major contributor to sidewalk damage and city liability. Sandy City spends approximately a million dollars annually on sidewalk repair projects while estimating that 70% of the damage is from street trees. In addition, fallen leaves are

prone to clog gutters and stormwater inlets that cause a strain on stormwater management.

As Utah battles a housing affordability crisis, we must look at maximizing the efficiency of our land use. As residential lots become smaller, the space required for park strips could better be used for larger yards, smaller setbacks, and more generous sidewalk space. On a recent bus tour, the Council and City Staff visited a variety of residential developments that had no park strips. These residential areas ranged from large homes on large lots, to detached homes and twin homes on medium sized lots, to townhomes on small lots. The reality is that Sandy City is already full of residential areas without park strips, the benefits are obvious, and drawbacks are not apparent.

While there are challenges to any changes, I believe that these can be mitigated through thoughtful discussion and planning. In my research for this project, I spoke with over 60 professionals including planners, engineers, home builders, utility companies, elected officials and city employees. During each discussion it was easy to envision a path forward where we can maintain street trees, utility access, pedestrian safety and aesthetics while solving the problem of an inefficient use of space and water that drains financial resources in repairing hazardous concrete and creates risk.

Proposal

This proposal stems from years of thought and consultation with stakeholders, many of which have informed me that they now see park strips in a different way and can see the benefits of alternative design standards. I recommend the Council adopt a resolution directing that amendments be drafted to Chapter 21-21-10 of the Sandy Land Development Code that remove park strips as a residential design standard for all new residential developments. In removing the onerous and unnecessary requirement, we can pursue a better development standard that costs less and is a more efficient use of finite resources. Developers could still include park strips through a Planning Commission exception. The draft and recommendations being requested from CD staff should be presented to the council at a city council meeting no later than 90 days from the date the Council approves this proposal. Proposed amendments will go through the standard code amendment process, including review by City Staff, review by the Planning Commission, and all required notices and public hearings.

Attached Exhibits

Exhibit "A"

Provides an overview of the information I've gathered through research and interviews.

Exhibit "B"

Contains the materials that I originally presented to the Council on October 22, 2024 during my first reading of this item.

Exhibit “C”

Chapter 21-21-10(n) of the Sandy Land Development Code addresses Sandy Street Standards.

Exhibit “D”

Chapter 21-25-1 of the Sandy Land Development Code addresses Sandy Landscaping Standards.