



Non-Functional Turfgrass Transformation Project FAQ Sheet

Q: Why is the Water Utility Authority removing and replacing lawns?

A: Outdoor water use in Albuquerque accounts for 40% of overall demand. In order to close the gap between water supplies and demands in the Colorado River basin, the Water Utility Authority (in addition to 26 other water providers), signed a [Memorandum of Understanding](#) in 2022 committing to “Introduce a program to reduce the quantity of non-functional turfgrass by 30% through replacement with drought- and climate-resilient landscaping, while maintaining vital urban landscapes and tree canopies that benefit our communities, wildlife, and the environment”, among other actions.

Q: Who will be affected by this change?

A: Commercial, institutional, industrial, and multi-family / HOA properties with lawns that may meet the definition of “non-functional turfgrass” will be impacted by this change. However, it’s important to emphasize that all transformations will be **voluntary**. Lawns that serve a functional purpose will not be affected, including lawns used for visitations, gathering, recreation, pet activities, and civic/community events (such as events regularly scheduled at Balloon Fiesta Park and Tiguex Park). Single-family residential properties are **exempt** from this change, but they are still **eligible for voluntary lawn transformations** through rebates and have the option to participate if they choose to.

Q: What will replace the lawns and what will the new landscapes look like?

A: Lawns affected by the definition of “non-functional turfgrass” will be transformed into desert-friendly xeriscapes (as specified by [Albuquerque Bernalillo County Water Utility Authority Xeriscape Guide](#)). This program will **NOT** replace lawns with rocks and hardscape. The new landscapes will switch water intensive grasses with lower water use and drought-tolerant plants that are appropriate for Albuquerque's climate. These desert-friendly landscapes can also provide multiple co-benefits beyond water conservation, including reduced water bills, habitat creation, heat mitigation, and aesthetic improvement.

Q: How will tree health be maintained during this process?

A: Grass directly beneath tree canopies will be exempt from the removal efforts. This exemption will help protect the health of the tree and maintain the tree canopy, shade, and mitigate impacts from increased heat. The Water Authority is committed to preserving valuable mature trees and bolstering the size and diversity of our urban forest. Best management practices for preserving existing mature trees will be required for participating lawn transformation sites as well as the planting of new trees.

Q: What are the benefits of switching from lawns to desert-friendly landscaping alternatives?

A: Resilient and desert-friendly landscapes:

- Reduce outdoor water use and help make water bills more affordable;
- Support wildlife, pollinators, and climate-adapted plant species;
- Increase the size and diversity of the urban forest to create shade and combat the urban heat-island effect;
- Use rainwater to help irrigate new landscapes;
- Provide stormwater detention and infiltration benefits; and,
- Provide aesthetic beauty that can increase property values.

Q: How will this program impact my property value?

A: The transition to desert-friendly landscaping through our program can positively impact property values in several ways. Desert-friendly landscapes are known to enhance curb and aesthetic appeal, which can attract potential buyers and contribute to increased property values. Additionally, these landscapes often require less maintenance and water, resulting in long-term cost savings for property owners.

Q: Will reducing lawns increase Albuquerque's temperature?

A: Reducing lawns and replacing them with desert-friendly landscaping is not expected to increase Albuquerque's temperature. In fact, these changes are likely to mitigate the urban heat island effect by maintaining and increasing tree canopy cover, encouraging the installation of climate adapted plants and increasing green space, and ultimately contributing to a more sustainable and cooler built environment. A [study conducted by the Desert Research Institute](#) found that low water landscapes that include living plant material and shade trees can achieve the same level of cooling during the daytime as lawns.



Q: Once new desert-friendly landscapes are installed, what will prevent people from replacing those with traditional grass lawns again?

A: To prevent the reinstallation of grass lawns, ongoing education and community outreach programs will be implemented to raise awareness about the benefits of desert-friendly landscaping alternatives. Additionally, local ordinances and regulations will encourage the maintenance of desert-friendly landscapes and discourage the reinstallation of grass.

Q: Will lawn replacements consider varying income levels and varying access to green space within the community?

A: The project is actively incorporating feedback from local stakeholders on concerns around equity and access. Efforts are underway to ensure that lawn transformations consider varying income levels and access to greenspace in the community. Single-family residential properties, although exempt from the “non-functional turf” definition, will be encouraged to transform their lawns into desert-friendly landscapes and participate in the Water Utility Authority’s Lawn to Xeriscape Rebate Program. Additionally, the Water Utility Authority is exploring how it can create programs that may provide additional subsidies and resources to support other property types (e.g., multi-family properties) and lower-income residents' transition to desert-friendly landscaping, such as direct installation of climate appropriate landscapes.

Q: Who is going to pay for these projects? How much will this cost?

A: The Water Utility Authority is exploring how it can help pay for, and incentivize, these lawn transformation projects, and is developing various project cost scenarios designed to keep rates down while meeting its water conservation goals. Currently, the Water Utility Authority has a Lawn to Xeriscape Rebate Program (up to \$2 per square foot) to help residential and commercial customers remove and replace their lawns with desert-friendly landscaping.

Additional Questions? Reach out to: askanexpert@abcwua.org

