



● **Board of Directors**  
***One Water and Stewardship Committee***

8/15/2023 Board Meeting

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7-4

**Subject**

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Authorize implementation of a tree rebate modification to the Turf Replacement Program; the General Manager has determined that the proposed actions are exempt or otherwise not subject to CEQA

**Executive Summary**

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On February 12, 2019, Metropolitan's Board of Directors authorized several modifications to the Turf Replacement Program. Metropolitan Board, staff, and member agencies designed this conservation element as an annually offered program, which included sustainability requirements for removing turf and replacing it with drought-tolerant landscapes. This letter describes a proposed approach to add a tree rebate as another feature to increase the environmental sustainability and benefits of the program.

**Timing and Urgency**

Upon approval, the tree rebate is expected to be added to the program by the end of 2023.

**Details**

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**Background**

Conservation and water use efficiency have played a key part in Metropolitan's Integrated Water Resources Plan (IRP) for decades and will continue to move forward through the Climate Adaptation Master Plan for Water (CAMP4W). Metropolitan's regional conservation program is an important tool to help meet the conservation goals established by the IRP. This program provides financial incentives to encourage the installation of drought-tolerant landscapes and water-saving fixtures and devices.

During the last drought, the most popular water efficiency program was the Turf Replacement Program. Turf replacement provided long-term benefits by focusing public attention on a necessary transition to more drought-tolerant landscapes throughout Southern California. The Turf Replacement Program provides water savings while ensuring that these new landscapes are environmentally sustainable gardens.

The environmental benefit and importance of trees have been well established in the landscaping industry. Trees provide benefits such as urban cooling, carbon sequestration, and air quality improvements. The promotion of trees in the Turf Replacement Program will increase the environmental sustainability of these landscapes. It also directly addresses concerns about an increase in the urban heat island effect due to the removal of grass lawns.

**Proposed Approach**

The tree rebate will be added to the Turf Replacement Program as an additional optional incentive on top of the base \$2 per square foot incentive currently offered. All previously set program controls, such as the \$43 million funding cap, required project elements, and pre- and post-inspections, will remain in place.

***Proposed Changes***

- Add \$100 rebate per tree.
  - Maximum of five trees, or up to \$500 rebate per application.
  - 15-gallon minimum tree size required to be eligible for rebate.
- Change program guidelines to allow each newly planted tree to equal three plants.
  - Current guidelines require three plants per 100 square feet of rebated project area.

***Supporting Information***

The average cost of a 15-gallon tree ranges from \$80 to \$150, depending on the species of tree. The chosen rebate of \$100 per tree will cover most or all of the cost of the tree. The tree rebate option will include resources and guidelines such as a tree definition, recommended tree list, and tree exclusion list. The focus of the rebate will be on native trees with the greatest environmental benefits while allowing flexibility for applicants to choose trees based on size, firescaping needs, and other concerns.

***Project Milestone***

If approved by the Board, staff will implement the proposed changes. Staff will monitor data from the program and report progress and results to the Board.

**Policy**

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Metropolitan Water District Administrative Code Section 11104: Delegation of Responsibilities

By Minute Item 51496, dated February 12, 2019, the Board authorized changes to the Turf Replacement Program.

By Minute Item 51166, dated April 10, 2018, the Board authorized the Landscape Transformation Program.

By Minute Item 50358, dated January 12, 2016, the Board adopted the 2015 Integrated Water Resources Plan Update, as set forth in Agenda Item 8-3 board letter.

By Minute Item 50134, dated May 26, 2015, the Board authorized a budget increase and modifications to the Turf Removal Program.

By Minute Item 49542, dated September 10, 2013, the Board authorized new conservation program initiatives.

By Minute Item 49068, dated May 8, 2012, the Board authorized changes to Metropolitan's Water Conservation Program.

By Minute Item 48772, dated August 16, 2011, the Board adopted the Long-Term Conservation Plan and revisions to the water conservation policy principles.

**California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)**

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**CEQA determination for Option #1:**

The proposed actions are not defined as a project under CEQA because they involve continuing administrative activities, such as general policy and procedure making (Section 15378(b)(2) of the State CEQA Guidelines). In addition, the proposed actions are not subject to CEQA because they involve other government fiscal activities, which do not involve any commitment to any specific project which may result in a potentially significant physical impact on the environment (Section 15378(b)(4) of the State CEQA Guidelines).

**CEQA determination for Option #2:**

None required

## Board Options

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### Option #1

Authorize implementation of the tree rebate option for the Turf Replacement Program.

**Fiscal Impact:** Estimated \$830,000 increase in Turf Replacement Program expenditures per year, which equates to 3 percent of total program budget.

**Business Analysis:** The proposed changes may increase participation in the Turf Replacement Program.

### Option #2

Take no action

**Fiscal Impact:** None

**Business Analysis:** Staff would explore other ways to encourage tree installation as part of the Turf Replacement Program.

## Staff Recommendation

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### Option #1

  
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Brad Coffey  
Manager, Water Resource Management

8/3/2023

Date

  
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Adel Hagekhalil  
General Manager

8/7/2023

Date