City of Sebastopol

CITY OF SEBASTOPOL CITY COUNCIL
AGENDA ITEM REPORT FOR MEETING OF: December 1, 2026

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To:	Honorable Mayor and City Councilmembers
From:	Oriana Hart, Public Works Director
Department:	Public Works
Subject:	Ordinance Adding Section 13.04.050 to the Sebastopol Municipal Code to Prohibit Irrigation of Nonfunctional Turf with Potable Water in Compliance with AB 1572

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RECOMMENDATION(s):
That the City Council introduce and waive the first reading of an ordinance adding Section 13.04.050 to the Sebastopol Municipal Code to prohibit the irrigation of nonfunctional turf with potable waters pursuant to AB 1572.

PROCESS OF AGENDA ITEM:
If the item remains on the Consent Calendar, no presentation is required, and the item will be approved as part of the Consent Calendar. If the item is removed from the Consent Calendar, it will be heard as a regular agenda item and will proceed as follows:

- Presentation of Agenda item by the Requestor or Responsible Department
- Questions and Discussion from Councilmembers
- Public Comment Period
- Presentation Received

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:
Assembly Bill 1572 (AB 1572), enacted in 2023, prohibits the use of potable water to irrigate nonfunctional turf at specified commercial, industrial, institutional, and common-area properties, with phased compliance deadlines beginning January 1, 2027. The law also requires public water systems to revise their regulations, ordinances, or policies governing water service and communicate the requirements to customers by January 1, 2027.

Staff recommends amending the City's Municipal Code to incorporate the state requirements. The proposed ordinance defines functional and nonfunctional turf, identifies covered property types and compliance dates, and provides limited exceptions for irrigation necessary to maintain trees and other perennial non-turf plantings and to address immediate health and safety needs. The proposed amendment incorporates the state requirements into Sebastopol's Municipal Code, with code location and administration adapted for the City.

BACKGROUND:
AB 1572 was signed into law in October 2023 and is codified at California Water Code Section 10608.14. The law seeks to reduce potable water use for turf that is decorative and not used for recreation or community activity. Examples of nonfunctional turf include mowed grass in parking lots, street rights-of-way, around signs or buildings, and turf enclosed by barriers that permanently prevent access for recreation or assembly. Turf in recreational use areas or community spaces is generally functional turf. AB 1572 identifies January 1, 2027, as the deadline for public water systems to revise their local regulations, ordinances, or policies and communicate the requirements to customers. Sebastopol's existing Municipal Code includes water conservation and water shortage provisions; staff proposes placing the AB 1572 provisions within Chapter 13.04, Water and Sewerage System Conservation Requirement, of the Municipal Code.

DISCUSSION:
The ordinance would prohibit the use of potable water to irrigate nonfunction turf by the City's water customers based on the following compliance schedule, as required by Water Code Section 10608.14:

City of Sebastopol

- January 1, 2027: Properties owned by the California Department of General Services, properties owned by the City or other local or regional agencies governments, and public water systems.
- January 1, 2028: All other institutional properties and all commercial and industrial properties.
- January 1, 2029: Common areas of homeowners' associations, common interest developments, and community service organizations or similar entities.

The ordinance would also clarify that potable water may be used to the extent necessary to maintain the health of trees and other perennial non-turf plantings, or to address an immediate health and safety need. Cemeteries are excluded from the statutory covered-property prohibition. The prohibition is on irrigation with potable water; it does not itself prohibit the presence of turf. The ordinance would incorporate the statutory definitions and requirements into the City's water conservation regulations.

The City will utilize existing State resources and outreach materials developed by the State Water Resources Control Board to communicate AB 1572's nonfunctional turf (NFT) requirements to affected properties. Outreach will focus on informing property owners of the applicable compliance deadlines, identifying covered property types, explaining the distinction between functional and nonfunctional turf, and providing information regarding available exceptions and compliance options. By leveraging existing State guidance and communication resources, the City intends to provide clear and consistent information to affected water customers while minimizing the need to develop separate outreach materials.

STAFF ANALYSIS:
AB 1572 is structured as a restriction on the source of irrigation water, rather than a requirement to remove turf or convert every affected landscape. Property owners may evaluate climate-appropriate landscape conversion, discontinue potable irrigation, or use recycled water or rainwater where available. This distinction is important for communicating the law: compliance does not necessarily require immediate landscape reconstruction, although site-specific irrigation changes may be needed.

The law's functional turf definition is based on whether turf is located in a recreational use area or community space. Turf that is fenced or otherwise permanently inaccessible for recreation or assembly is expressly not functional. This provides a basis for distinguishing active-use lawns and gathering spaces from decorative turf, such as narrow landscape strips or grass areas in parking lots. AB 1572 also creates future property-owner certification requirements separate from the City's obligation to update its water-service regulations and notify customers. Owners of covered commercial, industrial, or institutional properties with more than 5,000 square feet of irrigated area, excluding cemeteries, must certify compliance to the State Water Resources Control Board beginning June 30, 2030, and every three years through 2039. Owners of covered HOA, common-interest-development, or similar common areas exceeding 5,000 square feet must begin certification June 30, 2031, and every three years through 2040. These reporting requirements may be relevant to customer outreach and information the City provides, but the statutory certification is made by the property owner to the State Water Board.

Staff's implementation focus is therefore to adopt code language aligned with Water Code Section 10608.14 and communicate the applicable property categories, dates, definition of nonfunctional turf, and exceptions in a clear manner to City water customers.

FISCAL IMPACT:
Adoption of the ordinance itself is not anticipated to result in a direct fiscal impact to the General Fund or Water Enterprise Fund. However, the City will incur nominal staff costs associated with providing information and outreach to property owners affected by the new regulations to communicate the requirements and applicable deadlines.

Compliance with the nonfunctional turf requirements will also necessitate landscape conversion in the nonfunctional turf areas in front of the Sebastopol Community Center and Police Department facilities. The City has secured grant

City of Sebastopol

funding to support this conversion work, which will offset the associated initial project costs. Following completion, the converted landscape areas are expected to require ongoing maintenance, and the City may experience increased future maintenance costs. These recurring costs will be considered through the City's operating budget process.

CITY COUNCIL GOALS/PRIORITIES/AND OR GENERAL PLAN CONSISTENCY:
This agenda item represents the City Council goals/priorities as follows:

- Goal 4 – High Performance Organization, specifically Task 4.4: Policies, Codes & Procedures Updates, which identifies updating the Municipal Code related to water use and turf as a priority.
- Goal 3 – Infrastructure by promoting responsible management and conservation of the City's water resources.

PUBLIC COMMENT:
This agenda item has been noticed in accordance with the Ralph M. Brown Act and was available for public viewing and review at least 72 hours prior to the scheduled meeting date.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH:
This item has been noticed in accordance with the Ralph M. Brown Act and was available for public viewing and review at least 72 hours prior to the scheduled meeting date. As of the writing of this staff report, the City has not received any public comment on this item. However, if staff receives public comment from interested parties following the publication and distribution of this staff report, such comments will be provided to the City Council as supplemental materials before or at the meeting. In addition, public comments may be offered during the public comment portion of this item.

RESTATED RECOMMENDATION:
That the City Council introduce and waive the first reading of an ordinance adding Section 13.04.050 to the Sebastopol Municipal Code to prohibit the irrigation of nonfunctional turf with potable water pursuant to AB 1572.

CITY COUNCIL OPTIONS:
There is no other alternative to approving this ordinance in order to be compliant with State regulations.

ATTACHMENT:
1 – Proposed Ordinance Amendment
2 – Municipal Code Title 13 with markups showing all changes
3 – CalWEP Fact Sheets

APPROVALS:
Department Head Approval: Approval Date: 11/6/26
CEQA Determination (Community Development): Approval Date: N/A
Exempt from CEQA pursuant to Title 14 of the CCR, Section 15378(b)(5).
Administrative Services (Financial) Approval Date: N/A
Costs authorized in City Approved Budget: ☐ Yes ☐ No N/A ☒
Account Code (f applicable) _____
City Attorney Approval: Approval Date: 11/23/26
City Manager Approval: Approval Date: 11/24/26

ORDINANCE NUMBER _____

FIRST READING AND INTRODUCTION

AN ORDINANCE OF THE CITY OF SEBASTOPOL ADDING SECTION 13.04.050 TO THE SEBASTOPOL MUNICIPAL CODE TO PROHIBIT IRRIGATION OF NONFUNCTIONAL TURF WITH POTABLE WATER PURSUANT TO AB 1572

WHEREAS, Article X, Section 2 of the California Constitution declares that water resources are to be put to beneficial use, that waste and unreasonable use of water be prevented, and that water be conserved for the public welfare; and

WHEREAS, Assembly Bill 1572 (AB 1572), enacted in 2023 and codified at California Water Code Section 10608.14, prohibits the use of potable water to irrigate nonfunctional turf at specified commercial, industrial, institutional, and common-area properties on phased compliance dates; and

WHEREAS, AB 1572 requires public water systems to revise regulations, ordinances, or policies governing water service and communicate the requirements to customers by January 1, 2027; and

WHEREAS, the City desires to amend the Sebastopol Municipal Code to implement the state requirements, promote efficient use of potable water, and protect the City's water supply;

NOW, THEREFORE, THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF SEBASTOPOL DOES ORDAIN AS FOLLOWS:

SECTION 1. RECITALS

The foregoing recitals are true and correct and are incorporated herein by reference.

SECTION 2. MUNICIPAL CODE AMENDMENT

Section 13.04.050 is hereby added to the Sebastopol Municipal Code to read as follows:

13.04.050 Prohibition on Irrigation of Nonfunctional Turf with Potable Water.

A. Definitions. For purposes of this section:

1. "Functional turf" means a ground cover surface of turf located in a recreational use area or community space. Turf enclosed by fencing or other barriers that permanently preclude human access for recreation or assembly is not functional turf.

2. "Nonfunctional turf" means turf that is turf maintained primarily for appearance rather than regular recreational or community use, including turf located within street rights-of-way and parking lots.

3. "Recreational use area" means an area designated by a property owner or governmental agency to accommodate human foot traffic for recreation, including sports fields, golf courses, playgrounds, picnic grounds, or pet exercise areas. Recreation may be formal or informal.

4. "Community space" means an area designated by a property owner or governmental agency to accommodate human foot traffic for civic, ceremonial, community events, or social gatherings.

5. "Common area" means a portion of a common interest development or property owned or managed by a homeowners' association, community service organization, or similar entity that is not assigned or allocated to the exclusive use of occupants of an individual dwelling unit.

B. Prohibition and compliance dates. The use of potable water to irrigate nonfunctional turf located on commercial, industrial, and institutional properties, other than cemeteries, and on properties of homeowners' associations, common interest developments, and community service organizations or similar entities is prohibited as of the following dates:

1. January 1, 2027, for properties owned by the California Department of General Services, the City, other local regional public agencies, and public water systems.
2. January 1, 2028, for all other institutional properties and all commercial and industrial properties.
3. January 1, 2029, for all common areas of properties of homeowners' associations, common interest developments, and community service organizations or similar entities.

C. Exceptions. Notwithstanding subsection B, the use of potable water is not prohibited to the extent necessary to ensure the health of trees and other perennial non-turf plantings, or to address an immediate health and safety need.

D. Extension. If the State Water Resources Control Board extends the deadline for compliance with Water Code section 10608.14, the deadlines extended by Subsection (B) shall be similarly extended automatically.

SECTION 3. CEQA

The City Council finds that this Ordinance is exempt from the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Sections 15307 (Actions by Regulatory Agencies for Protection of Natural Resources) and 15308 (Actions by Regulatory Agencies for Protection of the Environment).

SECTION 4. SEVERABILITY

If any section, subsection, sentence, clause, or phrase of this ordinance is held invalid or unconstitutional by a court of competent jurisdiction, such decision shall not affect the validity of the remaining portions of the ordinance.

SECTION 5. PUBLICATION

The City Clerk shall cause this ordinance to be published and posted as required by law.

SECTION 6. EFFECTIVE DATE

This ordinance shall take effect thirty (30) days after its passage.

APPROVED FOR FIRST READING AND INTRODUCTION OF ORDINANCE at the Regular City Council Meeting of December 1, 2026.

VOTE:

AYES:
NOES:
ABSENT:
ABSTAIN:

APPROVED: _____
Mayor Jill McLewis

ATTEST: _____
Mary Gourley, City Manager

APPROVED AS TO FORM: _____
Alex Mog, City Attorney

ATTACHMENT 2 — PROPOSED MUNICIPAL CODE AMENDMENT (REDLINE)

Title 13 — Public Services | Chapter 13.04 — Water and Sewerage System Conservation Requirements

ADD: 13.04.050 Prohibition on Irrigation of Nonfunctional Turf with Potable Water

A. Definitions..“Functional.turf”.means.a.ground.cover.surface.of.turf.located.in.a.recreational.use.area.or community space. Turf enclosed by fencing or other barriers that permanently preclude human access for recreation or assembly is not functional turf.

“Nonfunctional turf” means turf that is turf maintained primarily for appearance rather than regular recreational or community use, including turf located within street rights-of-way and parking lots.

“Recreational use area” means an area designated by a property owner or governmental agency to accommodate human foot traffic for recreation, including sports fields, golf courses, playgrounds, picnic grounds, or pet exercise areas. Recreation may be formal or informal.

“Community space” means an area designated by a property owner or governmental agency to accommodate human foot traffic for civic, ceremonial, community events, or social gatherings.

“Common area” means a portion of a common interest development or property owned or managed by a homeowners’ association, community service organization, or similar entity that is not assigned or allocated to the exclusive use of occupants of an individual dwelling unit.

B. Prohibition and compliance dates. The use of potable water to irrigate nonfunctional turf located on commercial, industrial, and institutional properties, other than cemeteries, and on properties of homeowners’ associations, common interest developments, and community service organizations or similar entities is prohibited as of:

1) January 1, 2027, for properties owned by local governments, local or regional public agencies, and public water systems, except properties described in subsection B.4.
2) January 1, 2028, for all other institutional properties and all commercial and industrial properties.
3) January 1, 2029, for all common areas of properties of homeowners’ associations, common interest developments, and community service organizations or similar entities.

C. Exceptions. Potable water use is not prohibited to the extent necessary to ensure the health of trees and other perennial non-turf plantings, or to address an immediate health and safety need.

LESS LAWN MORE EFFICIENCY

Fact Sheet: New Rules for Watering Lawns in California

California law (AB 1572) will soon prohibit the use of potable (drinking) water to irrigate nonfunctional turf—lawns that serve no recreational or community purpose—at most municipal, government, commercial, industrial, and institutional (CII) properties, including common areas managed by homeowner associations (HOAs).

These new rules provide an opportunity to create welcoming new spaces that showcase the beauty of low-water and native plants, highlight your commitment to a sustainable future, and provide a vision for others in your community to follow. They also work in tandem with California's Model Water Efficient Landscape Ordinance, which sets standards for water-wise landscape design for projects of a certain square footage.

By taking early action, you can reduce water use and pesticide usage, showcasing the way forward for local businesses, HOAs, landscape designers, and the community at large.



Toyon *Heteromeles arbutifolia, California native*

This fact sheet explains what is changing and how to prepare.



Functional Lawn



Nonfunctional Lawn

WHAT IS NONFUNCTIONAL LAWN?

Nonfunctional lawn refers to irrigated lawn that is purely ornamental and not regularly used for recreation or public gatherings.

Examples include:

- Narrow lawn strips in or around parking lots
- Decorative lawn along sidewalks, buildings, or fences
- Lawn between buildings with no seating, access, or activity
- Lawn in medians, roundabouts, or entry signage zones
- Sloped or oddly shaped areas that are hard to use or water efficiently

WHAT HAPPENS IF YOU DON'T COMPLY?

Failure to comply with AB 1572's nonfunctional lawn irrigation restrictions can result in civil penalties of up to $1,000 per day (California Water Code §1846). Enforcement specifics may vary by water agency; please get in touch with your local water provider for details.



BY JANUARY 1, 2027:

Public properties owned or managed by local governments—including city and county buildings, libraries, fire and police stations, courthouses, streets and highways, and public utilities—must stop watering nonfunctional lawn.

CREATE A VISION OF A NEW SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY

Many cities and counties are using this as an opportunity to transform their public properties and create colorful, sustainable, water-wise landscapes that establish a striking and memorable visual idenity at their public properties and inspire residents to do the same.

Show Off Your Local Roots:

- **Create landscapes filled with water-wise plants native to your region.**
- **Plant gardens that provide sustenance and shelter for native pollinators, birds, butterflies, and bees.**
- **Add shade trees that help cool buildings and sidewalks.**
- **Develop demonstration gardens that incorporate features such as stormwater capture, bioswales, recycled water, high-efficiency irrigation systems, and informational signage.**

Agenda Item Number 10

YOUR WATER PROVIDER IS HERE TO HELP

Many water agencies offer:

- Lawn replacement and irrigation rebates
- Free site visits and landscape reviews
- Sample plant lists and design templates
- Tree protection tips and irrigation strategies



The Loomis Library & Community Learning Center worked with the UC Master Gardeners of Placer County over six months to transform water-thirsty lawn surrounding the library into a stunning waterwise demonstration garden:

- 11,000 sq. ft. of lawn removed
- 12 unique areas featuring 85 plant varieties
- Serves as a living library and community resource
- Over 70% reduction in water used



The Santa Barbara Fire Department created a 1.7-acre Firescape Garden across the street from a fire station. It features:

- Four different plant zones filled with waterwise plants that highlight how to arrange plants around a residence
- A high-efficiency irrigation system that keeps the plants healthy

CALIFORNIA WATER EFFICIENCY PARTNERSHIP

NonFunctionalTurfCA.org

Agenda Item Number 10
City Council Meeting Packet for December 1, 2026

LESS LAWN MORE EFFICIENCY

A New Look for the City of Sebastopol

You are going to be seeing a new, more colorful and water-wise look for the landscapes around our government buildings and properties. We're going to remove sections of lawn that serve no purpose and replace them with stunning, water-wise landscapes filled with native plants and plants more suited for our climate.



Toyon *Heteromeles arbutifolia, California native*

We are developing low-water-use and native plant gardens, adding more shade trees, and creating more vibrant and sustainable landscapes.



Photo by Moulton Niguel Water District



Photo by Christine Kohn



Photo by City of Sacramento

The New Law

A new statewide law—AB 1572—requires local governments, counties, special districts, and other public agencies to stop watering lawns that serve no recreational or community purpose at public properties by January 1, 2027.

The law does not apply to parks, soccer fields, and baseball diamonds, to cemeteries or other areas where people gather.

Why Was This Law Passed

Drought is a way of life in California, and periods of drought are becoming more frequent and intense as the climate continues to warm. By transforming areas of lawn that serve no purpose into water-wise landscapes, California can save millions of gallons of drinking water a year. This will help strengthen California's ability to endure future droughts and protect this precious resource, so that it's always available when you need it.

How Will This Impact You

AB 1572 applies to properties owned by state and local public agencies, commercial, industrial, institutional properties, and non-residential HOA common areas. It does not apply to single-family or multi-family residential properties, but we hope you'll be inspired by the beautiful water-wise landscapes and do the same at your home.

OUR VISION

Here are the types of water-wise plants we will be adding around our community. You are welcome to join us in our quest to make our community more sustainable by participating in our water efficiency program. You can find more information online at: [insert URL]













CALIFORNIA WATER EFFICIENCY PARTNERSHIP