

Integrated Land and Water Use Planning for the City of Colorado Springs

Growing Water Smart Honor Award

[Award Video](#)

Our adventure began when the City of Colorado Springs and Colorado Springs Utilities attended the WaterSmart Land and Water Use Planning Workshop in Fall 2019. During this workshop, we began to collaborate on how best to connect land and water planning and identified future planning efforts where water and land use planning could start. Our first opportunity for collaboration were the City of Colorado Springs' RetoolCOS project to amend the zoning code, and Colorado Springs Utilities' update to the Water Efficiency Plan.

RetoolCOS revised the Zoning and Subdivision Ordinance, [Chapter 7 of City Code](#), which had not been comprehensively updated since the late 1990s. The primary goal of the project was to establish a new, modern, and more user-friendly Unified Development Code (UDC) as directed by PlanCOS, the 2019 Council-adopted comprehensive plan.

The RetoolCOS project gave the City of Colorado Springs and Colorado Springs Utilities an opportunity to update the Commercial Landscape Code which became part of City Code in 2001. Through this effort, we established regulatory language for a 25% high water use turf limit on all new development, including both commercial and residential projects, and the individual yards within those developments. Through the accompanying Landscape Policy Manual, we were able to improve irrigation efficiency equipment requirements, water-wise plant and tree requirements, and soil amendments.

Winning approval for these changes proved very challenging, especially the 25% high water use turf limit. A long series of collaborative presentations and virtual community tours demonstrated the need, and the issues around current landscape installs, and helped our team gain final approval from City Council in 2023. Combined, these Code changes will allow Colorado Springs Utilities to gain over 400 AF of annual savings by 2030.

Acknowledging the critical influence of land use patterns and density on water demands, Colorado Springs Utilities developed a Land Use-based Water Demand Model for its [2022 Water Efficiency Plan](#). A land use-based model consists of modeling future changes in water demands based on recent or emerging development patterns. This method is most useful where large areas of undeveloped land exist within a utility's water service boundary and where urban planning documents are available and regularly updated.

These models and plans will allow the City of Colorado Springs and Colorado Springs Utilities to better manage outdoor water use in new developments and predict how demands will change

as land-use changes. As a next step, we hope to demonstrate the value of these changes through landscape design competitions and public landscape installs that show how such changes reflect the economic vitality and community values of our City.



*Growing Water Smart Workshop 2019. Project team participants:
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