

Artificial Turf Zoning Text Amendment

STAFF REPORT

Ordinance No: 2022-02

Applicant: Village of Wellington

Request:

To amend Sections 3.2.2.30, 6.4.2, and 7.8.1.K of Wellington's Land Development Regulations (LDR) providing a definition and modifying regulations related to artificial turf for residential and non-residential uses in Wellington.

Boards, Committees, and Council:

	Date	Vote
PZAB	11/10/2021	Approval (6-1)
Tree Board	12/01/2021	Approval (5-1)
Council (1 st)	01/25/2022	Pending
Council (2 nd)	02/08/2022	Pending

Wellington Vision

A Great Hometown: Great Neighborhoods, Great Schools, and Great Parks.

Wellington Mission

To provide high-quality services that create economic, environmental, and social sustainability for residents.

Wellington Goals

- Economic Development
- Neighborhood Renaissance
- Protecting Our Investment
- Respecting the Environment
- Responsive Government

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Background:

On September 28, 2021, Council approved a Zoning in Progress (Resolution No. R2021-60) imposing a moratorium on the acceptance and processing of new applications for the installation of artificial/synthetic turf for non-governmental uses for a period of 180 days, to allow time for research and to draft a proposed zoning text amendment. Over the years, staff has had an increased interest from the public to use artificial turf on residential and non-residential properties.

Currently Section 7.8.1.K of the LDR limits the installation of artificial turf to governmental uses only. Since its introduction in the 1960, the use of artificial turf (FKA Astor Turf) has gone from mostly professional athletic fields to an increased use for parks, playgrounds, schools, residential properties, commercial properties, etc. Artificial turf is in the third generation, and manufactured to be less abrasive, more shock-absorbing, and less toxic compared to previous generations. Also, some artificial turf fibers are now made to look more similar to live natural turf/grass. The artificial turf installation consists of a complex system with multiple layer turf fiber and backing material, infilled with crumb rubber, sand, cork, etc., drainage system, and compacted existing natural subgrade, depending on different products and installation locations.

The timing of this text amendment is due to the overall increase in request from residential property owners over the years to install artificial turf in the back and side yards, and a recent artificial turf installation that was done in the parking lot and foundation areas of the Kobosko's Crossing project located at 9144

Forest Hill Boulevard. The Kobosko's Crossing owner and contractor did not know artificial turf installation was not allowed for commercial use in Wellington. The images below are of the artificial turf installation at Kobosko's Crossing.



The Kobosko's Crossing owner currently has an open Code Compliance case, which is on hold pending the conclusion of this code amendment.

Analysis:

Natural/living vegetation is an important element of Wellington's appearance and overall environmental impact. Wellington has been designated Tree City USA for over 20 years, participated in numerous Earth Day celebrations and replanting programs, and has regulations to protect existing vegetation. It is important to maintain these standards while being responsive and making changes to our regulations based on interest from the public. Research of other municipalities in the area and nationally indicates an increased acceptance for the use of artificial turf at parks, playgrounds, schools, on residential properties, and on commercial properties. Neighboring city code regulations on the use of artificial turf varies as shown below, with most allowing the use with limitations.

City	Allowed	Notes
Boca Raton	No	Will potentially have future regulations.
Delray Beach	Yes	Allowed with limited use/locations.
Greenacres	No	Will potentially have future regulations.
Hypoluxo	Yes	Not used to meet landscape code requirements.
Lantana	Yes	Used to meet landscape code requirements.
Palm Beach Gardens	Yes	Limited to impervious area. Not allowed in landscape buffers, parkways, or preserve areas.
Royal Palm Beach	Yes	Not used to meet landscape code requirements.
West Palm Beach	Yes	Not allowed in residential front yards or used to meet landscape code requirements.

The most likely reasons for an increase use of artificial turf is that third generation turf fibers are now made to look more similar to live natural turf/grass, reduce maintenance with no need to mow and water grass, and introduction of infill. The infill is brushed between the turf blades to keep the blades up, help keep the turf from moving, provide a cushion, and among other mimics soil function used in natural grass. Typical infill materials include crumb rubber and silica/quartz sand. Crumb rubber is made from used grounded up automobile tires, which may have some health concerns as the tires have some chemicals that may be considered toxic. There is no specific regulatory testing for artificial turf, so each manufacturer is responsible for testing the materials used in the artificial turf to make sure it meets the federal standards for health, safety, and environmental impacts. The artificial turf industry has the Synthetic Turf Council (STC) that assists buyers and end users with the selection, use, and maintenance of artificial/synthetic turf systems. The use of artificial turf poses a number of positive and negative impacts, below is a list of a few.

Artificial Turf	
Positive	Negative
Less water usage, advantage during water restrictions/shortages.	Increase surface/air temperatures (up to 40° F higher than natural grass), contribute to heat island effect.
Provide a useable surface for persons with disabilities/mobility aids.	Increase storm water run-off, potential flooding risk and water quality concerns.
No fertilizer/pesticide, potential to reduce the amount of toxic chemicals in groundwater.	No ecosystem benefits, loss of water retention/recharge, oxygen generation, carbon sequestration, and wildlife habitat.
No mowing, reduce the amount of yard waste, and air pollution from equipment.	Chemicals and synthetic materials, concerns with impact on human health and the environment.
Non-allergenic, reduce grass pollen and dust for persons with allergies.	Odor build-up, prone to hold odors if not cleaned-up.
Durable, able to withstand heavy use from sports and foot traffic.	Loss of natural green space, potential increase noise levels and reflective brightness compared to natural grass.

The cost (materials and labor) of installing an artificial turf system may range from \$5.00 to \$12.00 per square foot. Below are examples of the cost for the installation of artificial turf system based on square footage, which may increase per site conditions and access, materials and underlayment's selected, location, size, additional services or products selected, etc.

Square Feet	Cost (\$7 to \$12 per sq. ft.)
120 sq. ft.	\$840 to \$1,440
250 sq. ft.	\$1,750 to \$3,000
500 sq. ft.	\$3,500 to \$6,000
1000 sq. ft.	\$7,000 to \$12,000

There is a cost for artificial turf installation and disposal/replacement at end of life cycle, which may make natural grass more cost effective over time for some.

Exhibit A are images (Provided by Go Forever Green) of properties with artificial turf installed. Wellington currently has no open Code Compliance case for installation of artificial turf on residential properties. However, residential properties in Wellington may currently have artificial turf installed in the rear and side yards that are not visible.

Proposed changes to the LDR will allow limited use of artificial turf to include:

- Residential properties, in rear and side yards only;
- Residential common areas, in recreation/amenity areas;
- Commercial, not allowed in landscape buffers, or areas visible from rights-of-way; and
- Recreational areas, athletic/activity fields.

The draft zoning text amendment was workshop at the October 13, 2021 Planning, Zoning and Adjustment Board meeting, and the following revisions to the standards are included:

- Removal of the requirement for artificial turf to have a 15-year warranty from a United States manufacturer. There are still standards to ensure the artificial turf surface fibers/blade and backing are made of durable materials.
- Provide limitation on the area allowed for artificial turf. Clarification is provided that a maximum 75% impervious surface area is allowed in the rear and side yard of residential properties,
- Include the three (3) feet setback for the side yard on residential properties to continue the landscape strip. The setback will be required when a residential property has 15 feet or more setback/separation between the side property line(s) and on-site building(s)/structure(s).

Summary:

The Planning and Zoning Division recommends approval of Ordinance No. 2022-02 to amend Wellington's LDR modifying regulations to allow the limited use of artificial turf for residential and non-residential properties.

List of Exhibits:

- Exhibit A: Artificial Turf Installed Images
- Exhibit B: Proposed Changes to LDR
- Exhibit C: LDR Modification Log