



Staff Analysis

Referral to General Policy Committee:

Discussion of City of Gainesville participation in Alachua County Landscape Irrigation Design and Maintenance Standards Ordinance

Presented by:

Wendy Thomas, Director
Department of Doing

Lila Stewart, Strategic Planning Manager
Department of Doing

November 9, 2017

CITY OF GAINESVILLE STAFF ANALYSIS

Legistar No: 170321

Title: Referral to General Policy Committee Re: Discussion of City of Gainesville participation in Alachua County Landscape Irrigation Design and Maintenance Standards Ordinance

Sponsor (i.e., Name of Commissioner or Department): Department of Doing

City Staff Contact: Lila Stewart

Summary of Issue

In 2015, the Board of County Commissioners adopted an Ordinance affecting all new irrigation systems in unincorporated Alachua County called the 'Landscape Irrigation Design and Maintenance Standards'. The Ordinance applies to all new residential and commercial irrigation systems as well as major modifications to existing systems. The Ordinance includes design standards that restrict the total irrigated area, address high volume irrigation and sprinkler head types, and require site plan review and inspections.

In 2015 and 2016, the City Commission held six public hearings to discuss the Ordinance, but the item was ultimately stricken from the agenda in 2016.

At the request of the City Commission, the referral to the General Policy Committee will provide all stakeholders the opportunity to publicly revisit whether Gainesville will opt-in or opt-out of the Alachua County Landscape Irrigation Design and Maintenance Standards Ordinance, with an additional option of drafting a municipal ordinance for similar purposes.

History/Background Information

On September 22, 2015, the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) adopted the Landscape Irrigation Design and Maintenance Standards Ordinance to promote water conservation and improve water quality. The intent of the Ordinance is to increase irrigation efficiency and limit harmful nutrient run-off. The Ordinance only applies to properties in the unincorporated area, with an option for municipalities to opt-in.

On August 20, 2015 the City Commission referred agenda item #150188, 'Alachua County's Proposed Irrigation Efficiency Code' to the Community Development Committee to discuss whether or not to opt-in to the Ordinance. After six public hearings, the item was stricken from the City Commission agenda on July 7, 2016. At this time, no other municipalities in Alachua County have elected to opt-in to the Ordinance.

The following issues are presented for the Commission's consideration:

- Cost: Alachua County has shared with us that the cost of landscaping a property increased by approximately 50% when they implemented the Ordinance, primarily because sod is an inexpensive landscaping material. The plant materials and mulch that many landscapers are using meet the reduction in high volume irrigation required by the Ordinance, but are more expensive than traditional sod. There are landscaping alternatives (such as unirrigated Bahia) that would be less expensive, but these practices are not commonly practiced in new residential construction.
- Administration: The Alachua County Environmental Protection Department administers the Ordinance in the unincorporated area, to include reviewing landscape sketches, processing fees, providing training and conducting inspections. When this item was previously heard by the City Commission, staff recommended that Alachua County administer the program for the incorporated area of the City of Gainesville at no cost to the City. If the City of Gainesville chooses to opt-in to the Ordinance, the question of who administers the program will need to be deliberated. Alachua County has approximately 1.5 FTE's dedicated to the program. If the City of Gainesville chose to administer the program, a Department and a budget would need to be identified.
- Enforcement: When the Ordinance is violated in the unincorporated area, County staff takes an education first approach. Persistent violations can be addressed with citations or the Alachua County Code Enforcement Board can hear the violation and has the authority to take action. Today, all code violations of City Codes in the incorporated area of Gainesville are heard by a Special Magistrate. Alachua County currently enforces the Water Quality Code, Fertilizer Code, Irrigation restrictions and the Hazardous Material Codes within the incorporated area. If the City chooses to opt-in to the Ordinance, the question of who is responsible for enforcement will need to be deliberated.
- Future modifications to Ordinance: If the City opts-in to the County Ordinance and the County elects to make modifications, what expectations would the City like to set to have a seat at the decision-making table?

Options

1. Choose to opt-in to the Landscape Irrigation Design and Maintenance Standards Ordinance; provide direction to staff on administration, enforcement and future modifications to Ordinance.

2. Choose not to opt-in to the Landscape Irrigation Design and Maintenance Standards Ordinance.
3. Direct staff to address irrigation systems as part of a Green Ribbon Task Force item; specifically addressing:
 - a. How impactful will Irrigation Ordinance be in terms of water conservation,
 - b. Would other programs provide more of a ROI on city funds than irrigation (i.e. washer replacement, fixture replacement, etc.)
 - c. What impact will new building/plumbing codes have on water usage over time in the community as we redevelop?

Staff Recommendation

The General Policy Committee 1) hear a presentation; and 2) consider options for moving forward.