



Overview: A Green Streets Policy for the City of Tucson

Green Streets Policy Summary

The proposed Green Streets policy for the City of Tucson would require the Tucson Department of Transportation to integrate stormwater harvesting features (such as vegetated streetside basins) into all new, publicly funded roadway development and re-development. Such features would be included from the beginning of the design process in order to ensure their effectiveness. The policy would:

- Require that stormwater runoff from roadways be directed through green infrastructure features¹ in order to irrigate roadside vegetation and filter out stormwater pollution *before* entering storm drains;
- Require that features be designed to capture at least the first $\frac{1}{2}$ " of rain that falls on the roadway;
- Require that features be planted with a variety of native grasses, shrubs, and trees in order to provide shade, habitat, and beautification;
- Be adopted as a resolution by the Mayor and City Council, meaning the policy will be mandated, not optional.

Why support the Green Streets policy?

There are numerous benefits of green infrastructure features (like those required under the policy), including:

- **Reduced demand on precious potable water supplies for landscape irrigation.** Stormwater harvesting basins and appropriate plant selection ensure that once established, plants will no longer need supplemental irrigation. This reduces the environmental cost to the watershed as well as the economic cost to the City of Tucson.
- **Increased shade along roadways.** Tucson's current urban forest canopy cover is estimated at between 2 – 10%, far below those recommended for healthy urban areas for groups like American Forests. This policy would require that features be designed so that street trees provide shade to streets and sidewalks. The benefits of these trees include a more comfortable and beautiful environment for bicyclist and pedestrians, increased real estate values, and the reduction of urban heat island effect².

¹ Green infrastructure refers to constructed features that use living, natural systems to provide environmental services, such as capturing, cleaning, and infiltrating stormwater; creating wildlife habitat; shading and cooling streets and buildings; and calming traffic. Examples of features include streetside basins with curb cuts and sunken medians and traffic circles that capture stormwater.

² The term "heat island" describes built up areas that are hotter than nearby rural areas. The annual mean air temperature of a city with 1 million people or more can be 1.8–5.4°F (1–3°C) warmer than its surroundings. In the evening, the difference can be as high as 22°F (12°C). Heat islands can affect communities by increasing summertime peak energy demand, air conditioning costs, air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions, heat-related illness and mortality, and water quality. Source: <http://www.epa.gov/hiri/>

- **An enhanced urban forest.** In addition to the shade provided by street trees, green infrastructure features create native habitat when planted with native trees, shrubs, and grasses, which the policy encourages. Tucson's abundant urban wildlife provides a sense of place, a connection to nature, and attracts tourists.
- **Reduced flooding.** Since these features capture stormwater close to where it falls, Tucson's notorious street flooding may be reduced along roads designed in accordance with the policy.
- **Reduced water pollution.** The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has mandated that municipalities start to use green infrastructure in order to treat non-point source stormwater pollution. By capturing and infiltrating polluted stormwater close to where it falls, these features use natural processes to remove pollution like motor oil, brake pad dust, and herbicides.

What can you do to help?

Mayor and Council will consider the Green Streets policy at a study session on May 29, 2013. **Please voice your support for this innovative policy** by calling or writing to Mayor Rothschild and your City Council representative before this meeting! Visit <http://cms3.tucsonaz.gov/citygov> to find out who your City Council representative is.

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Ward 1 – Regina Romero: ward1@tucsonaz.gov, (520) 791-4040

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For more information about the proposed Green Streets policy, please contact Tory Syracuse at tsyracuse@watershedmg.org or 520-396-3266, ext. 6.