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Planning Commission to look at making landscape ordinance less rigid

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The Coldwater Planning Commission will look at ways to make its landscape ordinance less rigid and give some discretion in how much and what to plant.

After a review and workshop on Sept. 7, suggestions are expected to come back before the commission Monday.

The call for review came over a year ago after Dutcher's Funeral Home faced major requirements for a new parking lot expansion after it purchased a church along West Chicago for an event hall adjacent to its business at Western Avenue.

Consultants Giffels Webster made the presentation after calls to ease up requirements for Coldwater after numerous complaints the current law is too restrictive with too many requirements.

All the commissioners agreed there needed to be some landscaping requirements.

Commissioner Aaron Garn said if the city requires more "than what is needed to maintain property values it makes it a tax. It should be left up to the business owners. If they want to go beyond that, it's up to them. If we go beyond what maintains the town's look, then we are asking too much. It's not the city's responsibility to make it better. It's the city's responsibility to maintain property values," Garn argued.

Commissioner Salwa Alsuraimi said, "I think just leave it to the professionals, landscapers and have them come with their idea and we can all vote on whether it's too much or less."

Others on the commission wanted to see different requirements for different locations. Those along main roadways might require more, while off main streets less. Should areas not visible be required to be planted?

Some also want to take typography and current plants on-site into account.

Commissioners suggested owners should be allowed to substitute trees and plants which would require less maintenance. Another suggestion was for consideration be made for mature plants and trees, as well how they will look in the future.

Chair Aloha Miller said she misses the trees along Marshall she remembers as a little girl and the impression it made on her moving here. As an asthmatic she wants plants to help clear the air.

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Besides how much leeway to allow for landscaping, the commission must decide who makes the final decision, staff or the commission.

How much impact has Coldwater's landscape ordinance had on the city?

Planner Dean Walrack went to Google Map views to compare Coldwater to surrounding communities.

The pictures tell the story. Google maps street scenes showed the difference between the Aldi's in Coldwater, Battle Creek, and Angola to demonstrated how much impact Coldwater's landscape ordinance has on the look of these businesses.

There were other examples. Comparisons between Culver's, O'Reilly Auto Parts, Dollar General, and Dairy Queen in Coldwater and other communities with less restrictive or no landscape ordinances.

Those views are available in the Planning Commission agenda for the Sept. 7 meeting on the city's website



Google map view of Culver's in Sturgis [provided Photo]



Google map view of Culver's in Clearwater [provided Photo]

<https://www.thedailyreporter.com/story/news/2021/10/01/planning-commission-look-making-landscape-ordinance-less-rigid/5935611001/>