

HISTORIC LANDMARK COMMISSION STAFF REPORT



Planning Division
Department of Community and
Economic Development

600 E Medians Minor Alterations PLNHLC2012-00147 May 17, 2012

Applicant:

Nancy Monteith, EPG
Salt Lake City Corporation

Staff: Michaela Oktay,
(801) 535-6003,
michaela.oktay@slcgov.com

Master Plan Designation:
Central Community Master Plan

Council District:
District 4 – Luke Garrott

Community Council:
Central City – Thomas Mutter,
Chair

Lot Size: n/a

Current Use:
City Parkways

**Applicable Land Use
Regulations:**
▪ 21A.34.020 (G)

Notification:
▪ Notice mailed 4/08/12
▪ Sign posted 04/10/12
▪ Posted to Planning Dept and
Utah State Public Meeting
websites 4/08/12

Attachments:
A. Public Comment
B. Application

Request

This is a request by Nancy Monteith, of EPG, consultant to Salt Lake City Parks and Open Public Lands, for minor alterations to the 600 East medians extending from South Temple to 600 South (boundaries which result from the limited money available to perform the proposed upgrades).

The medians did not have a site survey performed as part of the 1983 survey, but are clearly an amenity and historic resource in the Central City Historic District.

The project is being referred by the Planning Director and presented to the Historic Landmark Commission to keep the Commission aware of what is proposed as a result of necessary repairs to the existing irrigation system, as well as to gather general substantive comments or suggestions with regard to turf and planting changes to water-wise conservation as directed by Salt Lake City's Mayor Becker.

It is considered a "best practice" in Urban Planning to consider all adopted plans and policies when making decisions within the public realm. This consideration involves close consideration to ensure that adopted policies, whether they relate to preservation or conservation or urban form, be equally considered.

Recommendation

It is the Planning Staff's opinion that the policies set forth in the Design Guidelines are not in conflict. It is also found that the standards of the historic preservation ordinance are generally met. Therefore the Planning Staff has found that the proposal would be appropriate in balancing City adopted policies as well as Preservation policies.

Based on the findings listed in the staff report, it is Planning Staff's opinion that the project meets the intent of Standards 1 through 12 of the Zoning Ordinance and that the Historic Landmark Commission provide the City with substantive recommendations about the proposal options A-D presented and approve the Certificate of Appropriateness.

Potential Motions

Consistent with Staff Recommendation: Based on the findings listed in the staff report, testimony and plans presented, I move to grant a Certificate of Appropriateness approving the repair of the irrigation system and conceptual plans to replace modern turf with water wise alternatives on the 600 E Medians as proposed.

Not Consistent with Staff Recommendation: Based on the testimony, plans presented and the following findings, I move that the Historic Landmark Commission deny a Certificate of Appropriateness for the conceptual plans to replace modern turf with water wise alternatives based on the standards listed below:

The HLC shall make findings on the Certificate of Appropriateness Standards as listed below :

1. A property shall be used for its historic purpose or be used for a purpose that requires minimal change to the defining characteristics of the building and its site and environment;
2. The historic character of a property shall be retained and preserved. The removal of historic materials or alteration of features and spaces that characterize a property shall be avoided;
3. All sites, structures and objects shall be recognized as products of their own time. Alterations that have no historical basis and which seek to create a false sense of history or architecture are not allowed;
4. Alterations or additions that have acquired historic significance in their own right shall be retained and preserved;
5. Distinctive features, finishes and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a historic property shall be preserved;
6. Deteriorated architectural features shall be repaired rather than replaced wherever feasible. In the event replacement is necessary, the new material should match the material being replaced in composition, design, texture and other visual qualities. Repair or replacement of missing architectural features should be based on accurate duplications of features, substantiated by historic, physical or pictorial evidence rather than on conjectural designs or the availability of different architectural elements from other structures or objects;
7. Chemical or physical treatments, such as sandblasting, that cause damage to historic materials shall not be used. The surface cleaning of structures, if appropriate, shall be undertaken using the gentlest means possible;
8. Contemporary design for alterations and additions to existing properties shall not be discouraged when such alterations and additions do not destroy significant cultural, historical, architectural or archaeological material, and such design is compatible with the size, scale, color, material and character of the property, neighborhood or environment;
9. Additions or alterations to structures and objects shall be done in such a manner that if such additions or alterations were to be removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the structure would be unimpaired. The new

	<p>work shall be differentiated from the old and shall be compatible in massing, size, scale and architectural features to protect the historic integrity of the property and its environment;</p> <p>10. Certain building materials are prohibited including the following:</p> <p>a. Vinyl or aluminum cladding when applied directly to an original or historic material, and</p> <p>b. Any other imitation siding material designed to look like wood siding but fabricated from an imitation material or materials;</p> <p>11. Any new sign and any change in the appearance of any existing sign located on a landmark site or within the H historic preservation overlay district, which is visible from any public way or open space shall be consistent with the historic character of the landmark site or H historic preservation overlay district and shall comply with the standards outlined in chapter 21A.46 of this title;</p> <p>12. Additional design standards adopted by the historic landmark commission and city council.</p>
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Background

Project Description

The applicant is requesting a certificate of appropriateness to replace a failing irrigation system and replace turf with water-wise plantings. The works are proposed on the 600 East medians that run from South Temple to 600 South. The City has received funding for this section of 600 East medians only.

Work Session

On April 5, the Historic Landmark Commission held a public hearing to consider the minor alterations. The applicants presented proposed conceptual changes, and members of the commission provided general comment and suggestions concerning the request. The commission requested that additional history about the 600 East medians be presented at the next public hearing before a Certificate of Appropriateness is issued for the proposed work.

History of Medians & Central City Historic District Designation

- 600 East was the first street in Salt Lake City to be “parked” with the creation of grass medians, trees and flower plantings in 1916.
- January 1983 SLC Architectural/Historical survey was done for the Planning Commission and Historic Landmark Commission.
- A petition to create the “Sixth East Parkway Historic District” (later renamed Central City) was first received by in 1988.
- East Downtown Master Plan 1990 lists the Sixth East Parkways as historically significant resources, with considerable mention of nominating Central City as a local historic district.

- An original petitioner, Paula Norris, stated “the original intent was to preserve the “600 East Islands.” (Planning Commission minutes 2/21/91)
- The 600 East medians are identified as a linking element for the two sub areas of the district, connecting South Temple/Avenues area to Liberty Park. (City Council Minutes 2/14/91)
- Central City (including the medians) was designated as a Local Historic District by Salt Lake City Council in 1991.

Documented Intent

City Engineering Department, Annual Report (1909) reads:

“Everything possible should be done towards encouraging and carrying on the work already commenced....It is for the benefit of those who cannot seek recreation elsewhere that public spirited and more fortunate citizens in most cities favor the (creation of parking). There should be more than public gardens where even trespassing on the grass is properly forbidden.”

An excerpt from the Salt Lake City Architectural/Historical Survey (1983), with discussion of Foliage and Parks, speaks to the medians/parkways:

“With the alteration of some city streets to accommodate the new street car system (1906-11) electrical wires and poles were moved from the center to the sides of the street or buried. Concurrent with those alterations was the creation of ‘parkings’ or grass medians, down the center of several streets within the city. The first street to be “parked” was 600 East, creating a park-like extension from the north entrance of Liberty Park to South Temple. Lawns and some trees were planted, and flower beds and walkways were added on a few of the medians. Other streets so developed included South Temple, 700 East, 800 East, 1000 East, 1200 East and 200 South. Although several of the parkings remain, a boulevard system was never realized and their potential to add to the attractiveness of surrounding neighborhoods remained unexploited.”

An excerpt from the Salt Lake City Architectural/Historical Survey (1983), with discussion of Urban Design Elements, identifies the “Grass Median Strips” on 600 East as “urban design elements” identified in the area. There was no structure/site form used for this element. They are identified as aesthetic assets to the city streetscape.

Central Community Master Plan (2005)

“Historically this area contained the largest number of apartments and rooming houses in the City and has been identified as the medium to high density housing area in all planning efforts. Historic apartment buildings, large tree lined streets and center street medians are characteristic.” “Preserve the historic 25 foot wide tree lined park strips.”

Urban Design Element 1990 (Prepared by SLC Planning Commission)

“The Historic Medians have a significant effect on the residential areas in the Central City...” “The following actions should be used to restore this vital design feature of the City:

- Develop a long term capitol investment plan to refurbish the existing medians and to reestablish the existing medians in their historic places.
- Develop a landscape strategy to conserve water and maintenance on the existing and proposed medians including trees and other forms of vegetation.
- Establish landscape medians in other locations as viable urban design elements particularly along “gateways” through the city as well as along major thoroughfares such as State Street.”

Analysis: There is no part of the proposal which includes removing any portion of the physical medians. Staff research of the history of the 600 East medians suggests that they are of particular importance to the city as well as a historical design element, public amenity and resource in the context of the Central City Historic district. Their preservation is key and well documented in the local district nomination, master plans and throughout various City documents. It is clearly City policy to ensure their preservation.

The proposal to upgrade the irrigation system would result in improvements that undoubtedly preserve the trees which are key elements within the medians. The system would also reduce water consumption which is the policy of the City and current conservation efforts from the Mayor’s office. Such repairs would not be visible and would preserve the historic medians as well strengthen the viability of existing and future tree plantings.

As a result of a change of the irrigation system, the second part of the proposal is to replace the existing grass with water-wise grasses that will reduce the water consumption and maintenance needs of the medians. The grass would be green, slow growing and would reach a maximum height of six inches (6”) when not mown.

Essentially, the City proposes to conserve over half the amount of water with the new grasses. The City also proposes to conserve resources with the reduced maintenance such grasses require.

Historical intent of the medians has shown that they are particularly important and documented as alternative open spaces, or “parks” to be utilized by Central City residents. As the Central City historic district is characterized by a large portion of multifamily land uses particularly north of 400 S. Considering the intent, and adjacent land uses, it is important that the character defining feature of the medians as grassy areas of use, have turf that is durable enough to withstand their historic utilization as open space amenities for people. It is also important that the growth and maintenance be such to continue active residential activity.

Findings: Staff finds that the irrigation repairs/replacement are appropriate as proposed. Staff finds that grass changes are minor alterations to the character of the medians and do not have a detrimental effect on the medians or the neighborhood. Staff recommends that the Commission provide clear substantive direction and recommendations that the turf is durable, and in summer months will accommodate their historic use as “leisure” areas is preserved, particularly within the blocks north of 400 South.

The repairs are appropriate. The conservation of water and the preservation of the medians is possible with special attention given to the appearance, height and durability of new grasses proposed. Historically the tree plantings, turf and other flower plantings have varied and changed over time. The proposed grass changes are found to be minor changes to the medians and appropriate.

Public Comments

Staff has not received any public comments.

Analysis and Findings

Although there is not a site survey form, Staff has identified the medians as contributing resources uses the following standards accordingly in this analysis.

21A.34.020 H Historic Preservation Overlay District

G. Standards for Certificate of Appropriateness for Altering of a Landmark Site or Contributing Structure: In considering an application for a Certificate of Appropriateness for alteration of a landmark site or contributing structure, the Historic Landmark Commission shall find that the project substantially complies with all of the general standards that pertain to the application and that the decision is in the best interest of the City.

Standard 1: A property shall be used for its historic purpose or be used for a purpose that requires minimal change to the defining characteristics of the building and its site and environment;

Analysis: The medians should have necessary repairs, and will not be taken out, thus preserved. The trees within the medians are character defining “key elements” which will be preserved. The grass turf is not identified as a defining characteristic per se, and proposed changes would result in minimal physical and visual change to the characteristics of the site and environment. The use of the medians should not change as a result of grass changes providing that the chosen species is generally green, durable and will grow to appropriate lengths that ensure the medians can be actively used by residents safely.

Findings for Standard 1: No change of use is proposed. Grass changes would result in a minimal change to the medians and a natural evolution of landscaping that has historically occurred. The changes proposed meet City policies that “new landscape features should be compatible with the historic context” and “develop a landscape strategy to conserve water and maintenance on the existing and proposed medians including trees and other forms of vegetation.”

Standard 2: The historic character of a property shall be retained and preserved. The removal of historic materials or alteration of features and spaces that characterize a property shall be avoided;

Applicable Design Guidelines for Standard 2

Historic Site Features (Page 55-57)

Parkways

A Parkway is a large grassed or treed median that line the center of a street such as along 600 East. Where they are found, parkways add a unique character to the streetscape. Thus, where parkways have been established, they should remain.

1.1 Preserve historically significant site features.

These may include historic retaining walls, irrigation ditches, gardens, driveways, and walkways. Fences and street trees are also examples of original site features that should be preserved. Sidewalks,

parkways, planting strips, street trees and lighting are examples of historic streetscape elements that should be considered in all civic projects.

Central City Historic District (Page 175-176)

Goals for the District:

“Because the overall street character is the greatest concern, more flexibility in other areas, particularly renovation details should be allowed.”

Commercial Area Features:

While most of the district retains a traditional residential character, some major commercial streets bisect the neighborhood in an east west direction. These have redeveloped recently with commercial uses in auto-oriented designs and as a result, no historic context exists there. “When viewed from within the more intact residential portions of the district, these commercial zones are visually disruptive.”

It is not the intent to create a “historical” image for buildings in these areas, but simply to apply principles of good urban design that will enhance the visual quality while accepting the “contemporary design”

Characteristics of the Central Historic District

Grass medians run the length of the district from Liberty Park to South Temple.

Streetscape Standards

13.21 Maintain the character and scale of the side streets in the district

Many side streets, particularly the lanes have a distinct character and scale that should be preserved.

Analysis: Staff notes that the project is neither in conflict with the guidelines nor the overarching goal to preserve the medians. Within the local historic district but there have been minor changes in terms of plantings over time and the proposed water-wise grass should retain and preserve the character. The grass is not a historical material but the grass changes constitute as a minor alteration of features and spaces on the medians, but should not significantly alter the key elements that characterize the sites.

Findings for Standard 2: The combination of grass changes is not in conflict with this standard ~~or the design guidelines~~. Durable water-wise grass should not significantly visually alter the medians.

Standard 3: All sites, structure and objects shall be recognized as products of their own time. Alterations that have no historical basis and which seek to create a false sense of history or architecture are not allowed.

Analysis: The proposal would not create a false sense of history.

Finding for Standard 3: The proposal does not conflict with this standard.

Standard 4: Alterations or additions that have acquired historic significance in their own right shall be retained and preserved.

Analysis: Staff notes that this speaks to building additions, however it could be argued that the trees in the median have acquired significance in their own right. The trees within the medians will be retained as part of this proposal.

Finding for Standard 4: The proposal does not conflict with this standard.

Standard 5: Distinctive features, finishes and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a historic property shall be preserved.

Analysis: The historic medians are examples of urban design elements that are distinctive within the historic district. They will be preserved. The proposal to make minor alterations to the grass turf would not result in destruction of preservation intent.

Finding for Standard 5: The overall proposal preserves the distinctive features of the medians which are the grass plantings and trees. The proposal does not conflict with this standard.

Standard 6: Deteriorated architectural features shall be repaired rather than replaced wherever feasible. In the event replacement is necessary, the new material should match the material being replaced in composition, design, texture and other visual qualities. Repair or replacement of missing architectural features should be based on accurate duplications of features, substantiated by historic, physical or pictorial evidence rather than on conjectural designs or the availability of different architectural elements from other structures or objects.

Analysis: There is limited pictorial evidence of the median's landscaping, which shows generally trees and grass turf. We do not have evidence of the original type of grass turf used whether it was Kentucky blue grass or another type of grass. Although the new turf might appear slightly different, it is grass and would be similar to the existing turf and should continue visual continuity.

Finding for Standard 6: The proposal does not conflict with this standard.

Standard 7: Chemical or physical treatments, such as sandblasting, that cause damage to historic materials shall not be used. The surface cleaning of structures, if appropriate, shall be undertaken using the gentlest means possible.

Analysis: The proposed work does not include any treatments of historic materials.

Finding for Standard 7: This standard is not applicable for the project.

Standard 8: Contemporary designs for alterations and additions to existing properties shall not be discouraged when such alterations and additions do not destroy significant cultural, historical, architectural or archaeological material, and such design is compatible with the size, scale, color, material and character of the property, neighborhood or environment.

Planting Designs

1.9 Preserve historically significant planting designs. For example, a row of street trees is an established historic feature, this should be preserved. Existing trees in such a setting that are in good condition should be maintained.

Analysis: This standard speaks to design that is compatible with the character of the medians, neighborhood and the environment. The proposed grass and plantings would be considered more contemporary than the existing grass, but is actually the use of native or prehistoric plant species. That being said, the medians historically have been planted in grass with trees. There is no tree removal as part of the proposal. The proposal would not destroy significant material. The proposed grasses should be compatible with the district as proposed if properly watered and maintained so grass turf height is kept to a minimum. It should be noted that the existing grass or any proposed grass would be unsightly if not mown or maintained.

Finding for Standard 8: The proposal generally meets this standard.

Standard 9: Additions or alterations to structures and objects shall be done in such a manner that if such additions or alteration were to be removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the structure would be unimpaired. The new work shall be differentiate from the old and shall be compatible in massing, size, scale and architectural features to protect the historic integrity of the property and its environment.

Analysis: The proposed minor alterations, most specifically the grasses and plantings, could be easily removed in the future to protect the medians or the environment.

Finding for Standard 9: The proposal generally meets this standard.

Standard 10: Certain building materials are prohibited including the following:

- a. Vinyl or aluminum cladding when applied directly to an original or historic material, and
- b. Any other imitation siding material designed to look like wood siding but fabricated from an imitation material or materials;

Analysis: This is not applicable.

Finding for Standard 10: This is not applicable.

Standard 11: Any new sign and any change in the appearance of any existing sign located on a landmark site or within the H historic preservation overlay district, which is visible from any public way or open space shall be consistent with the historic character of the landmark site or H historic preservation overlay district and shall comply with the standards outlined in part IV, [Chapter 21A.46](#) of this title;

Analysis: This is not applicable.

Finding for Standard 11: This is not applicable.

Standard 12: Additional design standards adopted by the Historic Landmark Commission and City Council.

Analysis: The City Council document, “*Urban Design Element 1990*,” addresses the balance to be made between preservation of historic medians and the conservation of water and maintenance in strategies of chosen vegetation.

“The Historic Medians have a significant effect on the residential areas in the Central City...” “The following actions should be used to restore this vital design feature of the City:

- *Develop a long term capitol investment plan to refurbish the existing medians and to reestablish the existing medians in their historic places.*
- *Develop a landscape strategy to conserve water and maintenance on the existing and proposed medians including trees and other forms of vegetation.*
- *Establish landscape medians in other locations as viable urban design elements particularly along “gateways” through the city as well as along major thorough fares such as State Street.”*

It is considered a “best practice” in Urban Planning to consider all adopted plans and policies when making decisions within the public realm. This consideration involves close consideration to ensure that adopted policies whether it be preservation or conservation or urban form be equally considered.

It is the Planning Staff’s opinion that the policies set forth in the Design Guidelines are not in conflict. It is also found that the standards of the historic preservation ordinance are generally met. Therefore the Planning Staff has found that the proposal would be appropriate in balancing City adopted policies as well as Preservation policies.

Finding for Standard 12: Staff finds that the project generally meets this standard as well as other City policies aimed at conservation of natural resources.

Attachment A:
Public Comment

From: [Lon Clayton](#)
To: [Oktay, Michaela](#)
Cc: [Lee Pettit](#); [Michael Clayton](#)
Subject: PLNHLC2012-00147
Date: Tuesday, May 08, 2012 10:53:06 AM

Ms. Oktay,

I'm Lon Clayton, one of the partners of Western Garden Center located at 550 South 600 East. I am responding to the proposal to re-plant the 600 East medians with water wise plants.

1. I'm all for low water use plants.
2. I am very anxious about the design, particularly plant selection and location which could impact traffic and pedestrian safety. IF typical shrubby low water use plants are used and installed with some density, they will create visibility barriers. Particularly in our neighborhood where Trolley Square patrons often fill all the on street parking, it may be very difficult for drivers to safely enter and exit driveways with comparatively narrow vehicle traffic lanes with parked cars on one side and tall plants on the other. Taller plants in the median will also make it difficult to cross (in the proper curb cuts) the medians to travel either north or south. Turf seems to me to be the best "groundcover" for the medians compared to taller plants. Of course proper plant selection and location can minimize the traffic safety issue.
3. IF there are budget constraints demanding project prioritization, I would favor City spending on a traffic light at 600 South and 600 East. If 40 years of going to work, I've seen a lot of (usually thankfully minor) accidents and some close misses, particularly sobering when the near misses involve pedestrians.

Best wishes if you proceed with the project.

Lon Clayton
Wester Garden Center
lon@westerngardens.com

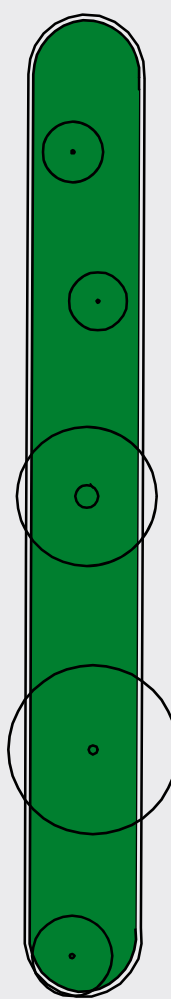
Attachment B:
Submittal Options A-D

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Salt Lake City is planning for the renovation of 600 East median irrigation system from South Temple to 900 South. The primary emphasis of the improvements is to update the failing irrigation system, and in the process replace the existing turf with a turf that uses 50 to 70 percent less water. Also included in the plan

are restoring the historic perennial beds at key intersections. The park-like aesthetic of the medians will be maintained and the existing trees along the islands will be protected during the improvement process. The design for each block takes into consideration the adjacent land use along the six blocks that include both residential neighborhoods and commercial development.

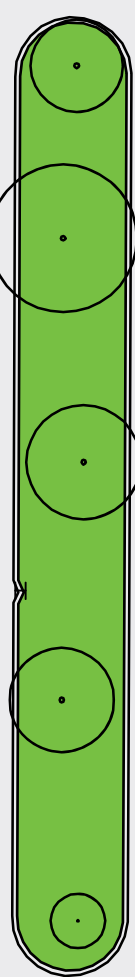
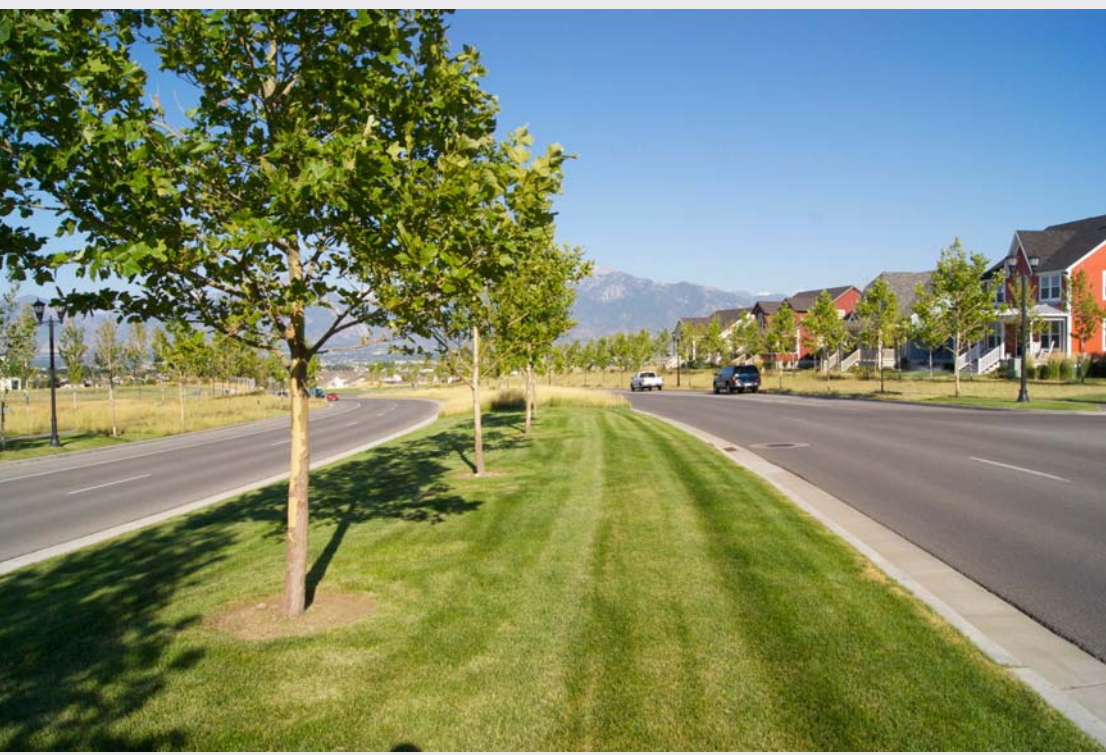
EXISTING CONDITIONS



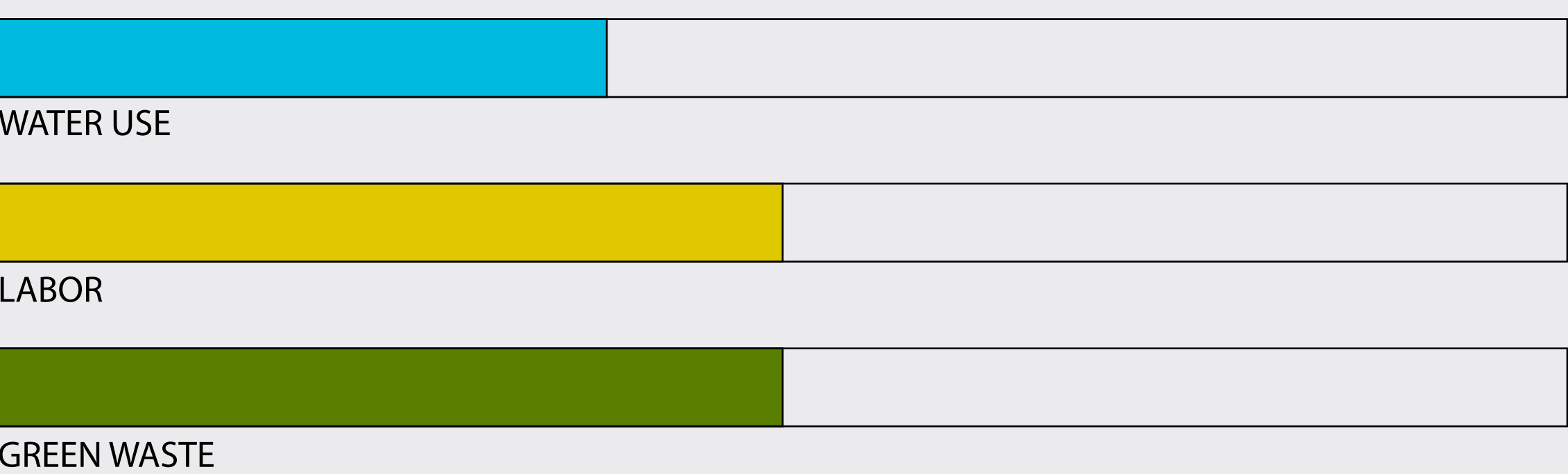
100% KENTUCKY BLUEGRASS



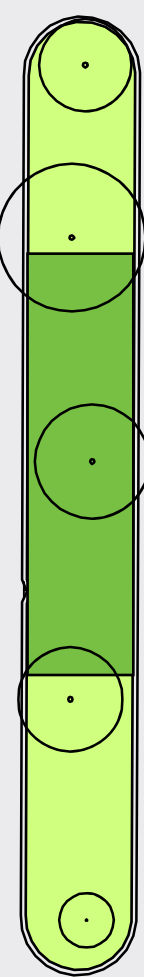
OPTION A



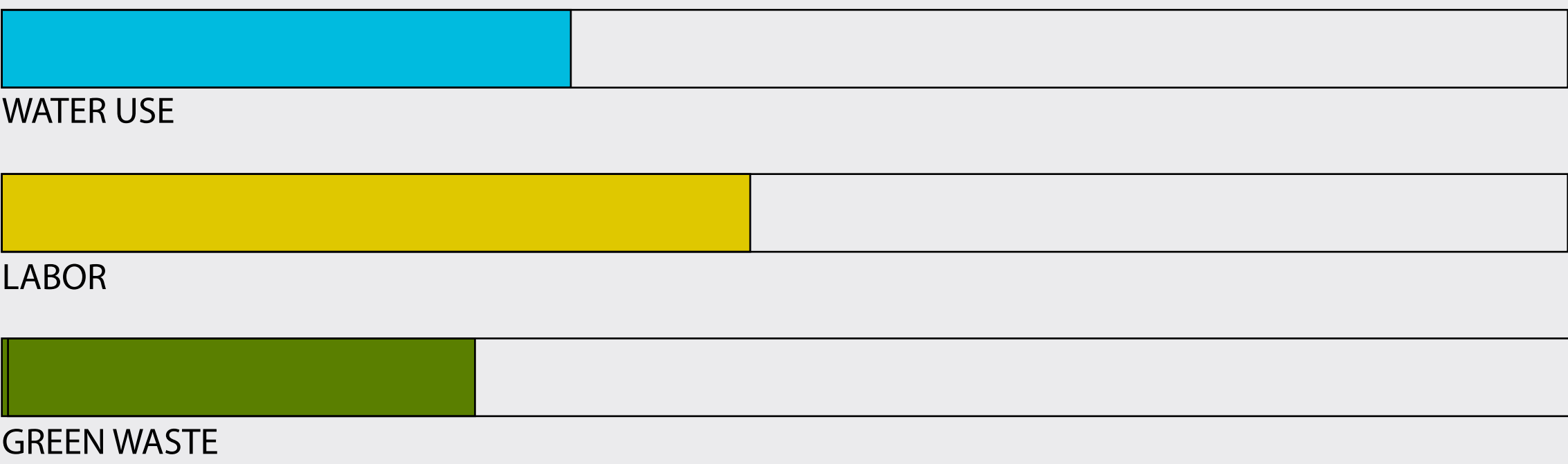
100% LOW-WATER-USE TURF



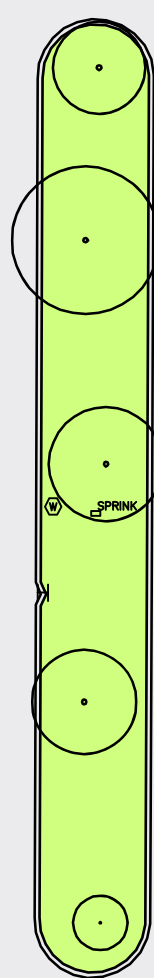
OPTION B



50% LOW-WATER-USE TURF
50% LOW-WATER-USE MEADOW GRASSES



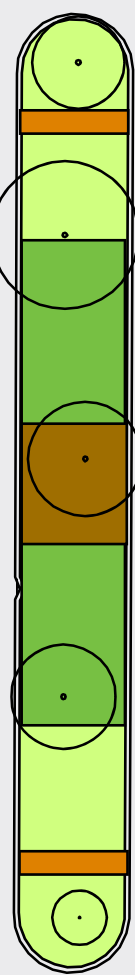
OPTION C



100% LOW-WATER-USE MEADOW GRASSES

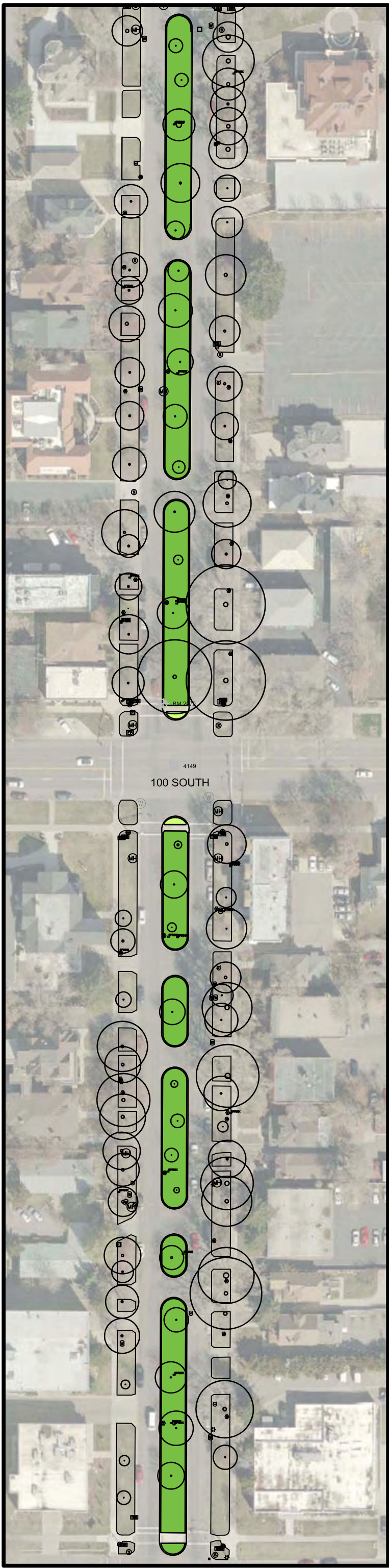


OPTION D

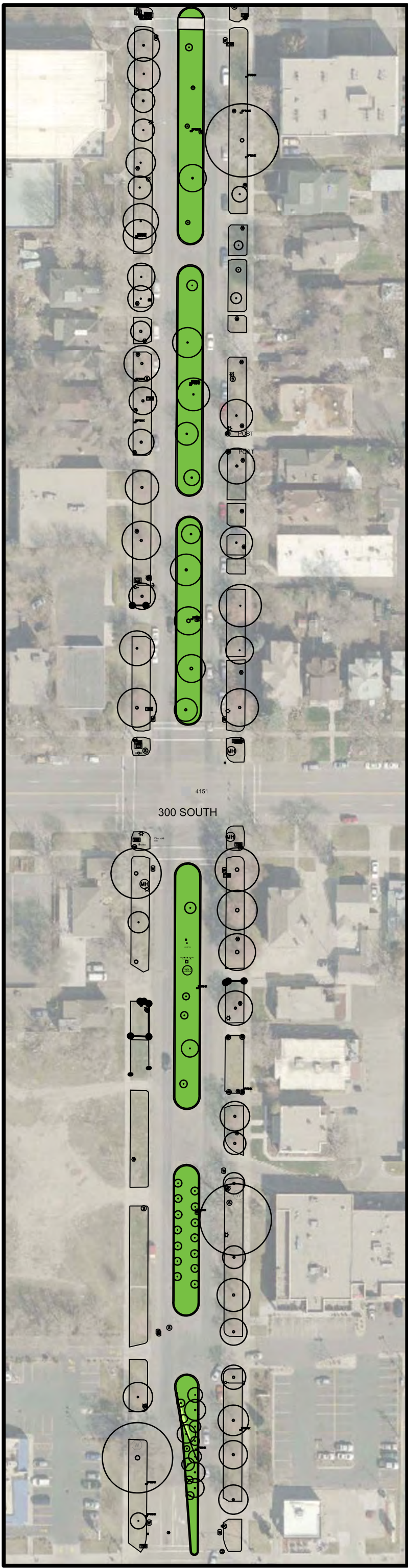


40% LOW-WATER-USE TURF
40% LOW-WATER-USE MEADOW GRASSES
15% LOW-WATER-USE SHRUBS
5% LOW-WATER-USE PERENNIALS

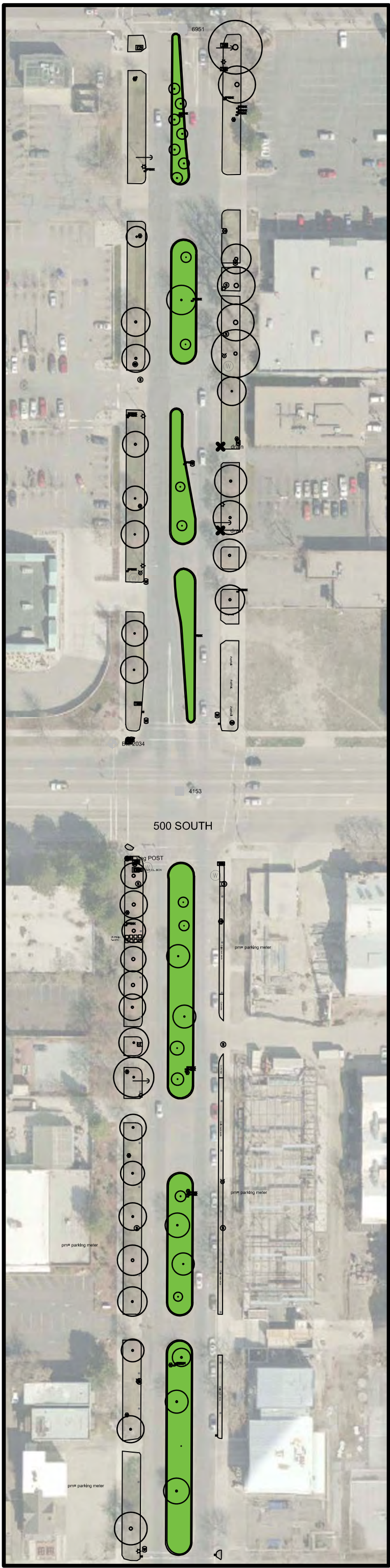




SOUTH TEMPLE TO 200 SOUTH



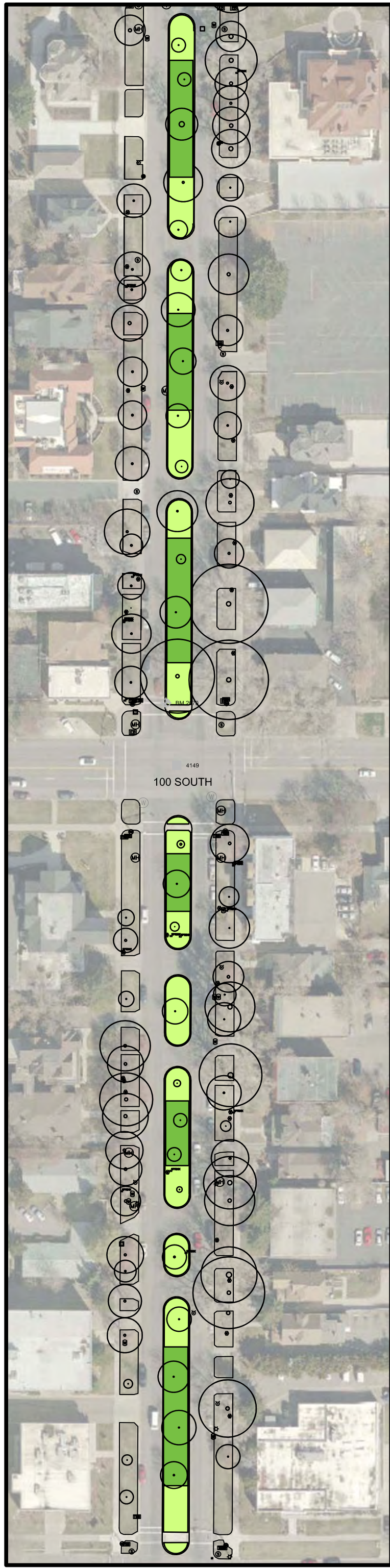
200 SOUTH TO 400 SOUTH



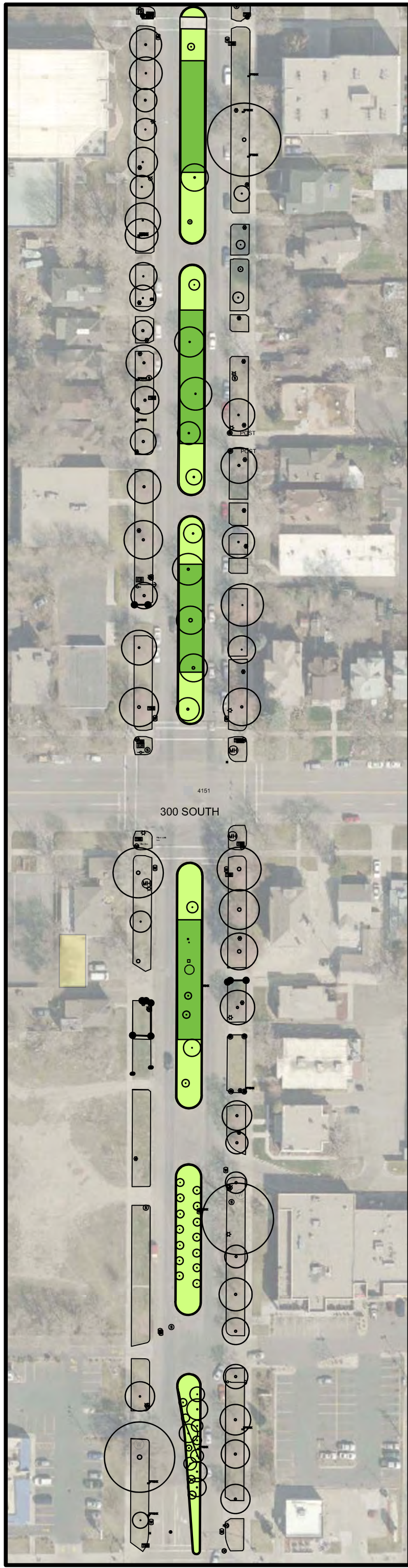
400 SOUTH TO 600 SOUTH

OPTION A:

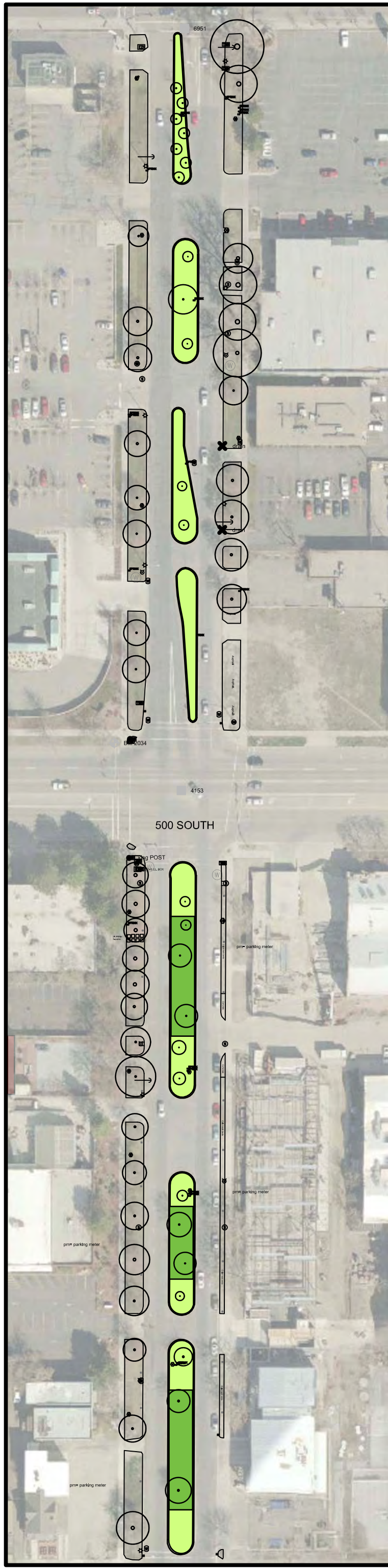
100% LOW-WATER-USE TURF



SOUTH TEMPLE TO 200 SOUTH



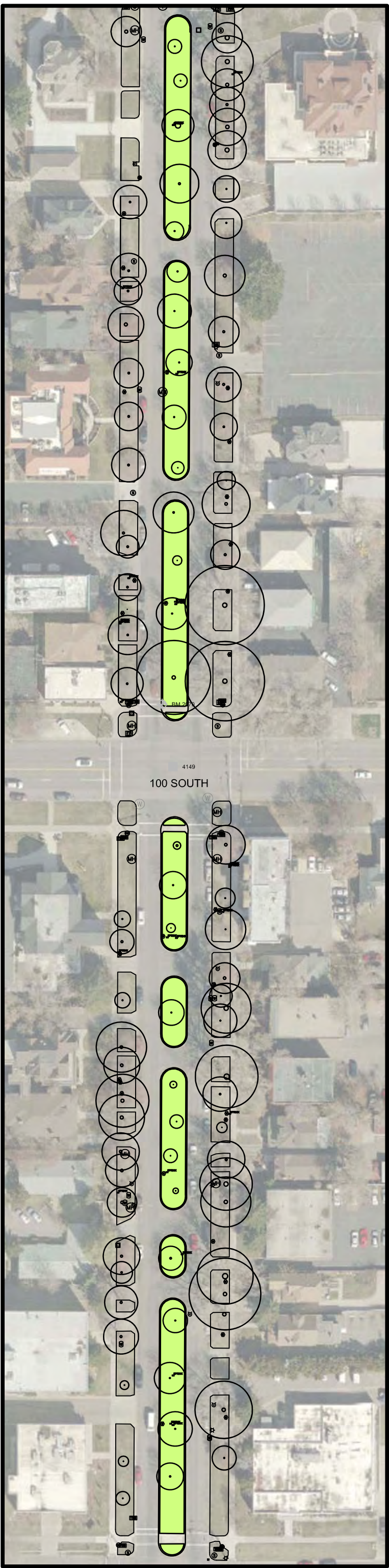
200 SOUTH TO 400 SOUTH



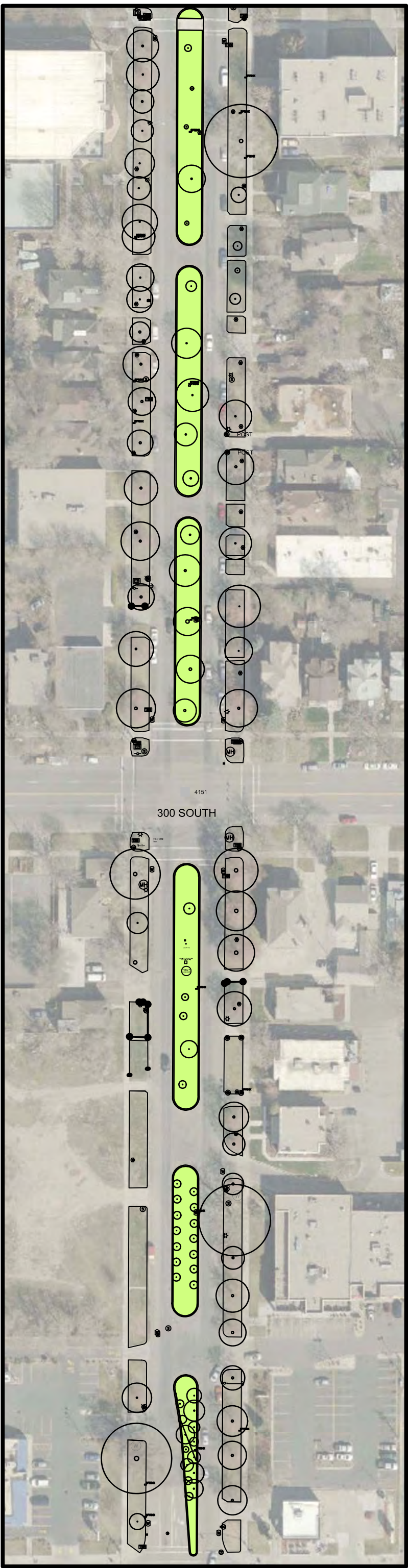
400 SOUTH TO 600 SOUTH

OPTION B

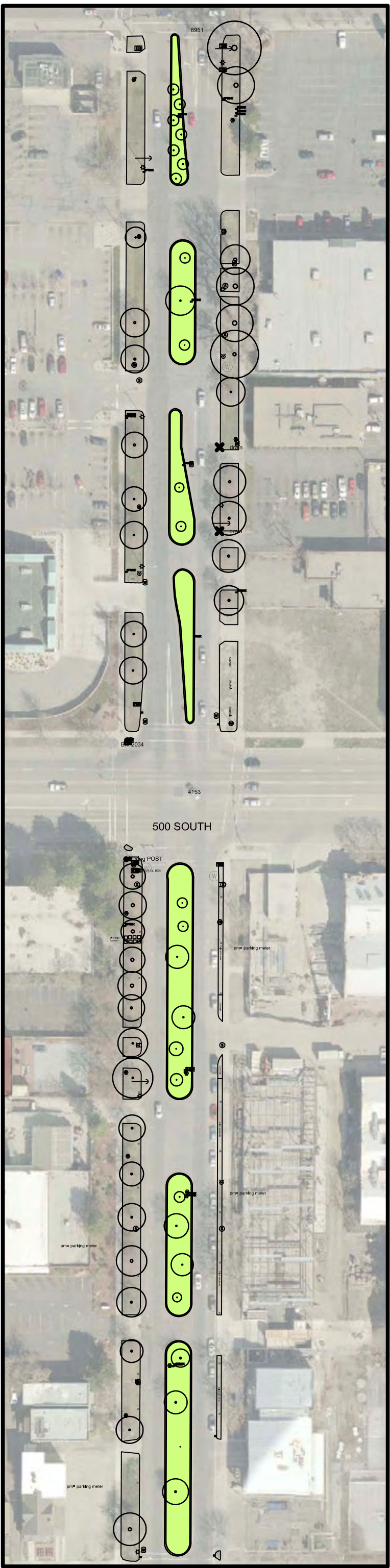
50% LOW-WATER-USE TURF
50% LOW-WATER-USE MEADOW GRASSES



SOUTH TEMPLE TO 200 SOUTH



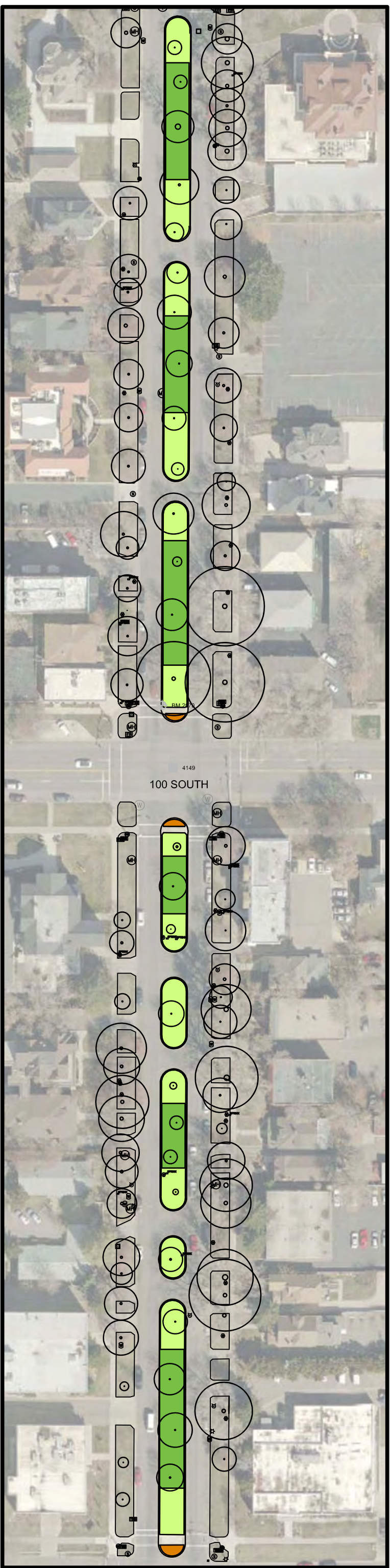
200 SOUTH TO 400 SOUTH



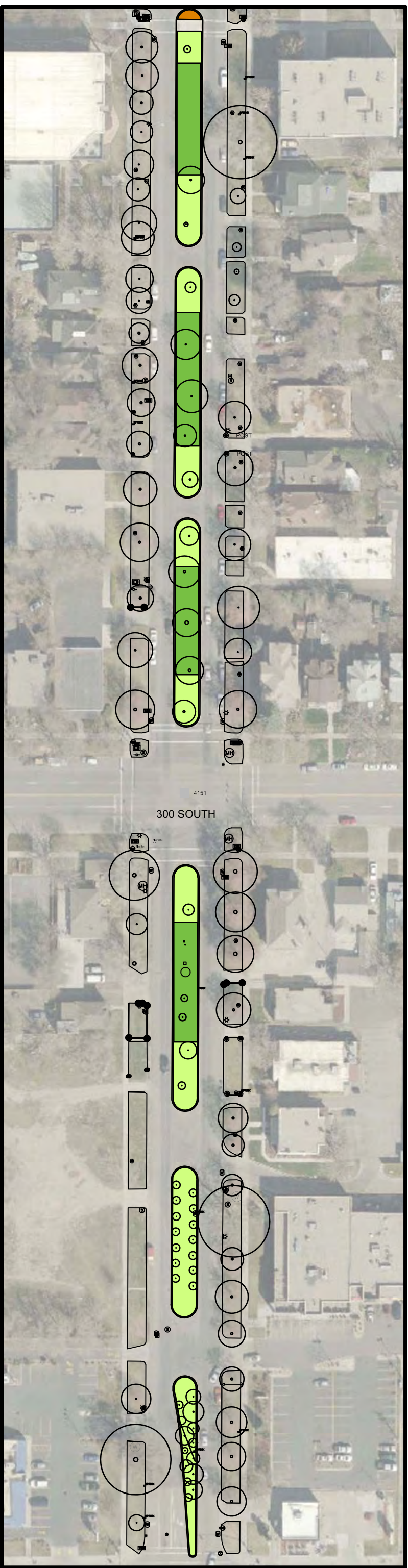
400 SOUTH TO 600 SOUTH

OPTION C

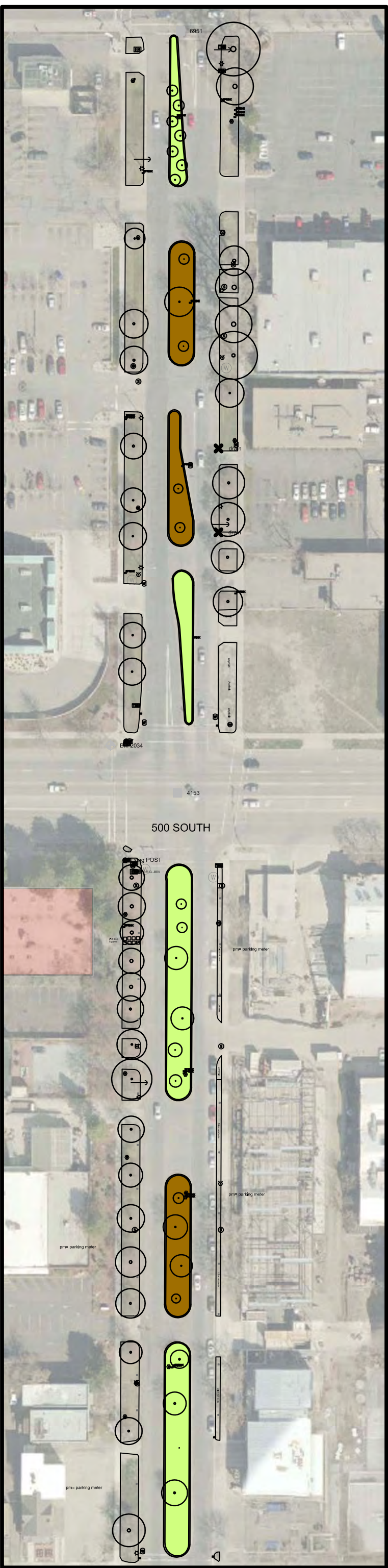
100 % LOW WATER USE MEADOW GRASSES



SOUTH TEMPLE TO 200 SOUTH



200 SOUTH TO 400 SOUTH



400 SOUTH TO 600 SOUTH

OPTION D

40% LOW-WATER-USE TURF
40% LOW-WATER-USE MEADOW GRASSES
15% LOW-WATER-USE SHRUBS
5% LOW-WATER-USE PERENNIALS