LESS LAWN MORE VALUE

Turning Nonfunctional Lawn Into Spaces for Habitat and Community

Sage *Salvia spp.*

Project Snapshot

Windsong Sonoma HOA

LOCATION: Rohnert Park, Sonoma County

WATER UTILITY: City of Rohnert Park

SUPPORT: Vaca Landscape and Construction

Project Overview

Windsong Sonoma Homeowners Association is a 14 building, 224 unit planned community in Rohnert Park, CA. A phased approach is planned to convert the property's nonfunctional lawn to water smart landscaping and community gathering spaces to comply with California AB 1572.

The first phase of the project converted 3,000 square feet of highly visible nonfunctional lawn in December 2025. Narrow sections of grass bordering a tennis court and clubhouse were transformed into low-water use plantings and butterfly habitat.

The sprinklers were converted to highly efficient drip irrigation. An unused section of lawn by the community pool was turned into a community gathering area with permeable gravel, a BBQ and picnic style seating.

"The two areas of native plants have drawn a lot of positive attention and people are happy to see the improvement. The transition to drip irrigation has been great and we've greatly reduced runoff and water waste compared to the old sprinkler system."

Mike Brannon,
Windsong HOA President

BEFORE

AFTER: *5 MONTHS AFTER INSTALLATION*

Garden Features

Low-water plantings around the community clubhouse and tennis court include bunch grasses, as well as flowering sages and California fuchsia that attract hummingbirds. Butterfly habitat plants include phacelia, butterfly bush, and lupines. The project also includes a permeable community gathering area with picnic style seating and a BBQ.

Project Highlights

PROJECT FEATURE	DETAIL
Lawn Removed	3,000 sq. ft. of nonfunctional lawn replaced in Phase 1 of the project.
Plant Palette	Colorful, water smart shrubs, perennials, and groundcovers. Added seasonal color and texture while attracting butterflies and hummingbirds. Mix of California native and other low-water use plants.
Landscape Features	Permeable gravel seating area for community gatherings and BBQs. Butterfly gardens.
Irrigation System	Sprinklers converted to drip irrigation with weather-based irrigation controller.
Water Savings	Estimated 70% water savings in areas where lawn was converted.
Project Timeline	1st phase installed Dec. 2025. Remaining nonfunctional lawn to be converted in phases over 3 years.
Installation Approach	A landscape committee was formed with several community members that had passion and knowledge about landscaping. They helped develop a landscape plan that was approved by the HOA board and shared with the community. Phase 1 was installed by a professional landscaper that provides regular maintenance for the property, converting four highly visible test areas around the HOA clubhouse and tennis court. Community feedback will be considered as the remaining nonfunctional lawn is converted in phases.
Project Cost	$7,000 for Phase 1 of project - $2.34 per square foot
Funding Sources	City of Rohnert Park Cash 4 Grass Rebate, HOA Landscaping Reserves
Community Benefits	Positive feedback from residents. Added seating and gathering space, butterfly habitat, increased seasonal interest around clubhouse.
Return on Investment	Drip irrigation reduced water waste and runoff compared to old sprinkler system.

Get Started in Your Community

1. Evaluate your landscape and how space is used to identify lawn areas with no recreational use.
2. Consider lower maintenance costs as well as water use for budgeting.
3. Learn about funding from your water agency and other programs, including any restrictions.
4. Form a landscape committee with community members that have passion for and knowledge of landscaping to help drive the project.
5. Try out ideas in test projects, then graduate to larger makeovers. Consider tackling the project in stages to maximize rebate opportunities and as resources are available.