

# Argument for Maintaining Swimming Pools as Softscape (Not Hardscape)

City-Government Policy Position

## 1. Pools Function as Permeable, Adaptive Environmental Features

Hardscape is defined by its rigidity, impermeability, and heat retention. Pools do not fit this definition.

- Water moderates heat rather than storing it
- The surface is non-load bearing
- The surrounding microclimate is cooling, not warming
- Evaporation and thermal exchange reduce heat-island effects

Pools behave much more like water gardens, ponds, or naturalized water features, all of which are categorized as softscape.

Reclassifying pools as hardscape contradicts the functional criteria that define the category.

## 2. Pools Support Environmental Objectives the City Already Values

Municipalities prioritize:

- Urban heat-island reduction
- Stormwater and watershed protection
- Outdoor recreational access
- Green infrastructure integration
- Mental and physical wellness

Pools actively support these when combined with modern construction and landscape standards:

- Water surfaces reduce ambient temperatures
- Mechanical systems regulate volume and prevent runoff
- Pools encourage outdoor use and community recreation

- Surrounding landscapes integrate planting and ecological buffers

In policy terms, pools behave as environmental amenities, not as static pavements or structures.

### **3. Reclassifying Pools as Hardscape Would Artificially Inflate Lot Coverage**

Changing the classification does not change the environmental impact, but it does:

- Distort lot-coverage calculations
- Penalize homeowners unfairly
- Reduce feasible landscapes for families
- Increase variance requests and administrative load

Cities already struggle with permitting delays; reclassification would create hundreds of unnecessary variances for properties with no change in actual environmental footprint.

Softscape classification keeps assessments accurate and manageable.

### **4. Pools Do Not Add Impermeable Surface Load**

Most municipalities define hardscape by imperviousness.

A pool:

- absorbs no stormwater
- sheds no additional runoff
- replaces no absorbent soil beyond its footprint

Its net effect on stormwater load is neutral.

The surrounding deck is the regulating factor, not the pool itself.

Classifying pools as hardscape misattributes stormwater impact to an element that does not generate runoff.

## **6. Numerous Municipalities Already Classify Pools as Softscape**

City precedent matters.

Urban regions that prioritize environmental protection still maintain softscape status for pools because:

- water is part of the natural environment
- classification is based on ecological behavior
- it supports families and recreation
- it avoids unnecessary regulatory burden

Aligning with established municipal practice strengthens consistency and legal defensibility.

# **Summary Statement**

A swimming pool behaves as a soft environmental feature, not as built hardscape. It does not shed stormwater, does not increase heat retention, does not add impermeable load, and does not function as a structural extension of the home. Reclassifying pools as hardscape would create regulatory distortion without environmental benefit. Maintaining softscape status preserves accurate environmental assessment and supports the city's wellness, recreation, and planning objectives.