

Food Council – Pollinator Task Force Report

I want to start by congratulating the Pollinator Task Force for putting together an excellent report that reviews the city's policies and practices. It is clear to me that the city recognizes the significance of maintaining adequate pollinator habitat. However, the pollinator decline illustrates that we as a community need to make additional efforts to foster thriving pollinator populations. My front and back yard and the streets terrace in front of my house are a pollinator paradise. My gardens are exactly what the pollinator task force is envisioning of what home owners can do to provide optimal habitat to pollinators. A couple of complaints by an anonymous individual that were followed up by an inspection and a complaint letter by the City Building Inspection Division made me aware how vulnerable my pollinator paradise is even in the progressive city of Madison. Today I am speaking out in an attempt to protect the pollinator habitats that already exist in the city and I would like to propose guidelines to encourage the generation of new ones:

1) Fully legalize pollinator habitat in our yards

Property maintenance codes currently prohibit grasses and herbaceous materials over 8 inches. The current policy is not to regulate gardens on private property that violate the ordinance. I would very much like to see this policy changed to fully legalize native flowers in our yards. Pollinator gardens should not exist at the mercy of the Building inspection staff to decide whether they are compliant with existing code or not.

2) Liberalize height restrictions of native flowers on terrace to encourage more native plantings

Street terraces are a great place to install native plants that benefit pollinators and it is an effective way to educate the public. I converted my terrace into a pollinator oasis planted with butterfly milkweed, blazing star, wild lupines, prairie smoke, prairie clover and phlox etc. Families with kids are captivated by the visiting butterflies and caterpillars. Due to a complaint that the plantings obstruct parking at the curb I had to remove the 2-3 feet tall plants within two feet from the back of the curb. The current city ordinance says that plants cannot be taller than 8 inches within two feet from the back of the curb. Very few flowers are shorter than 8 inches. I believe the city should further liberalize the height restrictions on the terrace to encourage more flower plantings. In my view 2-3 feet tall plants should be allowed within two feet from the back of the curb as I don't live on a corner lot where the flowers could impair visibility and safety.

3) Foster and support new demonstration projects initiated by volunteers

The Pollinator Protection Task Force report states on page 18 that Madison Parks Department is open to form partnerships with community members to create demonstration projects that foster public education. I identified a non mowed grassy area along the Odana Golf Course (south of the X-country trailhead) that would be ideal to convert to a mesic/dry prairie with lots of sun loving, colorful native flowers. I would be happy to take the lead on getting this project initiated and maintained thus I emailed the Park Operations Manager Charles Romines a month ago but have not received a decision regarding this idea yet. I wish city officials would treat volunteer driven demonstration projects with higher priority and Parks would provide resources to maintain volunteer driven native prairies (for example help with annual controlled burns and/or provide mowers).

4) Ban or minimize the use of neonicotinoids pesticide application on city land

I concur with the Pollinator Task Force proposal to minimize or even ban the use of insecticides on public and private land in the city.