

5.02: Mayors for Monarchs Program

City Planner Anderson presented the staff report. He noted he has not had a chance to put together how this program might look. He wanted to inform the EPB that the Council directed Staff to explore with program with the EPB and the Parks and Recreation Commission. He noted the different types of initiatives the City is involved in. One is the trail connection in the Brookfield neighborhood. This is being coupled with a sustainable landscape, including milkweed. Another is the City is working with Ramsey Elementary presently on a potential peace garden planting with the Ramsey Rangers. He explained there is a citizen science aspect as well that can help engage residents too. The thought was not just the City leading by example, but rather to engage the public to take action on private property also. Some of the regulatory barriers have been removed, to help make it easier for residents to follow suit. The need and ability to add prairie and natural plants to the urban landscape has not been widely promoted by the City. The City does plan to promote this more, and one way could be to ask the owners of any existing native landscapes, if people can look at their landscape to get ideas and know what it could look like.

Board Member Valentine asked how an unkempt yard can be distinguished from landscape that has been carefully planned out to create a prairie landscape.

City Planner Anderson responded the City will approach the homeowner if there seems to be an issue. Prairie landscaping takes time and planning, and caretaking to make it grow and look good. He said from his time in Code Enforcement, this is a valid question as some homeowners simply stop mowing and say they are letting the yard go natural, which is not the same as establishing a native landscape. Homeowners that are familiar with the plants, and have a sense of how to maintain them are not going to let the plants over grow. These gardens are a significant amount of work to create, and establish. Once they are established, they can be easier to maintain, but it can take a few years to get to that point.

Board Member Valentine pointed out both the prairie plants and tall grasses can invite problematic or nuisance animals.

City Planner Anderson acknowledged that but also noted that they can also deter nuisance animals such as geese adjacent to water bodies. There is a balance to achieve.

Board Member Lewis inquired if there is a minimum size requirement in terms of utilization of having a butterfly garden.

City Planner Anderson responded a naturalized prairie area would constitute a butterfly garden but that a small butterfly garden is not the same as a prairie. He said he could not point to a minimum square footage requirement to have a benefit to the environment as a whole.

Board Member Lewis suggested it could be interesting to outline and scale what a homeowner could do on a small, city lot compared to what the City can do in terms of the Mayors for Monarchs Program and larger areas to work with.

City Planner Anderson stated the discussion in the Council Work Session involved the idea that the City would serve as a repository of information. There are many organizations that can give specific advice and ideas. The City would help provide links to these places, and a summary of information. There will not be a dedicated staff person to teach residents how to do this. He said there was a brief discussion that there are likely some areas in our parks that could be evaluated to see if the maintained areas could be reduced in size. These areas could be good candidates for this type of landscaping. The Parks and Recreation Commission would explore this idea.

Board Member Hiatt noted the rain garden that has been created in Alpine Park is a good example.

City Planner Anderson advised there is no milkweed in that garden presently, but it could be introduced. The demonstration project in Brookfield will have milkweed. It may make sense to introduce milkweed to other areas with this type of landscaping.