

CONSERVATION COMMISSION MINUTES

Regular Meeting

July 27, 2021 at 7:00 pm

Meeting Room 3, Municipal Center, 3 Primrose Street, Newtown, CT

These minutes are subject to approval by the Conservation Commission

Present: Holly Kocet, Michael Ablondi, John Dixon, Mark Lurie

Staff: Dawn Fried, Clerk

Ms. Kocet opened the meeting at 7:02 p.m.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Mr. Dixon moved to approve the minutes of June 22, 2021. Mr. Ablondi seconded. All in favor. The minutes from June 22, 2021 were approved.

DISCUSSION AND ACTION ITEMS

Regulation Regarding Native Plants for Commercial and Industrial Landscapes –
The Commission reviewed the newly crafted ordinance requiring native plants for municipal properties drafted by Ms. Kocet. The Commission was appreciative of Ms. Kocet's efforts and agreed the document was well written. **Mr. Lurie moved to approve the "Ordinance Requiring Native Plants for Municipal Properties". Mr. Dixon seconded. All in favor.**

The Commission reviewed the draft text amendment changes to the zoning regulations, Article VIII, Section 4. Ms. Kocet explained that she had received an email from Mr. Sibley stating he wanted to discuss the changes. Ms. Kocet decided it was best not to vote on the proposed text amendment changes until after she spoke with Mr. Sibley.

The Commission discussed the wording of the text amendment. The Commission felt strongly that the changes to the text amendment are for the betterment of the Town. The inclusion of native plants in the landscape will benefit the environment and pollinators.

Ms. Kocet would like to give an overview of the text amendment at the P&Z meeting and explain the purpose of the native plant implementation.

The Commission agreed they would like to have the August 10th CC meeting to vote on the proposed text amendment in order to present at the next P&Z Commission meeting.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Dixon moved to adjourn the CC meeting. Ms. Kocet seconded. All in favor. Meeting adjourned at 7:40 pm.

Respectfully submitted, Dawn Fried

Ordinance Requiring Native Plants for Municipal Properties

Native Plant Ordinance for Municipal Landscapes, Town of Newtown

PURPOSE

The purpose of this ordinance is to establish minimum standards for the use of native plants in the Town of Newtown for municipal properties. A **native plant** is defined as one that lives or grows naturally in a particular region without direct or indirect human intervention. It is part of the balance of nature that has developed over hundreds of thousands of years in a particular region or ecosystem, (USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service). In order for a tree, shrub, herbaceous perennial or ornamental grass to be considered native to our region, it must be indigenous to the Northeast. The Town recognizes the necessity to maximize the use of native vegetation to protect and restore natural habitats and a healthy ecosystem.

INTENT

It is the intent of this ordinance is to maximize the use of appropriate native plants on municipal properties to help mitigate the effects of habitat loss and fragmentation from development and the proliferation of non-native/exotic plantings in our town landscapes. Native plants are important for maintaining healthy ecosystems. In observing this ordinance, we acknowledge that:

- a) the native plant ordinance is consistent with the 2014 Newtown Plan of Conservation and Development.
- b) native plants promote healthy watersheds by filtering pollutants, stabilizing banks and providing food for macroinvertebrates that in turn feed fish and other aquatic species.
- c) native trees sequester more CO₂ than introduced species creating healthy ecosystems essential for human health.
- d) all native plants must be protected to preserve the genetic diversity that evolved in our region.
- e) native pollinators and many wildlife species rely on the native plants for survival.
- f) healthy pollinators and wildlife species have a role in maintaining healthy ecosystems.
- g) use of native plants in developed landscapes will help create connected and stable plant and animal populations.
- h) we must educate residents on native plants and their importance to native pollinators and other wildlife in our ecosystem.
- i) we have a responsibility to future generations to support, maintain, and improve our natural environment.

Ordinance Requiring Native Plants for Municipal Properties

DEFINITIONS

Straight species or wild-type native plant is a plant that occurs naturally in a particular region. It has not been cultivated by human intervention. These plants have co-evolved over time to develop complex and essential relationships with pollinators, birds, and other wildlife species in a given ecological community. Every effort should be made to use straight species of native plants that are local ecotypes.

Non-native plants, also called exotic or alien plants, are not naturally found in our local area. Many are imported from Europe and Asia. They have been introduced by human intervention (intentionally or accidentally) and include agricultural crops, ornamental plants, naturalized plants (including invasive species). A naturalized plant thrives without human intervention but can never be considered “native” since it has not evolved to provide the same benefit here as it would in its own country of origin.

While many non-native plants are benign for aggressive spread, they dominate our landscapes. As development increasingly encroaches on our wild places, our native flora is being replaced by exotic plants and lawns. Loss of native flora threatens healthy ecosystems, a balance essential for all life including our own.

Invasive plants are non-native plants recorded on the CT Invasive Plant List. The list includes plants prohibited by state statute, plants having potential for invasive spread, and invasive species with cultivars yet to be evaluated for invasive characteristics. Invasive plants are able to establish on many sites, grow quickly, and spread to the point of disrupting plant communities or ecosystems. Planting of any plant listed on the CT Invasive Plant List is prohibited by the Town of Newtown Ban on Invasive Plants, Oct. 24, 2017.

Native cultivars or nativars can be hybrids, (products of two or more plants intentionally selected by breeders and crossed to create certain traits), or they may be clonally-produced copies of one particular wild-type plant. While these are technically the same species as wild-types, they may represent only a fraction of the natural diversity of the species.

When plants are selectively bred for a particular trait(s), (changing flower or foliage color, weeping form or creating double flowers), the result is often a cultivar that have lost what made them attractive to important pollinators and beneficial insects and may even lack the nutrition needed to sustain them.

Ordinance Requiring Native Plants for Municipal Properties

ORDINANCE REQUIREMENTS

This ordinance will be a minimum standard and will apply to all new plantings of trees, shrubs and other plants planted municipal properties. It also applies to seeds used in place of plants. The ordinance applies to any replacement plantings, including but not limited to trees, shrubs, and perennials felled by storms, disease, redevelopment/expansion, or other reasons.

Trees

Due to the high wildlife value of native trees, 100% of new and replacement tree plantings on municipal properties will be native to the Northeast. Many trees, when not harmed by storms, disease, injuries from equipment, etc., can live for hundreds of years. They should be considered permanent parts of a landscape. Many native trees support hundreds of insects and the birds and wildlife species that consume those insects. Non-native trees do not support this diversity.

Shrubs

New and replacement shrubs will be a minimum of 85% native for municipal properties. There are a great variety of native shrubs to fit all growing conditions and aesthetic desires. Every effort should be made to select native shrubs. Native shrubs also support a high number of insects and many produce berries or other fruit that are an important fall and winter food for birds.

Grasses

New and replacement grass plantings will be 100% native for municipal properties. Due to the large number of seeds grasses produce and potential to spread by wind, only native grasses may be planted. Some ornamental non-native grasses that were commonly planted are believed to be detrimental to our ecosystems. Fountain Grass (*Pennisetum alopecuroides*), for example, is an emerging invasive threat in some areas.

Groundcovers

New and replacement plants intended as groundcovers will be 100% native for municipal properties. These low-growing plants spread quickly and form a dense cover.

Herbaceous Perennials

New and replacement herbaceous perennials will be a minimum of 75% native for municipal properties. There are a great variety of native perennials to fit all growing conditions and aesthetic desires. Every effort should be made to select native perennials.

Every effort should be made to select and plant straight-species of native plants that are local ecotypes.

Care should be taken to source plants and seeds that have not been treated with neonicotinoids. These pesticides are deadly to pollinators.

There are native trees and plants for every site condition. *The Native Plant Resource Guide*, published by the Newtown Conservation Commission in association with Monroe Conservation Commission, contains comprehensive lists of native plants for different uses and includes resources and more information on native plants.

Ordinance Requiring Native Plants for Municipal Properties

EXCEPTIONS

This ordinance does not apply to plants grown for food, lawns, green roofs, or other applications that have a clear reason to use non-native plants.

This ordinance does not apply to annual plants since they complete their life cycle within one growing season.

Existing trees and other plants will remain unaffected by this ordinance. For any trees or plants replaced for damage or any other reason, replacements must be native species as specified in ordinance requirements.

ENFORCEMENT

This ordinance shall be implemented, administered and enforced by the Town of Newtown, and Town department designated by the First Selectman.