

PUBLIC COMMENTS ON O31.010

Dear Representatives,

I am writing to express my full support for revising Stamford's current Blighted Properties ordinance to include an exemption for Managed Natural Meadow Landscapes. I am a resident of District 19, a member of the Pollinator Pathway Stamford, and a Professor of Biology at Fordham University that has published over 50 scientific papers on the influence of humans on wildlife. This amendment is long overdue, as meadows composed of native plants are a major improvement over the non-native turf grass lawns that have become the norm. Meadow plants support local wildlife, mitigate erosion and stormwater runoff, and store large amounts of carbon in their extensive root systems. Unlike turf lawns, native meadows do not require watering, fertilizer, herbicides, or mowing and blowing beyond a single annual cut. They are also beautiful year-round. I can attest to all of these benefits, as my family and I are steadily converting much of our lawn to native meadows. The numbers of beneficial insects, birds, and other species have increased dramatically, areas of waterlogged lawn are no longer a problem, and neighbors have complimented us on the diverse wildflowers.

The idea of a "weed" is not a robust scientific concept, and typically refers to a plant that someone does not want in a particular place. Many of our native wildflowers such as butterfly weed and Joe Pye weed bear this name despite their ecological value and beauty. It is worth reflecting on the history that led us to our current state of vast lawn monocultures. Originally, such lawns were maintained by European nobility as a sign of their wealth, a practice later adopted on American estates such as Jefferson's Monticello. The American lawn as we know it today took off in the 1960's with the dramatic rise in suburban housing, and the widespread availability of gas-powered lawn tools and synthetic chemicals. The TruGreen company that spreads chemicals on lawns throughout Stamford grew out of an earlier venture from this period called ChemLawn. These synthetic fertilizers and pesticides end up in our well water, in local streams, and ultimately the Long Island Sound. They also contribute directly and indirectly to the death of many plants and animals in our area. Native meadows reduce the need for such destructive practices. While some lawn is valuable, many of us in Stamford maintain much more grass than we can possibly use on a regular basis.

Communities around the country have passed statutes to protect native plantings, and many also go further by providing incentives for homeowners to install such plantings. I fully support Stamford taking these steps to promote healthy, ecologically friendly practices in our city.

Sincerely, Jason Munshi-South