

Pollinator Habitats and Naturalistic Landscapes

HOUSING COMMITTEE
JANUARY 5, 2026

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Pollinator Habitats and Naturalistic Landscapes

Council Priority Alignment

- ▶ Great Neighborhoods and Well-Managed Government focused on the Environment

Purpose

- ▶ Introduce the policy topic referral related to pollinator habitats and naturalistic landscapes, including a summary of current exemptions to the nuisance vegetation ordinance.

Key Takeaways

- ▶ The city has a Registry Program that has provided exemption from the nuisance vegetation ordinance for maintained pollinator habitats since 2023.
- ▶ In 2025, staff worked with stakeholders to enhance the Program, including expanding the Program to include naturalistic landscapes.
- ▶ Updating the ordinance would codify the exemption and bring awareness to the importance of these habitats, however the process is not proposed to change.

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Policy Referral Summary

Description

- ▶ The Health & Sanitation Ordinance (Sec. 10-155 overgrown vegetation) requires property owners to cut grass, weeds and vegetation when it exceeds 12 inches in height. Violations of this section are subject to a civil penalty in the amount of \$150.
- ▶ While the ordinance does not include exemptions for specialized landscaping, the city values and encourages the creation of pollinator habitats and naturalistic landscapes that help support and establish urban wildlife corridors. When properties are registered with the city and properly maintained, they are not considered overgrown vegetation, and are therefore not subject to enforcement under the City's health and sanitation ordinance.

Policy Question

- ▶ How can the city further encourage the creation of pollinator habitats and naturalistic landscapes while also maintaining safe and sanitary neighborhoods and communities?

Committee Charge

- ▶ Review current Health & Sanitation Ordinance regarding overgrown vegetation
- ▶ Explore best practices from other NC and peer cities
- ▶ Review current registry process and programs supporting pollinator habitats and naturalistic landscapes
- ▶ Determine any recommended policies or approaches for consideration by full Council

What are Pollinator Habitats and Naturalistic Landscapes?

- ▶ **Green spaces designed to support the biodiversity and health of pollinators, birds, and other wildlife and native ecosystems**
- ▶ **Often have a diversity of plant species, sizes, forms, and textures, with a focus on the critical role of native species**
- ▶ **Benefits include support for pollinators and native wildlife, healthy ecosystem, and reduced environmental impact**



Habitat Registry Program Background

- ▶ The city launched a Pollinator Habitat Registry Program in 2023
- ▶ The Program is a collaboration between Landscape Management, Code Enforcement, Keep Charlotte Beautiful, and the Office of Sustainability
- ▶ Property owners with maintained habitats that are not currently registered and receive a Notice of Violation of the nuisance vegetation ordinance are given 30 days to complete the registration process



Pollinator Habitat and Naturalistic Landscape

Explore pollinator gardens and naturalistic landscape within the City of Charlotte

[Community.charlottenc.gov](https://community.charlottenc.gov)

CLT Community Home / Pollinator Habitat & Naturalistic Landscape Registration

Pollinator Habitat & Naturalistic Landscape Registration



Join the movement to support pollinators and create natural spaces for wildlife in our city! By registering your maintained pollinator garden or naturalistic landscape with the City of Charlotte, you're helping to build vital urban corridors for pollinators, native wildlife and naturalistic landscapes. Plus, once your application is approved, your maintained habitat will be exempt from the City of Charlotte's nuisance vegetation ordinance.

You also have the option to put your habitat on our interactive map, which highlights our community's growing commitment to conservation. Simply let us know on the application if you'd like your site included. Whether you choose to be on the map or not, your approved maintained habitat or landscape is exempt from the city's ordinance.

Registration

[Register a Habitat](#)

You'll need a CLT Community account to register a habitat.

[Create Account](#) [Sign In](#)

Ensuring Safety & Sanitation

► Landscape Management evaluates applications

- If applicant demonstrates that habitat/landscape is designed and maintained with 50% or more native plant species, certification is approved

► Nuisance complaints

- Unregistered Property
 - If complaint received for an unregistered property with possible qualifying landscape, Code Inspector proceeds with issuing notice of violation (NOV)/door hanger, and provides owner with program information. Owner then has 30 days to register property to qualify for exemption.
- Registered Property
 - If complaint received for registered property, no NOV is issued; Complainant is notified of property status.
 - If multiple complaints received or property appears unmaintained, Code can request review from Landscape Management.

► Certification may be revoked due to:

- Failure to maintain landscaping (e.g., turf grasses over 12")
- Changes in ownership

Recent Program Enhancements

► Program enhancements implemented in November 2025 in collaboration with stakeholders:

- Eligibility - Expanded eligibility to include Naturalistic Landscapes
- Updated Registry: Streamlined registry process, added specific references to exemption from nuisance vegetation ordinance, and updated CLT Community for digital accessibility
- Updated Program Resources – Created new program handout and Frequently Asked Questions, added links to plant lists and planting tips and resources
- Mapping Application - Added the option for property owners to opt-out of inclusion in public-facing interactive map
- Yard Signs - Developed yard signs for participating properties to promote awareness and readily identify participation in city program
- Code – Added 'Registered Garden' banner in the field application for code inspectors



Program Outreach and Marketing

- ▶ Enhance program marketing through the city's social, newsletters and other communication platforms
- ▶ Begin yard sign distribution to participants early 2026
- ▶ Schedule an outreach campaign in early Spring of each year to align with the planting season
- ▶ Community groups can also request staff presentations through the Need-A-Speaker program (cltgov.me/needaspeaker)



Municipal Pollinator Ordinances



Proposed Ordinance Amendment

Sec. 10-155. – Overgrown vegetation.

- (a) It shall be unlawful for the owner and/or occupants of a premises to fail to cut overgrown grass, weeds, and other vegetation when the grass, weeds, and other vegetation is of a height greater than 12 inches. A civil penalty in the amount of \$150.00 may be issued to any person in violation of this section.
- (b) Vacant lots adjacent to improved property, except as defined as heavily wooded lots, shall be cut in their entirety. A civil penalty in the amount of \$150.00 may be issued to any person in violation of this section.
- (c) Vacant lots over one acre shall have a 100-foot buffer area cut adjacent to the nearest premises. A civil penalty in the amount of \$150.00 may be issued to any person in violation of this section.
- (d) It shall be the duty of the owner and occupant to cut and remove all grass, weeds, and other overgrowth vegetation as often as necessary so as to comply with this provision of this division.
- (e) **Exemption.** This section shall not be construed to prohibit pollinator habitat and naturalistic landscapes when registered with the city and properly maintained by the owner.

Proposed Ordinance Amendment

Sec. 10-1. – Definitions.

The following words, terms and phrases, and their derivatives, when used in this article, shall have the meanings ascribed to them in this section, except where the context clearly indicates a different meaning:

Naturalistic landscape means a carefully designed and intentionally maintained area of vegetation that reflects an ecosystem native to the Southeastern United States using regionally native and adapted plant species.

Pollinator habitat means a landscape area designed to support pollinator species, including bees, butterflies, moths, and birds. It consists of a diverse selection of plants primarily native to the southeastern United States that provide nectar, pollen, and habitat across multiple seasons and is maintained without the use of pesticides to protect pollinator health.

Process for Amending City Ordinance

► If Committee directs staff to draft ordinance amendment:

- Present topic and ordinance amendments to full City Council at an Action Preview meeting
- Place ordinance amendments with red-line attachment on Council Business Agenda for Council vote
- Speakers can sign up to speak on the Policy item, but a Public Hearing is not required

Discussion