

City Council Agenda Item Memo

From: Robin Buterbaugh, Sustainability Council Member

Council Meeting: October 15, 2024

Subject: Update on Sustainability Council's "No Mow May" program

Presenter: Robin Buterbaugh, Sustainability Council Member

Summary and Recommended Action:

The Brookings Sustainability Council recommends discontinuing the "No Mow May" program and instead adopting the upcoming Bee City USA Resolution, which provides a framework for protecting pollinators through a variety of municipal and community practices and educational programs.

Item Details:

In 2023, the Brookings Sustainability Council recommended that City Council approve Ordinance 23-004 to adopt "No Mow May," allowing homeowners to voluntarily cease mowing their lawns for the month of May without receiving a lawn height violation. The Brookings Sustainability Council provided funding for yard signs which identified participating homeowners.

"No Mow May" is a grassroots initiative encouraging homeowners to refrain from mowing their lawns during the month of May to support pollinators and biodiversity. The idea is that allowing grass and wildflowers to grow promotes habitats for bees, butterflies, and other beneficial insects, which are vital for ecosystem health.

Currently, pollinators are in decline, and 40% of pollinator species are at risk of extinction. The benefits of "No Mow May" include supporting pollinators, increasing biodiversity, improving soil health, reducing maintenance, and increasing education and awareness about the importance of pollinators. Some of the drawbacks include aesthetic concerns, pests, weeds, and compliance with mowing requirements after May.

Brookings has participated in "No Mow May" for two years; however, concerns about the drawbacks of "No Mow May" outweighing the benefits have continued to rise. Specific concerns raised by community members include:

- Sight line issues.
- Noxious weeds growing in their yard and the neighbor's yard.
- Noxious weeds mean they're using more pesticides than in previous years.
- Beautification aspect – community looks unkempt.
- Mosquitos have become more prevalent.
- Harder to cut the grass after participating due to the height.

- City staff had to process additional code enforcement cases, and mow the code violation properties on top of their current work load (year 2 only).

Current horticultural research indicates letting introduced turfgrass species grow only provides minimal benefits when compared to increasing the number of native plants in community and residential spaces. For this reason, the Brookings Sustainability Council recommends discontinuing the “No Mow May” program. As an alternative, the Sustainability Council recommends adopting the upcoming Bee City USA Resolution.

The Bee City USA Resolution provides a framework for communities to support pollinators in a variety of ways which are more beneficial than current no mow practices. The Brookings Sustainability Council and the Brookings Parks and Recreation Department will work together to fulfill the commitments required to maintain Bee City USA status. These commitments include:

- Creating and enhancing pollinator habitat on public and private land by increasing the abundance of native plants and providing nesting sites for native bees.
- Reducing the use of pesticides.
- Incorporating pollinator-conscious practices into city policies and plans.
- Hosting pollinator awareness events.
- Publicly acknowledging Bee City USA affiliation with signs and online presence.
- Paying the initial application fee and annual renewal fee (\$200).
- Reporting on previous year’s activities.

Brookings has already implemented practices and programs which support pollinators, including adding areas of pollinator habitat in city parks, increasing the number of No-Mow Zones, reducing pesticide use by using ladybugs for pest control, and incentivizing native plant purchases for homeowners as part of the Stormwater Incentive Program. In addition, SDSU has been a Bee Campus USA since 2018.

The costs and responsibilities associated with applying for and maintaining Bee City USA status would be shared by the Brookings Sustainability Council and the Brookings Parks and Recreation Department. The Brookings Sustainability Council will submit a formal request to adopt the Bee City Resolution prior to May 2025 so the City can begin the application process and implement pollinator friendly practices for the next growing season.

Legal Consideration:

None.

Strategic Plan Consideration:

Sustainability – The City of Brookings will meet environmental, community and economic desires and needs without compromising future generations’ quality of life by strategically planning, implementing and maintaining infrastructure and facilities.

Pollinators play a critical role in our food system and our environment. Supporting programs which protect pollinators by promoting native plants in our community will increase biodiversity, improve soil and water quality, reduce inputs and maintenance, and provide benefits to human health and well-being.

Financial Consideration:

The application fee and annual renewal fee is based on population. The cost for Brookings would be \$200-\$300 annually. This fee would be paid for by the Brookings Sustainability Council and/or the Parks, Recreation & Forestry Department.

Supporting Documentation:

Presentation