

Item 23-0276: Resolution 2-R-23 Resolution To Eliminate No Mow May

Common Council

Wed, Apr 19, 2023 7:00PM

Mayor Jake Woodford 05:19

Tonight, we have one member of the public who signed up to speak. So, when I call your name, we'll have you come up and state your name and address for the record. Ask such keep your comments brief into the point and on items that appear on the agenda, that you'll limit your comments to five minutes or less. Welcome Ronna.

Ronna S. (Resident) 05:43

[Ronna S. at XXXXX] and nuisance control [indecipherable] probably needs to deal with me sometimes. I'm going to continue haunting everybody. First of all, thank you all for serving. New department heads, welcome. I just keep hearing good things for Dani today at noon hour philosophers, and it went really well.

Ronna S. (Resident) 06:03

First of all, in the name of Earth Day, please support the No Mow May. I support science, and I was part of the pollinator project and the No Mow May project. The other thing is I encourage all the alders to do thorough research before presenting a resolution. Some have surfaced recently that seem to be a lost cause and tend to waste valuable time. Civility, respect, listening and looking for what we have in common will help us to go forward. Thank you.

[Cut]

Mayor Jake Woodford 09:19

All right, next we'll take up the item from municipal services committee. This is item 23-0276 Resolution 2-R-23 resolution to eliminate No Mow May. We have a motion from Alder Hartzheim to approve, and we have a motion from a second from alder Del Toro. Alder Del Toro, go ahead.

Aldersperson Israel Del Toro (District 4) 09:49

If the recommendation from committee is to deny. The motion is to deny is that correct?

Mayor Jake Woodford 09:58

The motion is to approve which would uphold the denial at committee.

Aldersperson Israel Del Toro (District 4) 10:04

The motion is to approve the committee which would up—cool I'm good with that.

Mayor Jake Woodford 10:09

Okay. Attorney Behrens.

Attorney Christopher Behrens 10:16

The aldersperson could request is a "vote notwithstanding" which is a bit simpler than which means an aye vote approves and a nay vote denies the resolution.

Mayor Jake Woodford 10:32

You're fine with how it is? You're—okay so we'll leave it we'll leave it as is unless there's a request to vote notwithstanding. Okay—so. Okay so our mover and our seconder have withdrawn so we'll just put this back in front of you. This is item 23-0276 resolution 2-R-23 resolution to eliminate no momentum. Is there a motion? Alder Meltzer moves approval. Just need we need a second. Is there a second?

Mayor Jake Woodford 11:13

We're having a having an issue here? Okay. Let's just see .Yeah, yeah, yeah. Okay. We have a motion from Alder Meltzer. Is there a second? Okay. We have a second from Alder Fenton to approve. Again, the recommendation by committee is denial. All right. Alder Del Toro.

Aldersperson Israel Del Toro (District 4) 11:43

Thank you, Mr. Mayor. I encourage my colleagues to follow the recommendation of the Municipal Services Committee and deny this resolution. The committee's vote reflects hours of thoughtful consideration of this problematic resolution. The vote also reflects the voices of the community members who have reached out to us with a total of 60 emails in support of continuing No Mow May versus 15 emails in support of the misint—the misinformed resolution. I hope that we as a representative body will reflect the will of our constituents and vote this resolution down tonight. Thank you.

Mayor Jake Woodford 12:13

Alder van Zeeland.

Aldersperson Katie Van Zeeland (District 5) 12:16

Thank you Chair. I just wanted to make everyone aware if you didn't see it, that there was some paperwork handed out that Clerk Lynch will attach to the item for the public tomorrow. I received an email from the gentleman that was referred to as the Bee Specialist regarding No Mow May. He just wanted to say that he'd received numerous questions recently, I guess the basic is "finally my critique of the now retracted study should not be taken as evidence either for or against the general concept of No Mow May, as it deals only with this particular study," and then did reference a presentation that was done by a turf specialist talking about what you can do if you would want to abstain from mowing in May, or talking about issues that might be with turf health. And I just wanted to bring that to everyone's attention. Thank you.

Mayor Jake Woodford 13:19

Any further discussion? Alder Hartzheim?

Aldersperson Sheri Hartzheim (District 13) 13:24

Thank you chair. I would like to urge my colleagues to defeat the recommendation from the committee and affirm resolution 2-R-23. A very informal poll such as here's the number of things that we received from our constituents through the all constituents reach on our website, is not a way to truly gauge what is occurring in our in our districts. I have received many individual contacts from my constituents who are in support of this resolution. So, I believe based on all of the information presented in the committee meeting, as well as what has been presented so far through all of the other forms of communication, formal and informal, that that we should as a city, perhaps, think about doing away with No Mow May, for the portion that involves lawns.

Aldersperson Sheri Hartzheim (District 13) 13:26

I still believe there's value in supporting pollinators in this city. But there may be other ways to do it. And I think the portion that involves the length of lawn is irrelevant at this point. I think we need to go back to the way the code holds all year long, because eight inches is sufficient to support the early pollinators. Thank you.

Mayor Jake Woodford 15:00

Alder Doran.

Aldersperson Chad Doran (District 15) 15:02

Thank you. There's been a lot of things that have been said about this in our committee meeting and out in public about this resolution that's really supposed to be about the science and about the ordinance. And ironically, I think a lot of those things haven't had to do with either one of those things.

Aldersperson Chad Doran (District 15) 15:21

I've been really careful throughout this process not to share my opinion about any of this. I've simply shared language in the resolution that comes from the journal in which the retracted study by our colleague was published. And the resolution also just quotes directly from the editor of the journal, and other scientific studies that I found online.

Aldersperson Chad Doran (District 15) 15:43

So, to the point where my some of my colleagues have repeatedly made claims, I'm somehow slandering the authors, or defaming them, or sharing false information, or straight up lying, I'm happy to share the sources with them where that information came from so they could redirect their misplaced outrage there. And despite what some of my colleagues have apparently been told, I did have discussions with the mayor and with the attorney's office about the resolution, and I did share it with our colleague who authored the retracted study prior to introducing the resolution. So, I think those are some important facts to share.

Aldersperson Chad Doran (District 15) 16:22

I think our colleague owed it to this community to bring this information forward that he's retracting the study. It was absolutely the basis this Council used to pass this ordinance last year. But he chose not to. But I think it's important for the community to have a chance to have discussion about that.

Aldersperson Chad Doran (District 15) 16:39

I'm not the one who conducted this study that was retracted. The onus here isn't on me to prove the evidence that this ordinance should exist. But I've shared plenty of evidence that shows science that's contrary to what was claimed in the study.

Aldersperson Chad Doran (District 15) 16:54

I guess I was going to share some of the information that I shared in committee, but I think with the author of the information that was used to, I guess, go against the study, sharing an update here that was shared with us tonight. I'll just read the first paragraph. I think that sort of sums up that where he says "In my professional and scientific opinion, no part of the now retracted paper should be considered reliable. In general, retractions of papers only happened for serious issues that cannot be addressed with a correction, and the findings of a retracted paper should be considered invalid." So again, since that was the impetus for us passing this ordinance, I think there's clearly nothing there that supports it any longer. Again, it's not my opinion, this is this is what the experts are saying. The editor of the journal noted the same saying that, you know, they concluded the findings were unreliable the study and could impact the results.

Aldersperson Chad Doran (District 15) 17:58

So, I think there's plenty of other evidence here that I've shared, that again, goes against what we've heard, as claimed as a reason to support this. A couple of those things, typical maximum height of dandelions is six to eight inches. That's within the tolerance of our original ordinance that says you can grow your grass up to eight

inches long. Typical maximum height of clover four to eight inches, again within that same tolerance. The argument here that had been made is that dandelions and clover are the key source of food for bees and pollinators in early spring before flowers and gardens come to. Every recommendation that I could find, for the optimal height for cutting your grass to actually help dandelions grow is four inches. And a USDA study shows the optimal mowing frequency for the best bee habitat is two weeks. So again, this whole kind of count goes—runs counter to what we've been told. Our colleagues have said they've done another study. As of yet, we haven't seen that study submitted, apparently, and it hasn't been peer reviewed. So, I would say we're not doing our jobs well, if we use that as the basis for keeping this long grass ordinance in place. If they want to bring it back again, in the future, I would say that's fine. If they can, they can prove that the evidence does exist to support this.

Alderson Chad Doran (District 15) 19:25

I think the other key fact here that I shared at committee, the indisputable fact I think everybody agrees on, flowers and gardens are far more beneficial than long grass. So that's the science and I encourage my colleagues to follow it and vote to approve this resolution and return our ordinance back to its original form.

Mayor Jake Woodford 19:46

Alder Siebers.

Alderson William Siebers (District 1) 19:49

Thank you, Your Honor. We spent two committee meetings discussing this. I'm not a No Mow May person, but I do respect those people who are involved in No Mow May. I don't think they're doing any harm in terms of not cutting their lawns during the course of a month, and they're feeling like they're doing something very positive. I don't see there being any harm. Those people who are in opposition to this, other than maybe Alderson Doran, at least the people in my district, don't like—it boils down to aesthetics. They don't like the fact that their lawn is cut, whereas their neighbor's lawn isn't. But beyond that, you know, they don't go into detail like Alderson Doran has. There are—they also say there are individuals that are using No Mow May so they cannot have to cut their lawn. There's individuals that are doing it for that reason, but most of the people that are doing it are doing it because they're feeling like they're doing something very positive. And for and alderperson who initially voted no on this, I support it. Because like I said, I don't see it doing any harm. And I see it doing positive things.

Mayor Jake Woodford 21:35

Alder Wolff?

Alderson Nate Wolff (District 12) 21:37

Thank you, Chair. We've spent a great deal talking about No Mow May in these chambers. With the majority of the people in the room. And I have heard all the arguments. I have heard everyone's viewpoint. I've heard from my constituents. I've heard from people in other parts of the city over time and over and over again. Even the people who don't necessarily know what it is, the second you tell them oh, it's for bees and other pollinators and they go oh, that's great. Because then they also feel like they're taking part in it.

Alderson Nate Wolff (District 12) 22:20

I don't think that we need to continue to talk about this. That's why I voted to make it permanent last year, because it feels like we continue to get over and over and over the exact same conversations. As far as the science being explained to me against No Mow May, I don't trust the source of those facts. that's all I'd say. I hope we can just vote on this and move on

Mayor Jake Woodford 22:59

Alder Del Toro?

Aldersperson Israel Del Toro (District 4) 23:11

I'd like to again reiterate that the committee work has been done at committee and there is no need to rehash this yet again to give Mr. Doran an inappropriate platform for political grandstanding. I'm struggling to understand if my colleague Alder Dorn is purposely misleading or willfully ignorant. Let's just get to a vote.

Mayor Jake Woodford 23:28

Alder Hartzheim.

Aldersperson Sheri Hartzheim (District 13) 23:30

Thank you chair. I would like to challenge what Aldersperson Siebers said in terms of there is no harm. I've heard people say there's no harm and there's no cost to this. And in a way, you're right. There isn't a harm to—

Mayor Jake Woodford 23:45

Direct your comments to the chair.

Aldersperson Sheri Hartzheim (District 13) 23:46

Yes. In a way he's right. There is no harm in trying to help the bees. But if you're trying to help the bees affects your neighbors and what they do on their property there is harm in my mind. And there's no cost. So, there's no cost to the city to do this. But in terms of the costs that your neighbor may have to pay in order to mitigate pests or to get the turf that he or she wants in their yard, those are additional costs. So, I think when we think about this, we think of this as a very nebulous, "it's not really harmful to anybody," but in—but what's coming from my constituency is "this is harmful, because it is affecting neighborhood property—neighboring properties." So, I think we need to sort of reframe how we think about the harms or the costs that come with this particular thing.

Aldersperson Sheri Hartzheim (District 13) 24:50

There is a reason that all year long this city has some sort of standard at which we need to request that folks keep their lawns mowed, because there's obvious—obviously, then somewhere along the line pest problems, or unsightliness, et cetera, et cetera. So, there's a reason we have the standard. To deny that standard for a month for bees, which—I don't... That's—that sounds like a great plan. Oh, that sounds wonderful. But those harms are still being done during that time. And what we found now or what we're seeing now is evidence to the contrary of the aid that it's really doing for pollinators.

Aldersperson Sheri Hartzheim (District 13) 25:32

So that's why I continue to challenge this view. I don't challenge that we should help pollinators, that we should figure out ways as a city to support early pollinators and that sort of thing. I just feel like this particular—the lawn portion of this, the grass portion of this is causing all this disharmony, and causing those harms we don't think about and those costs we don't think about. So that's why I still support removal of No Mow May in this city. And I would ask my colleagues to think further in that regard as well. Thank you.

Mayor Jake Woodford 26:13

Alder Alfheim.

Aldersperson Kristin Alfheim (District 11) 26:16

Thank you, Mayor. When this discussion happened, I was looking forward to the rest of the information, as I do try to listen and learn what's going on. And I listened to the presentation by, um, Alder Del Toro and the

coauthor, and I found it to be thorough. I found—I I enjoy listening to professionals who know their stuff and present it confidently. And I did understand in the conversation what had gone wrong and what was being corrected to follow through. I also have constituents in the room that I would put as doggone close to experts, uh, as they enjoy, uh, the plant life in the Master Gardener program. And I take that information as not only professional scientific advice but experienced people in, and I I take that as my first level of knowledge.

Aldersperson Kristin Alfheim (District 11) 27:14

When the information is questioned, um, it's understandable. I mean, there is definitely an uh opposing thought on everything in today's world. There will be someone that will argue the point. Um, in comparison, as the information is provided, um, by Alder van Zeeland, um, this is the last paragraph from the explanation from the other expert, and I'm gonna wor—read it word for word. "So, my take home points are really, you know, No Mow May could result in a stressed lawn depending on weather, uh. And I think, you know, it's, it's obviously up to the individual, whether or not they want to take place in that. But our recommendation is, is to really focus on sound management practices. Uh. And you can still try to do your, uh, do the most as far as, um, promoting pollinators or having as minimal disturbance on them. Planning low input long lawns like fine fescue are going to require less mowing. They're also going to be, uh, you know, more of a suitable habitat for, uh, for pollinating species and pollinators themselves. And mow when the lawn needs it, not what day or month it is."

Aldersperson Kristin Alfheim (District 11) 28:40

Now, I'm not an expert. But I read this as perhaps not the most scientifically written response to an important issue for us. And all I have to go on is the information presented in front of us. And based on this, which is the paper that has been quoted, um, I'm not convinced. I think there are more professionals presenting their information than what we have based this entire conversation on. With that in mind, can we please allow No Mow May to continue? Thank you.

Mayor Jake Woodford 29:21

Alder Schultz.

Aldersperson Alex Schultz (District 9) 29:25

Thank you, Mayor. I'm as exhausted by this conversation as the rest of my colleagues are, and we've been over a lot of scientific data, some certifiable, some not, a lot of hearsay, and a lot of anecdotes. And I think the test in this case is what has No Mow May done for the community. And you only have to look to see how many communities outside of Appleton in the United States have moved forward with their own version of No Mow May, whether that's no mowing through the month, whether it's a slow mow resolution, whether it is a No Mow resolution, slow mow spring, there are hundreds now communities who have followed our lead. We were the first, and they have followed suit. And I can tell you now that they are all dealing with these kinds of questions. What's the best way to do this? Do we allow our grass to grow for four weeks and have it grow to 18 inches? But is that a real benefit?

Aldersperson Alex Schultz (District 9) 30:31

There are lots of unanswered questions, and the science is going to follow. Science will evolve because this is a fresh initiative. We only started it three years ago. It's not a lot of time to have a long breadth of information to reflect on and look at and understand the effects of what we're trying to do. So, we have to give ourselves that space, and we have to understand that this community started a movement that has spread like wildfire across the United States. And our responsibility now is not to back up and say, "Well, we don't know exactly what the results are. We don't know what the implications are." We have some early scientific evidence showing that the speciation is increasing, and the amount of species and their magnitude is increasing. Can we replicate that year by year? Are there other factors involved? We don't know that yet.

Alderson Alex Schultz (District 9) 31:24

What we do know is that there is a desire by this community and the people who are in it, to try something new and that has spread across the United States. And I think it's incumbent upon us to keep this going with the understanding that we may have to reevaluate what the program looks like. We may have to rebrand this. There is some evidence and we've seen it in this paper and other studies that, you know, letting your grass grow 18 inches may not be the best thing for pollinating species. But that's a singular individual lawn that may have been manicured for 5-10 years to grow that way. There are lots of other lawns, lots of other spaces that don't react that same way.

Alderson Alex Schultz (District 9) 32:04

So, if I don't mow for four weeks, my own lawn only gets four inches tall. That means I can let it go for four weeks, sometimes eight weeks, and it'll blossom and do the things that I want it to do without mowing. If I mow that four inches down, I'm not doing any good. Yes, I have that ability to do it right now without this ordinance. But I think what this does for the community it says, we want you to think about doing something different with your green spaces to help insect populations that are on steep decline. We know this; this is scientifically proven. And by helping those insect species we are supporting the bird species that we all love to go and watch. We [indecipherable] supporting everything else on up the food chain. So, if it's even a small effect on increasing insect speciation and populations, it's very beneficial to us. And I think we can prove that we have done that.

Alderson Alex Schultz (District 9) 32:58

And yes, there is no question that we have to evolve the program and think about in more detail and more granular approach to how this affects individual properties, and maybe there's five or six different ways to do it, depending on what your property looks like, what you do to your property. But the program itself is allowing us to have that conversation. And I think it's incredibly significant for this community to be the first one to do it and have the rest of the United States follow us.

Alderson Alex Schultz (District 9) 33:26

I was really frustrated that this was introduced. I wanted it to be pulled once we talked about the science, but here we are a month into this and I would really encourage my colleagues to uphold the committee's recommendation to deny this. Thank you.

Mayor Jake Woodford 33:46

Alder Meltzer.

Alderson Vered Meltzer (District 2) 33:49

Thank you. No Mow May is a very popular program. When our constituents approached us wanting to engage in this and our ordinances prohibited them, we had temporary measures, and as one of my colleagues said, last year, we voted to make it permanent so that we could avoid having these conversations again. Clearly, there is a great desire in our community to have the opportunity to participate in No Mow May.

Alderson Vered Meltzer (District 2) 34:20

It's voluntary. And having the ordinance on the books allows our residents that opportunity. There is I feel great harm that would be done to deny them that opportunity now. I think that we have worked very hard to elevate conversations. There's a sense of community pride and a sense of identity that we are pioneers in the realm of pollinator preservation. And that's a very important path that we've chosen to take, and we need to stay that path. So please vote not to eliminate No Mow May. Thank you.

Mayor Jake Woodford 34:59

Alder Hayden.

Aldersperson Patrick Hayden (District 7) 35:01

Thank you Chair. I like No Mow May. I think it's really not only given an opportunity to give pollinators a chance, but it's also given an opportunity for me to talk to my neighbors. As someone who participates in it and as my neighbors do not, it's allowed us to have a conversation about what it means to them to keep their lawn up and for me to help our pollinators.

Aldersperson Patrick Hayden (District 7) 35:22

And I just like that it's kind of bringing our communities together in having an open discussion of these ideas. And I think that this kind of allows our neighbors to come together, and it's not our job to really police the neighborhoods and to come down hard on it. I think if we start having these conversations with our neighbors, it will find commonality and a way to move forward together.

Mayor Jake Woodford 35:48

Right, so just before we proceed with further discussion about this, I want to point out we've heard from just about everybody, and there's the conversation about what's before you, which is the recommendation to deny from committee. There's a broader conversation happening about—this sort of glancing conversation about the actions of members of the Council. And I'd like to encourage the Council to focus on the item before you and focus debate on the item before you now as we continue the discussion, okay? Next is Alder Wolff.

Aldersperson Nate Wolff (District 12) 36:33

Call the question.

Mayor Jake Woodford 36:40

Motion's been made to call the question. Is there a second? Motion and a second to call the question. We have one speaker in the queue. Sure alder—did was—Alder van Zeeland, did you have a point of order?

Aldersperson Katie Van Zeeland (District 5) 36:57

No, I just didn't hear what you said. One speaker?

Mayor Jake Woodford 36:59

We have one speaker in the queue. All those in favor of calling the question please sig—Alder Hartzheim.

Aldersperson Sheri Hartzheim (District 13) 37:07

Our new rule rules. Please, could you clarify by our new rules do you need to ask if everyone's had a chance? Or do we not approve that? I'm got such a short memory.

Mayor Jake Woodford 37:17

That that was not approved.

Aldersperson Sheri Hartzheim (District 13) 37:21

That was not approved? Okay. Thank you.

Mayor Jake Woodford 37:22

No.

Aldersperson Sheri Hartzheim (District 13) 37:24

Thank you for [indecipherable].

Mayor Jake Woodford 37:26

I think by now everybody's had a chance certainly. All right, we have a motion and a second to call the question. All those in favor please signify by saying aye. Any opposed? All right. The ayes have it. The question has been called. We have a motion and a second to approve which would approve the denial of committee. An aye vote will defeat the resolution.

Mayor Jake Woodford 38:04

Motion passes 11 to three. The denial at committee has been upheld. The resolution has been defeated.