

Pilon, Janet

Subject: I support bylaw reform for biodiversity

From: Joanne Ernst

Sent: Tuesday, July 23, 2024 9:28 AM

To: Office of the Mayor <Officeofthe.Mayor@hamilton.ca>

Subject: I support bylaw reform for biodiversity

Dear Andrea Horwath (Mayor), Hamilton,

It has never been more urgent for people to contribute to community and planetary health. One simple way they can do this is to install and care for a habitat garden.

This type of garden contains native plants and natural features such as fallen leaves and dry stems that support insects and birds at all life stages. It also provides both the gardener and neighbours with meaningful nature interactions and essential ecological services including pollination, stormwater storage and relief from the urban heat island effect.

Habitat gardens demonstrate a local response to the global challenges of climate change and biodiversity loss. In an ideal world, municipalities would support and celebrate such actions. This is the case in some communities, but not all. There is more work to be done to revise municipal property standards, practices and bylaws to realize the full potential of habitat gardens to improve local quality of life for all.

I fully support habitat gardens in our community and request the following government actions, which will undoubtedly result in more of these life-sustaining landscapes:

1. Reform municipal bylaws: Revise existing property standard bylaws that discourage or prohibit habitat gardens, ensuring that new versions support biodiversity and ecological health.
2. Initiate bylaw enforcement training: Bylaw enforcement policies and procedures must include training for bylaw enforcement officers on native and prohibited plant identification, essential and permitted habitat features, community relations, and the legal rights of gardeners to express their environmental ethics.
3. Lead by example: Insist on a high level of ecological gardening awareness and practice among city employees tending to public gardens, natural areas and other lands.
4. Commit to community outreach and education: Effective outreach programs are crucial for shifting public perceptions and fostering a deeper understanding of sustainable practices. Municipalities should partner with community leaders and committed organizations to deliver habitat garden resources and events and to install and maintain habitat gardens on public land.

Through these actions, our municipality can transform sterile landscapes into thriving ecosystems with enhanced biodiversity and climate change resilience, improving the quality of life for all residents.

Not sure where to start? The Ecological Design Lab at Toronto Metropolitan University has conducted research and developed tools for towns and cities interested in supporting biodiversity and habitat gardens. Please visit the EDL website for more information, <https://ecologicaldesignlab.ca/project/by-laws-for-biodiversity/>.

Thank you for taking the time to read my letter and consider the recommendations within it.

Sincerely,
Joanne Ernst