

Roadside Pollinator Program FAQs

+What is and Who administers the Roadside Pollinator Program?

- The Roadside Pollinator Program is a Public Works program that is converting mowed turfgrass along roadsides, in medians, and roundabouts to low maintenance native vegetation. The program started in Spring 2019 following a pilot project that was established along select roadsides and designated as “No Mow Zones”. This program is administered by the Public Works Department’s Streets Division with the assistance of the Office of Sustainability’s community conservationist.

+Why is the City allowing tall “weeds” to grow along roadsides?

- We are not neglecting our maintenance responsibilities. This is a project in progress and the finished product will result in a diverse mosaic of wildflowers. Establishing native vegetation along roadsides has become a more common practice amongst governments due to the long term environmental and economical benefits reaped once these plants become established. The downside to establishing native plants in public rights-of-ways is that it takes several years for them to mature resulting in a couple of growing seasons of a “weedy” appearance. To learn more about the program and the establishment timeline go to www.como.gov/pollinator.

+What plants are being seeded in these pollinator areas and “no mow zones”?

- Native Missouri wildflowers and grasses ranging in height from 6 inches to about 56 inches. We did not seed every species at every site since in some areas tall plants may become a safety hazard. We seeded shorter wildflowers and grasses (< 36 inches tall) in places like medians and roundabouts and some taller species were seeded along roadsides. To review the purchased mixes for Phase 1 sites go to www.como.gov/pollinator.

+Won’t tall plants block the view of drivers, bikers, and pedestrians?

- Public safety is a top priority for the City and roadside vegetation standards were consulted during pollinator site selection. These standards include but are not limited to sight distance, vegetation height, and vegetation growth pattern. The City worked with vegetation experts from Pure Air Native Seed retailer to select the appropriate plants for this project. Additionally, city streets engineers were consulted when selecting sites if public safety was a concern. In general, we seeded shorter species (< 36 inches tall) in medians and roundabouts and taller species along roadsides.

+Why can the City allow grass and “weeds” to grow beyond 12 inches but I can’t do the same on my property?

- The City is not allowing vegetation to grow uncontrolled. We are in the middle of establishing native Missouri plants which require a different maintenance method than frequent mowing. As of March 2020, the City hired DJM Ecological Services, an

environmental consultant, to establish and maintain the Roadside Pollinator Program sites. Due to COVID-19 work has been delayed on this project but resumed in early May 2020. DJM will manage the sites using “Integrated Pest Management” practices including the use of herbicide spot treatment for killing harmful invasive vegetation such as callery pear, bush honeysuckle, sericea lespedeza, and others. Additionally, DJM will use specialized equipment to mow the sites at a height of 8 inches. This is a standard practice for native vegetation establishment to prevent the weeds (e.g. wild lettuces, ragweed, mullein, birdsfoot trefoil, etc.) from shading out the native seedlings that are only a few inches tall.

- Residential or commercial properties that are served with a notice of violation related to the Landscape Management Ordinance (LMO) are typically not restoring their property to native vegetation but have let vegetation grow uncontrolled. Allowing your yard or property to grow uncontrolled is in violation of City Code. Native landscapes are allowed on residential and commercial properties as long as they are maintained by the confines of the LMO. To review the Landscape Management Ordinance click on this [link](#).

+What’s wrong with mowing grass?

Maintaining turfgrass is a carbon-intensive and costly practice.

- Scientific research shows that mowing turfgrass for twenty minutes emits the same amount of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gasses as if you were to drive a sedan from Columbia to St. Louis one-way. The Columbia City Council adopted the City’s first Climate Action and Adaptation Plan (CAAP) in June 2019. Goals in the CAAP include reducing our greenhouse gas emissions by 80% by 2050. As part of the City’s strategy to reduce municipal carbon emissions the Public Works Department has committed to reducing the surface area of turfgrass maintained by frequent mowing via converting turfgrass to native vegetation. Native vegetation requires a different type of management resulting in a different aesthetic and lower emissions. In fact, native vegetation actually feeds more carbon into the soil than turfgrass due to the extremely long root systems of natives (native roots grow 10 - 15 feet whereas turf grass grows to maximum 12 inches). Bringing more carbon into the soil reduces the carbon in our atmosphere mitigating the effects of climate change. For more information about the CAAP, visit the [Office of Sustainability’s website](#).
- Mowing turfgrass in medians, roundabouts, and roadsides is costly for the City because it requires a relatively large team of staff to mow a small area due to the need for traffic control. An internal analysis revealed that the annual cost of mowing 88 acres of roadside turfgrass ranged between \$230,000 to \$350,000 (we present a range because costs fluctuate year to year due to fuel costs, salary benefits costs, etc.). A recent estimate for hiring a consultant to convert and establish native vegetation in these turfgrass areas is approximately \$60,000 to \$70,000 per year. Once the native vegetation is established the annual cost of

maintenance is projected to be much lower than our current costs (projected native vegetation maintenance cost per year is < \$70,000). Resulting in cost savings of \$160,000 to \$280,000 per year.

+Where are these sites located?

- The map on the program webpage highlights the pollinator areas that are currently being converted to native vegetation. More sites will be added in the future as we identify other roadsides appropriate to convert. Visit the webpage to view the map:
www.como.gov/pollinator

+Can I maintain the area by my house or business?

- If a resident, neighborhood organization, or business owner would like to assume the maintenance responsibility of the public right-of-way near their location they may sign a "Landscape Maintenance Agreement (LMA)" with the City of Columbia. To review the LMA click on this [link](#). If upon review you are still interested in signing an LMA with the City complete this [google form](#).

+Who can I talk to about the pollinator site near my house or business?

- There is a comment button at the bottom of the webpage where customers may relay their concerns and comments to City Staff. All comments are recorded in a spreadsheet and will be shared in reports to the City Council regarding the program. Scroll down to the comment button on our webpage: www.como.gov/pollinator or you may contact the call center at 573-874-CITY.