



Department Source: Community Development - NS

To: City Council

From: City Manager & Staff

Council Meeting Date: November 20, 2017

Re: Discussion of changes to Chapter 11 - Weeds

## Executive Summary

Chapter 11 Health and Sanitation of City Ordinance addresses weeds as vegetation which has attained the height of twelve inches or more. An update to this ordinance may be needed as a greater number of property owners are planting their yards with native vegetation.

## Discussion

Currently, any vegetation other than "recognized trees, decorative shrubs and ornamental grasses" that exceed 12 inches is in violation of our weed ordinance. As written, native plants may be in violation of our weed ordinance because they often exceed 12 inches.

Staff in Community Development-Neighborhood Services enforce the section of Chapter 11 that relates to weeds. In FY17, ONS staff handled 1,520 weed cases; nearly 500 of which were from citizen complaints. Of these cases, staff estimate that fewer than 2% relate to properties with native plantings. ONS abates 40-50 properties annually for weed violations with the cost charged back to the property. In cases where native plants are part of the landscape, staff talk with property owners about their maintenance practices to obtain voluntary compliance.

Native plants benefit the environment because they have adapted to our local climate and coevolved with native wildlife. To survive extreme climate conditions, native plants grow extensive root systems that in some species may reach up to twenty feet long. These extensive root systems allow native plants to access more water and nutrients than some non-native plants that are commonly used in residential landscapes. Consequently, native plants do not require frequent watering or fertilizer unlike non-native landscape plants which do require more care, saving the property owner money and time. Additionally, native plants do not need to be treated with pesticides because they have adapted to insect damage by developing various defense mechanisms against insect herbivores. Overall, native plants are low maintenance, reduce the amount of chemicals used in residential areas, and support essential ecosystem goods and services (i.e. clean air and water, pollination, healthy soil, flood mitigation, etc.) that we use every day.

Challenges to modifying our weed ordinance include citizen perception about landscaping, and property owners who do not maintain their property by stating they have native vegetation. Additional staff training may be required to enforce a modified ordinance that specifies noxious weeds and nuisance plants.



# City of Columbia

701 East Broadway, Columbia, Missouri 65201

Staff has reviewed ordinances from other communities both in and outside of Missouri. Many communities have modified their weed ordinances to allow for native plantings. Regulations vary by community but may include additional approvals by the municipality or neighborhood organization, setbacks from property boundaries, border requirements, or limits on the lot area that can be dedicated to native plantings. A document summarizing ordinances from other communities is attached.

City met with the Board of Health in September to get initial feedback on amending the ordinance and received general support for proceeding with a report to Council. If Council is interested in amending the weed ordinance, staff propose a public input process including a public meeting in January. We would also receive public comment through an online form and comment cards at the Columbia/Boone County Department of Health and Human Services offices at 1005 W. Worley and at the Community Development Service Center in City Hall. Neighborhood organizations and those interested in neighborhood issues will be notified of the process. If the Council and public comment support doing so, staff would return to Council with legislation in February or early March with changes to go in effect with the growing season.

## Fiscal Impact

Short-Term Impact: none  
Long-Term Impact: none

## Strategic & Comprehensive Plan Impacts

### Strategic Plan Impacts:

Primary Impact: Social Equity, Secondary Impact: Not Applicable, Tertiary Impact: Not Applicable

### Comprehensive Plan Impacts:

Primary Impact: Environmental Management, Secondary Impact: Not applicable, Tertiary Impact: Not Applicable

## Legislative History

Date	Action
08/06/2001	The weed ordinance found in Chapter 11 of City ordinance was adopted; Sec. 11-251 through 11-256.

## Suggested Council Action

Staff request direction from Council on pursuing changes to the weed ordinance to allow for native plantings.