

RESOLUTION PROMOTING ECOLOGICALLY BENEFICIAL AND SUSTAINABLE PARKWAYS

WHEREAS, the planet is facing a climate and biodiversity crisis, manifested in Chicago by higher annual temperatures, increases in the severity and duration of rain events, and the collapse in the populations of the Monarch butterfly and many other native insects; and

WHEREAS, Chicago's 2022 Climate Action Plan Strategy 3: Community Resilience calls for "increasing the planting and maintenance of native trees and plants"; and

WHEREAS, parkways in the City of Chicago make up at minimum 313,420,800 ft², or 7,195 acres, which is approximately the same amount of green space managed by the Chicago Park District; and

WHEREAS, though not explicitly required by the municipal code, it is customary for the City or its subcontractors to lay and/or restore the vast majority these parkways with turfgrasses with none to negative ecological and infrastructural benefits; and

WHEREAS, the Municipal Code of Chicago 10-32-050 does convey the responsibility to homeowners to water, weed and mow the contiguous parkway lawn; and

WHEREAS, the average number of 311 flooding- and blocked-sewer- related complaints, namely 'Water in Basement', 'Water in Street' and 'Sewer Cleaning Inspection Request', filed by Chicago taxpayers from 2019 to 2024 is 27,171 per the Chicago Data Portal, and such numbers across these service request types are not noticeably decreasing year-after-year since 2019 but have remained steady; and

WHEREAS, turfgrasses have shallow roots that lend to excessive soil erosion during high wind and rainfall events, routine gas mowing negatively impacts air quality, and the routine application of fertilizers, herbicides and pesticides negatively impact air, water and soil quality and human and animal health, while watering, weeding and mowing are time and financial costs to property owners; and

WHEREAS, a growing number of Chicago homeowners and tenants feel that parkways should provide some ecological benefit which turfgrass does not provide; and

WHEREAS, on September 14, 2021, this body passed an ordinance creating a Native and Pollinator Garden Advisory Board Registry reflecting homeowners' and tenants' desire to protect native habitats and increase nature-based solutions to climate change; and

WHEREAS, on October 16, 2023, this body passed a resolution to call for hearing(s) on the City's plans to mitigate and respond to future extreme flooding events, and during that hearing before the Joint Committees on Environmental Protection and Energy and Public Safety, the concept of curbside wetlands on parkways was introduced to councilmembers as a solution; and

WHEREAS, parkway plants native to the Chicagoland region and other nonnative but stormwater-resilient plants do not require nearly as many inputs, require little maintenance once established, increase the diversity and resilience of pollinating insects and can also serve to moderate extreme temperatures, reduce soil erosion and manage stormwater runoff and flooding, reduce air and water pollution, improve mental wellbeing, improve aesthetics, and have even been shown to increase property values; and

WHEREAS, rolled out at scale, such sustainable parkways may provide long-term cost benefits to the City, renters and homeowners over turfgrass, being easier and cheaper to maintain and progressively cheaper to install with economies of scale, and spending less time and money to deep clean private and public catch basins and field 311 requests; and

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF CHICAGO that we, the members of the Chicago City Council, recognize the aesthetic, cultural and ecological value that native and nonnative stormwater resilient plants bring to our communities and support all efforts to install such gardens in public and private green spaces, including the parkway; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT we, the members of the City Council, call for a subject matter hearing inviting experts, advocacy groups, and community members to provide insights and recommendations for investigative measures potentially including but not limited to undertaking pilot studies on suitable parkways, determining a suitable species mix, method of application, considerations for care and maintenance, and any necessary changes to the municipal code, funding mechanisms, and other policy areas to allow native and/or stormwater-resilient seed mixes to be the default option for city parkways; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT we, the members of the City Council will consider a follow-up from the subject matter hearing to further investigate including but not limited to the establishment of a task force or working group dedicated to conducting research and providing recommendations for policy development and implementation of support initiatives aimed at amending restoration and landscaping practices and/or directing relevant city agencies such as the Department of Transportation, Department of Water Management, Department of Streets and Sanitation and Department of Environment to conduct a cost-benefit study to incorporate such practices into the city's long-term planning and development processes, including land use, green infrastructure development, and emergency preparedness.