



CITY OF LAUREL, MARYLAND

ORDINANCE NO. 2054

AN ORDINANCE OF THE MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL OF LAUREL, MARYLAND, AMENDING CHAPTER 18, ARTICLE XI DIVISION 2 “ACCUMULATIONS AND OBNOXIOUS CONDITIONS, ETC.”, BY ADDING A NEW SECTION 18-181.1. “DEFINITIONS”, AND SECTION 18-181.2. “INTENTIONAL PLANTINGS EXEMPTION”; AMENDING AND RENUMBERING FORMER SECTION 18-181.1 “TRIMMING OF HEDGES, SHRUBS, AND TREES” TO SECTION 18-181.3 AND RENUMBERING FORMER SECTION 18-181.2 “SNOW AND ICE REMOVAL” TO SECTION 18-181.4, AND RENUMBERING FORMER SECTION 18-181.3 “PROHIBITED DISPOSAL OF REFUSE ON PROPERTY OF ANOTHER WITHOUT CONSENT” TO SECTION NO. 18-181.5 OF THE LAUREL CITY CODE TO PERMIT INTENTIONAL NATIVE PLANTINGS, POLLINATOR GARDENS, AND OTHER MANAGED LANDSCAPES AS AN EXEMPTION FROM THE WEED HEIGHT REQUIREMENT, AND TO UPDATE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE TRIMMING AND MAINTENANCE OF HEDGES, SHRUBS, AND TREES ALONG STREETS AND SIDEWALKS TO ENSURE PEDESTRIAN ACCESS, VISIBILITY, AND PUBLIC SAFETY AND PROVIDING AN EFFECTIVE DATE.

Sponsored by Councilmember James Kole

WHEREAS, the Mayor and City Council of Laurel recognize the importance of maintaining property in a manner that supports public health, safety, and neighborhood quality of life; and

WHEREAS, the City’s current property maintenance code establishes maximum grass and weed height standards and trimming requirements for vegetation along streets and sidewalks, in order to prevent nuisances, maintain accessibility, and protect community aesthetics; and

WHEREAS, native plant gardens, pollinator habitats, and similar intentional landscapes provide significant environmental benefits, including stormwater management, erosion control, improved biodiversity, and increased support for pollinators and wildlife; and

WHEREAS, untrimmed hedges, shrubs, and trees along public rights-of-way can obstruct sidewalks, limit visibility for motorists and pedestrians, and interfere with streetlights and other public infrastructure, thereby creating safety hazards; and

WHEREAS, the Mayor and City Council desire to add new sections, renumber and amend existing sections of the Laurel City Code to allow residents to establish and maintain intentional plantings as an alternative to turf lawns, while also updating

vegetation trimming standards along streets and sidewalks to ensure safety, accessibility, and compatibility with surrounding properties; as set forth herein; and

WHEREAS, the Mayor and City Council find that it is in the best interest of the City of Laurel and its residents to promote sustainable landscaping practices while preserving public safety, pedestrian access, and property maintenance standards; and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT ENACTED AND ORDAINED, by the Mayor and City Council of Laurel, Maryland, that Section 18-181 is amended; that new Sections 18-181.1 and 18-181.2 are added; and that existing Sections 18-181.1 through 18-181.3 are renumbered as Sections 18-181.3 through 18-181.5, respectively:

CHAPTER 18 BUILDINGS AND BUILDING REGULATIONS

Article XI – PROPERTY STANDARDS

DIVISION 2. – ACCUMULATIONS AND OBNOXIOUS CONDITIONS, ETC

Sec. 18-181. Height of ~~w~~Weeds.

It shall be the duty of every person as owner, occupant, lessee or agent in charge of land lying within the city to keep all weeds and grass cut to a height of ~~not over eight (8) inches~~ not to exceed eight (8) inches, except as provided in this section.

Sec. 18-181.1. Definitions.

For the purposes of this section, the following words and phrases shall have the meanings respectively ascribed to them herein:

Intentional Planting means an area deliberately established and actively maintained as an alternative to traditional turf grass or formal planting beds, including but not limited to wildflower gardens, meadows, pollinator or native plant gardens, wildlife habitat gardens, rain gardens, xeriscaping, or other low-impact landscaping practices, where vegetation is intended to grow beyond the height otherwise permitted under Sec. 18-181. The presence of native plants alone does not constitute an intentional planting.

Invasive Species means plants or weeds that are prohibited by the State as shown on the Consolidated Maryland Prohibited Invasive Plant Species published by the State

of Maryland Department of Agriculture, and amended from time to time, and any invasive species prohibited by City law.

Managed Edge means a clearly defined and maintained boundary separating an intentional planting from adjacent areas, which demonstrates active maintenance and limits the spread or encroachment of vegetation beyond the designated planting area.

Native Plant means a species indigenous to the State of Maryland as identified within the Maryland Plant Atlas (MPA).

Sec. 18-181.2 Intentional Plantings Exemption.

(a) Applicability.

Occupied residential properties that are intentionally cultivated and actively maintained for a purpose other than a traditional turf lawn, including wildflower gardens, meadows, pollinator or native plant gardens, wildlife habitat gardens, rain gardens, xeriscaping, and vegetable or herb gardens, shall not be in violation of this section, provided the conditions in subsection (b) are met.

(b) Conditions – The exemption applies only if:

- (1) The planting is kept free of noxious and invasive plants and weeds in accordance with the Annotated Code of Maryland, Agriculture Article, § 9.5-101, and the Consolidated List of Maryland Invasive Plant Species, as amended and any invasive species prohibited by City law.
- (2) The planting does not create a health or safety hazard or fire risk, including but not limited to harborage for vermin, mosquito breeding, or excessive dead vegetation.
- (3) The planting does not obstruct public rights-of-way, sidewalks, or visibility at intersections and does not extend beyond the property line.
- (4) The planting does not conceal any required building address number.
- (5) The planting shows evidence of active maintenance and stewardship.
- (6) Water features are maintained to prevent mosquito breeding.
- (7) A managed edge is maintained along sidewalks, driveways, alleys, and adjacent properties.

(c) Managed Edge.

Where an intentional planting abuts a sidewalk, improved right-of-way, driveway, or adjacent property, the owner shall maintain a managed edge at least twelve (12) inches in width, consisting of a mowed strip, mulch, low plantings, path, hedge, fence, or similar boundary.

Any hedge used as a managed edge shall be maintained in accordance with Sec. 18-181.3.

(d) Evaluation Criteria.

In administering this section, the City may consider plant composition, habitat function, presence of pollinators, clarity of borders, and evidence of maintenance. Certification by a conservation organization may be considered but is not required.

(e) Relationship to Other Law.

Nothing in this section permits obstruction of sidewalks or rights-of-way or impairment of visibility.

Sec. 18-181.43 Trimming of ~~H~~hedges, ~~S~~shrubs and ~~T~~trees.

All hedges composed of ~~Hawthorne, Buckthorn, Osage orange, or other shrubs,~~ or trees, or similar vegetation planted along the line of any street in the eCity shall be trimmed, so that the branches thereof shall not extend to or over the inside portion of the sidewalk on any street, nor shall they obstruct pedestrian passage, streetlights, or visibility for vehicular traffic at intersections and driveways. Vegetation shall be maintained to provide a clear vertical space of not less than seven (7) feet above any sidewalk and not less than fourteen (14) feet above any street or roadway open to vehicular traffic.

Sec. 18-181.24. - Snow and ice removal

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Sec. 18-181.35. - Prohibited disposal of refuse on property of another without consent.

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BE IT FURTHER ENACTED AND ORDAINED, that this Ordinance shall become effective upon its passage.

PASSED this _____ day of _____, 2026.

ATTEST:

SARA A. GREEN, CPM, MMC
City Clerk

BRENCIS D. SMITH
President of the City Council

APPROVED this _____ day of _____, 2026.

KEITH R. SYDNOR
Mayor