

Hello Richmond Select Board,

I'm writing today to talk about the Better Places pilot program Vermont has initiated and request you "donate" a section of the Richmond Free Library lawn to be transitioned to perennial pollinator garden.

While lawns are a ubiquitous presence in the United States, unfortunately they do more harm than good. They require heavy inputs of water, fertilizer, and gas (for mowing). They're inhospitable to the foundational species of the eco- and food systems--insects, birds, and other small animals. They don't hold much water during flooding, are not drought-resistant, and do little to mitigate climate change.

In contrast, perennial gardens (especially those planted with native species) once established, typically require few inputs. They provide habitat for insects, birds, and animals. They drop far deeper roots than lawn, thus slowing the passage of water, making them drought-resistant, and sequestering more carbon than lawn.

Transitioning away from lawn is a practice absolutely in keeping with Richmond's Town Plan in a variety of ways, notably: nurturing volunteerism, supporting recreation, creating an appealing downtown, fostering our small town character, and stewarding the beauty and health of our landscapes.

While many Americans are still attuned to seeing grass as the main landscaping element in homes and businesses, there is wonder to be had in seeing the world as it has always been and then imagining it in a new way. A growing number of public and private landowners are transitioning their lawns to perennial gardens—for aesthetic and ecological reasons. I would like to see members of the Richmond community take up this call to change and inspire others to do the same.

What we're looking for now is an MOU stating that our perennial garden team will be allowed to transition an agreed upon number of square feet of lawn to garden (most likely 500-700 square feet). We can work with you on design preferences throughout the winter. After the gardens are installed, they will be maintained by the community gardening group. The only cost I anticipate to the Town is water for establishing the plants. As water is expensive in Richmond, we can discuss whether monies from the grant might be used to defray that expense. This grant is due for submission by January 22, 2021—so I hope the board will be ready to sign an MOU at the January 19, 2021 meeting.

Below please find a list of the goals of the Better Places pilot program we believe this project fulfills, a website focusing on "wildscaping" and "The New Perennialism", and some photos of lawns that have been changed to perennial gardens.

Thanks for your consideration,  
Katie Mather & Ari Matthews-Salzman

The Better Places pilot program provides “placemaking” grants ranging from \$5,000 to \$20,000 that improve the vitality of state designated downtowns, village centers, new town centers, or neighborhood development areas. The Better Places partnership is a place-based economic development program that:

- Revitalizes and improves public spaces in support of local economic and community development efforts
- Empowers residents to play an active role in shaping their communities, building social capital, and local pride
- Advances “quick build” projects that boost confidence, builds partnerships and sparks momentum
- Improves public health, reduces social isolation, and increases physical activity
- Stimulates the creative economy and supports public art projects

<http://www.thenewperennialist.com/>



