

ATTACHMENT B

From: krista dahlinger <kristadahlinger@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, September 14, 2021 12:23 PM
To: Pete Storandt <pcstorandt@msn.com>
Subject: Native Plant Landscape

Dear Peter and Judie

I would like to say I was surprised that you were contacted for some sort of a code violation in regard to the prairie restoration landscape at your house. Having spent time with both of you in your landscape, I know that the plants in your landscape are accurate for a prairie landscape in the Flint Hills region of Kansas.

As a member of, and current President of the Kansas Native Plant Society, I have spent more than twenty years learning about and observing native plants in their habitats. There are not many people with an awareness of authentic prairie landscape who also choose to incorporate Kansas native plants on a large scale in their beautiful and well maintained residential landscape.

I suppose the “codes” for vegetation or sanitation were written for management of the old fashioned style residential lawns and yards that consist of 100% non-native exotic alien species of grasses, plus a few forbs, shrubs, vines and trees.

Non-native plants, which are still being sold to homeowners, require the application of herbicide and pesticide to kill and “keep nature out” of the landscape. This is a business model – growing and selling plants that live one year and then die and have to be repurchased again the next year. Even perennial plants sold by garden centers are pretreated with chemicals and require the application of toxic chemicals to “keep nature out” while contaminating waterways and endangering pets and pollinating bees.

The Gramineae grass family of plants includes bamboo, sugar cane, cereal grasses as well as the non-cultivated native grasses that are found growing around the world. Does the City “code” specifically name any of the grasses you are growing? Which grasses are the “code” meant to enforce? Is Pampas grass covered? Bamboo? Johnson grass? Fescue?

Old fashioned landscape lawn or turf grasses usually consist of a limited number of species, likely a fescue grass (Kentucky Bluegrass is not from Kentucky – it is a grass that originated in Europe and Asia) as a “lawn” or “turf” grass, with the addition of some roses (from Central Asia), pampas grass (from South America), euonymus (from China and Asia) and so on.

Scotts, the large-industry grass company, recommends all non-native grasses as ideal turf and lawn grasses. None of these are part of your native prairie landscape.

<https://www.scotts.com/en-us/library/grass-grass-seed/identify-your-grass>

Is the city “code” meant to enforce height of these exotic alien species?

Your native prairie landscape is not based on the outdated concept of 100% exotic alien plant species, heavily managed by chemical application. Rather, your prairie landscape consists of the indigenous native plants that are appropriate for where you live. Native grasses that can grow 6’ tall or taller in the Tallgrass Prairie are in no way the equivalent of a lawn or turf grasses.

Yes, they are both members of the Gramineae family, a diverse family of plants. Your native prairie grasses are grown as ornamental vertical-texture features. You have established pathways through the

landscape, around all of the taller native plants, including the native prairie grasses. Your prairie grasses are not suitable for cutting to ankle height and maintained as if they were a low growing turf or lawn.

When I first visited your home, it was to walk through and help identify the seedlings that were coming up in the spring after the seeds you purchased had spent their first winter germinating and putting down roots. Judie wanted to be able to identify which seedlings were natives, and which plants were truly “weeds” that she committed to removing by hand, one at a time, nearly every day for the rest of 2020 and now through 2021. She asked me to pull one example of every kind of seedling that did not belong, and she saved those examples so she would know what to let grow, and what to remove from the landscape. I know that both of you have worked with sculptors, earth movers and other professionals to create a prairie landscape setting at your home.

What you have not allowed to happen on your property is for an eyesore to develop, full of noxious weeds and rank growth. Plant communities that evolve from benign neglect include exotic alien, non native plants such as Johnson Grass, Buffalo Bur Nightshade, Callery Pear, Japanese Honeysuckle. You do not have any of these plants that grow due to neglect. Judie and you both can easily name the plants in your prairie plant communities and have learned what belongs there and what does not.

Anyone who follows environmental, or science news has heard that **habitat loss is creating yet another catastrophe: loss of pollinators.** Your landscape concept is forward thinking by including appropriate native plants for your location. It is unfortunate that in the times we live in, there is a lack of recognition of the authentic native plants that have developed on Kansas prairies over thousands of years.

Some facts which may have been overlooked by code enforcement personnel include:

1. The plants in your landscape are located in a place they are wanted. A common definition of a “weed” is a plant growing in a place it is not wanted. Judie and you had purchased and studied native plant guides showing the plants that “belong” in a prairie landscape. Judie also purchased and studied the Nebraska Department of Agriculture “Weeds of the Great Plains” by James Stubbendieck, so she could better identify any “weeds” that do not belong in the prairie landscape. Your landscape did not come into being by neglect, whim or as a lark, there are years of planning, construction, maintenance of appropriate plants.
2. The seeds for the plants you are growing were purchased from Prairie Moon Nursery, a company that for 30 years has been cultivating and providing native plant seeds and plants that are an authentic representation of the native plant communities where they are to be planted. I believe you purchased the “Wichita” seed mix with the understanding that the seeds would be planted in the southern Flinthills. Your purchase order has the complete list of native seeds you purchased, and when I looked through it, there were no suspect, exotic or alien plants listed. You knew, and Prairie Moon Nursery knew, that you were not purchasing a low growing, exotic alien grass mix that was meant to be mowed to the ground every 10 days throughout the spring, summer and fall. Your prairie landscape is intentional for where you live in Kansas, it is not a mass of exotic alien plants to be managed by constant mechanical and chemical means.
3. The native plants in your landscape are being maintained to be free from the common “weeds” that can be found in a Kansas prairie landscape. After walking in your landscape in early 2020, and again in the summer of 2021, I can say there were none of the Butler County listed Noxious Weeds, i.e. Field Bindweed, Sericea Lespedeza, Musk Thistle, Johnson Grass, Wavy Leaf Thistle or Bull Thistle. <https://www.bucoks.com/429/Noxious-Weeds> Because Judie and you both have educated yourselves on what plants represent unwelcome weeds, you will not allow Noxious Weeds any quarter on your property.
4. **Tallgrass Prairie is a specific biome** (a large naturally occurring community of flora and fauna occupying a major habitat) that has been severely destroyed by the plow. Only about four percent of the original prairies that stretched across the Great Plains remain intact. Kansas holds almost all of the

remaining Tallgrass Prairie in North America, and also the world. This is a matter of pride and distinction for Kansas. The Tallgrass Prairie was protected from being plowed under because of the hard, flint containing rock just below a thin soil – it cannot be plowed.

The US National Park Service acknowledged the importance of the remnant prairie habitat remaining in Kansas by creating a National Park, the Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve near Strong City, Kansas, to educate about, protect and promote the value of native plants in the Tallgrass Prairie. This National Park has a very informative website which acknowledges the plants that make up the unique plant communities.

You are growing the very same plants that are also growing at the Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve. A quote from the website speaks to their unique character: “Prairies began appearing in the mid-continent from 8,000 to 10,000 years ago and have developed into one of the most complicated and diverse ecosystems in the world, surpassed only by the rainforest of Brazil.” <https://www.nps.gov/tapr/index.htm>
We live on prairie lands, how does everyone not know how rare and special this place is on the face of the earth?

5. The Flinthills Discovery Center in Manhattan, Kansas, is an \$18 million dollar destination complex that opened in 2012. This facility was built to provide a permanent home for destination education for school children, adults and visitors traveling in Kansas to learn about the unique remnant of the once-great prairies of the Great Plains. The exhibits include displays showing the deep root systems of the tallgrasses of Kansas, and a remnant tallgrass prairie outdoor landscape that contains many of the same plants you have growing in your landscape. The map at this link shows the extent of the remaining Tallgrass Prairie. EIDorado is located in the southwest portion of the map:
<https://www.flinthillsdiscovery.org/579/Flint-Hills-Map-Exhibits>

6. In addition to the four tallgrasses of the Tallgrass Prairie (Big Bluestem, Little Bluestem, Indiangrass and Switchgrass), there are many shorter grasses and other plants that are growing in your prairie landscape that can be found on the Great Plains Nature Center website (a Wichita City Park / State Park and US Fish and Wildlife Facility) as a free educational PDF book titled, A Pocket Guide to Kansas Flint Hill Wildflowers and Grasses. <https://gpnc.org/gift-shop/publications/>

These resources are easily accessible to anyone who is interested in the indigenous plants that grow in Kansas. Most of the information is free to download or research through these websites. Access to visit these locations is free or low cost.

Your front yard, street-side landscape, contains the old fashioned, acceptable range of low height turf or lawn grasses, plus some traditional landscape shrubs in flower beds. From the street, your yard looks as bucolic and well maintained as any other on your street, if not “better” in terms of maintenance. I don’t suppose there are any code violations in your front yard.

Your back yard prairie landscape, which is not visible from the street, is enclosed behind a tall wooden fence. You have a neighbor to the south separated by a chain link fence. The west side of your property is enclosed by a tall wooden fence. The north side of your property is also enclosed by a tall wooden fence with an open viewing portal, near a stone bench you have had installed, at your own expense, to create a small park like setting. Your intention is that anyone passing by could stop and rest in a natural setting. Your prairie landscape is not only authentic in it’s plant communities, it is a landscape meant to be shared as a welcome resting spot for anyone who wishes to stop.

I don’t know how anyone but a neighbor or trespasser could get close enough to your prairie landscape to take issue with it at all. I don’t suppose you call the Kansas Department of Agriculture every time your neighbors apply toxic insecticide or herbicide chemicals on their property, or that you claim to suffer damages from chemical drift.

I started by saying “I would like to say I was surprised” that your landscape would draw a code violation for being what it is, part of a Tallgrass Prairie complex. It looks different because it is different, it represents an ancient habitat still exists across Kansas in pastures, remnant hay meadows and a few natural areas.

The plants you are growing are not sprawling nuisances on sidewalks, they are not listed Noxious Weeds, they are not clogging up an alleyway along with trash and abandoned cars. They are the indigenous native plants that belong where they are growing now, in your yard.

Here is a listing of organizations that acknowledge the importance of the diverse and complex range of vegetation in Tallgrass Prairie in Kansas. Most of them have a presence in Butler County:

Kansas Land Trust

<https://www.klt.org/>

Ranchland Trust

<https://www.ranchlandtrustofkansas.org/>

Tallgrass Legacy Alliance

<http://tallgrasslegacy.org/>

Grassland Heritage Foundation

<https://www.grasslandheritage.org/>

Monarch Watch

<https://www.monarchwatch.org/>

In addition to these agencies with a presence in Kansas, your yard would also be considered appropriately managed under the guidelines of any of these nationwide agencies:

National Park Service

<https://www.nps.gov/tapr/index.htm>

The Nature Conservancy

<https://www.nature.org/en-us/get-involved/how-to-help/places-we-protect/tallgrass-prairie-national-preserve/>

Xerces Society

<https://xerces.org/>

Homegrown National Park Project

<https://homegrownnationalpark.org/about-us>

Kansas Native Plant Society

<https://www.kansasnativeplantsociety.org/>

I would be glad to visit with anyone interested in learning about your prairie landscape.

Krista Dahlinger