

**Re: Request for Expert Commentary**

Katie Van Zeeland &lt;District5@Appleton.org&gt;

Wed 4/19/2023 7:41 AM

To: Zach Portman &lt;zportman@gmail.com&gt;

Good Morning Zach,

Thank you for your feedback and for making me aware of the update.

Katie

Katie Van Zeeland

Aldersperson - District 5

Common Council President 22-23

District5@Appleton.org

(920) 358-0501

<https://www.facebook.com/AlderspersonVanZeeland>Get [Outlook](#) for iOS

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**From:** Zach Portman <zportman@gmail.com>**Sent:** Wednesday, April 19, 2023 1:36:36 AM**To:** Katie Van Zeeland <District5@Appleton.org>**Subject:** Re: Request for Expert Commentary

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Dear Katie,

I am getting back in touch because recently I received a number of questions about my article and the broader issue and many seem to lead back to the Appleton City Council.

I have appended an update at the end of my Medium article, which can be found here: <https://zportman.medium.com/documenting-serious-issues-in-a-bee-paper-on-no-mow-may-dd9b563feac0?sk=d1ff084187aefaf4252e80c71031d8bb>

I am letting you know because you reached out about this previously.

Thank you,

Zach

On Sun, Mar 19, 2023 at 2:58 PM Katie Van Zeeland <[District5@appleton.org](mailto:District5@appleton.org)> wrote:

Hi Zach,

I appreciate you taking the time to respond.

Thank you,

Katie

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**From:** Zach Portman <zportman@gmail.com>**Sent:** Sunday, March 19, 2023 2:56:10 PM**To:** Katie Van Zeeland <District5@Appleton.org>**Subject:** Re: Request for Expert Commentary

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Dear Katie,

Thank you for reaching out. However, I have no further comment on this issue beyond what I wrote in the article.

Zach

On Fri, Mar 17, 2023 at 8:31 PM Katie Van Zeeland <[District5@appleton.org](mailto:District5@appleton.org)> wrote:

Sorry - resending because I forgot a subject line.

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**From:** Katie Van Zeeland <[District5@Appleton.org](mailto:District5@Appleton.org)>

**Sent:** Friday, March 17, 2023 3:55 PM

**To:** [zportman@gmail.com](mailto:zportman@gmail.com) <[zportman@gmail.com](mailto:zportman@gmail.com)>

**Subject:**

Hi Zach,

I am a member of the City Council in Appleton, WI. As a result of the No Mow May paper (that has since been retracted because of the issues you uncovered) we passed a resolution that allows our citizens not to mow their lawns during the month of May.

I am concerned that if not mowing in May is still a good thing, it could go away because of the lack of evidence. Since reading your post, I guess I'm wondering if not mowing in May is beneficial at all.

Would you be willing to weigh in on this? I would really appreciate it. I'm not sure what to do, but I want to do what is best for pollinators.

I feel I should also disclose that one of the authors of the paper was elected to the council last April. My concerns are not related to my colleague.

When I tried reaching you on Twitter regarding this issue, it was so that I could be prepared when the topic arises this spring and so I could provide any relevant evidence that I can from a trusted scientific source.

Since then, an alder has introduced a resolution to end No Mow May on the grounds that there is not data to support that No Mow May helps pollinators.

(The full text of the resolution is attached.)

Any information you could provide before Monday's committee meeting would be helpful.

If it would be easier to speak by phone, you can reach me directly at (920) 851-4525.

Thank you for your consideration.

Katie Van Zeeland

Katie

Katie Van Zeeland

Aldersperson - District 5

Common Council President 22-23

[District5@Appleton.org](mailto:District5@Appleton.org)

(920) 358-0501

<https://www.facebook.com/AlderspersonVanZeeland>

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# Documenting serious issues in a bee paper on “No Mow May”

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 [zportman.medium.com/documenting-serious-issues-in-a-bee-paper-on-no-mow-may-dd9b563feac0](https://zportman.medium.com/documenting-serious-issues-in-a-bee-paper-on-no-mow-may-dd9b563feac0)

Zach Portman

April 16, 2023



Zach Portman

Oct 5, 2022

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**Second Update (15 Apr 2023):** I have received numerous questions recently and would like to provide some brief answers and clarification. First, in my professional and scientific opinion, no part of the now-retracted paper should be considered reliable. In general, retractions of papers only happen for serious issues that cannot be addressed with a correction, and the findings of a retracted paper should be considered invalid. More information about the process of retractions is available on the website of the Committee on Publication Ethics, whose guidelines PeerJ follows.

Finally, my critique of the now-retracted study should not be taken as evidence either for or against the general concept of “No Mow May” as it deals only with this particular study. If you would like to learn more about “No Mow May” and lawns for pollinators, I recommend this presentation and panel by University of Minnesota researchers.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZgFMINFJDi0>

## If you're going to abstain from mowing in May

- Mow at the tallest setting possible
- Remove clumps of clippings to compost off-site
- Gradually lower the mowing height over 2-3 mowing events, allowing the lawn to recover between events
- Mow on dry, un-stressed turf
- Mow in the evenings?



So, in the spirit of No Mow May, you know, I think we can still promote healthier lawns by doing something that we have been recommending from a turf management perspective, uh, for pretty much forever, and that's really just to raise the mowing height to promote a healthier lawn. You can, in doing so you can, protect flowering plants and the pollinators themselves, so and where that comes from is this one-third rule and, and what we're proposing to do is mow based on when the lawn itself needs it, not what day of the week it is or what month it is. So, and the one-third rule basically states never mow more than one-third of the, of the plant's leaf surface on any single mowing. If you do that, what you end up getting is you get the scalping effect where you're removing the plant's ability to make and create energy, the plant's ability to cool itself, down so, uh, so it's, it's really, uh, you're trying to prevent this from happening.

Mowing itself is already a stressful event for really any plant, uh, even grasses that are adapted for grazing, so, but if we can try to reduce that by mowing uh at a higher height of cut, what we can actually get is, um, we can actually increase the amount of time between our mowing events, and that has to do with mowing based off the one-third principle. So, as you increase your mowing height up to four inches, for example, you as you increase mowing height you increase the interval or the time between mowing events, so you have to mow less frequently and reducing the amount of carbon emissions that James had mentioned earlier uh, and you know just the amount of uh stress that you're putting on your lawn the added benefit of raising the mowing height is that you're increasing the rooting depth.

So, uh, it's if you think in terms of, uh, you know, a tree for example, uh you know if you think about the, the roots are oftentimes portrayed as being uh you know as much as what you see above ground is what you see below ground. You can think the same thing about grasses, and so as we raise the mowing height uh we can in, in, doing so we can increase the amount of rooting depth, allowing the plants themselves to be able to obtain more soil moisture, so higher mowing height equals fewer mowing events, more potential for flowers themselves. We have healthier, more resistant turf because the turf itself is more drought tolerant, and then it provides fewer opportunities for pests, things like crabgrass or Japanese beetle white grub species, for example, and then you know as to, to play off this, this is actually something that we've been recommending, uh, for the last couple of years is looking at uh alternative lawn types such as this no-mow fine Fescue lawn here in St Paul uh where uh you know this is a lawn that's really only clipped a couple of times a year and uh it's really you know from this standpoint it's really trying to not necessarily for the promotion of pollinators but it's really just as a traditional lawn sense but uh, but still being able to have a minimal impact from mowing, so there's uh, you know this is something that we've been promoting for, uh, for several years, and we have lots of ongoing research projects, uh, looking at this as a, as an alternative to the traditional lawn site.

So as practical ways of reducing the amount of mowing events that we, uh, that are needed, we recommend plant improved lower input cultivars or species like fine fescues uh turf type tall fescues, mow according to the one-third rule so mow as needed, use a higher mowing height whenever possible. For most walk-behind mowers or even riding lawnmower types, this is literally the highest mower setting, so you get to mow less frequently and promote a healthier lawn and, in doing so, benefit the pollinators as much as possible and if you are going to be mowing, recycle the mulch recycle or mulch clippings whenever possible.

So, uh, if after hearing all of this if you're still thinking about taking part in No Mow May or abstaining from mowing in May, uh at the, at the very least, I recommend mowing the tallest setting possible for that first mowing or whenever you choose to mow. Try to remove the clumps of clippings to compost off-site because clumps of those clippings are going to shade out or smother any other plants that you have, even the pollinating species, so, um, alright, so, consider that as well.

Gradually lower the mowing height uh over two to three mowing events, so allowing the lawn to try to recover between uh, between mowings, so that way you're not going from a foot down to three inches for example, uh take it down in sequential steps. Try to mow on dry unstressed turf whenever possible, and uh, if at all possible, consider mowing in the evenings. Uh, I'm not sure if there's really any data to support this as far as a time of the day mowing, but at least in terms of applying pesticides from a recommendation standpoint to have a minimal impact on pollinators, the recommendation is to try to do that when those pollinators are not active, and that would be closer to the evening hours and so if we can mow, then we're providing less of a physical disruption there.

So, my take-home points are really, you know, No Mow May could result in a stressed lawn depending on the weather, uh, and I think you know it's, it's, obviously up to the individual whether or not they want to take part in that but our recommendation is, is to really focus on sound management practices uh and you can still try to do your uh do the most as far as um promoting pollinators or having as minimal disturbance on them. Planning low-input lawns like fine Fescue are going to require less mowing, they're also going to be, uh, you know, more of a suitable habitat for uh for pollinating species and the pollinators themselves. And mow when the lawn needs it, not what day or month it is.



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### Take-home points

- No Mow May could result in a stressed lawn going stressful season
- Plant low-input lawns like fine fescue
- Mow when the lawn needs it, not what day or month it is

