



Alternative Mowing Pilot Program

2023 Review

BACKGROUND & PILOT PARAMETERS

- Adapted from Ann Arbor's Now Mow May Initiative of 2022.
- Developed to explore the outcome of mowing practices that diverged from established mowing cycles.
- Sections within eight parks selected for sites, with each differing greatly in scope and application.
- Observations of grass and other plant growth taken throughout the month of May.
- A return to normal mowing cycles starting in June.
- Opportunities provided for community members and staff to provide feedback.

POSSIBLE BENEFITS

- Increased food availability and habitat for pollinators
- Reduced emissions from fuel-powered equipment
- Improved stormwater infiltration
- Increased awareness and education of the value of pollinators
- Greater biodiversity



CONCERNS

- Ticks, mosquitos, and other pests
- Reduced park usability
- Challenges in returning to normal mowing cycles/ left over clumps of grass
- Proliferation of nonnative species and weeds
- Aesthetic concerns
- Safety concerns
- Accessibility concerns
- Potential risk to mowing equipment during recovery phase
- Pollen allergies

MOWING'S EFFECTS ON INSECT AND PLANT BIODIVERSITY

- In a 2012, a study was conducted by Unterweger, Rieger & Betz in Tübingen, Germany which found that “the process of mowing on a regular monthly basis reduced heteropteran biodiversity about 50% per mowing event.”
 - Heteroptera: group of about 40,000 species of insects.
- A 2019 paper by Lehrman et al. looked at whether different lawn mowing frequencies (1,2, or 3 weeks) influenced the abundance and biodiversity of bees in 16 suburban Massachusetts yards. The study found there were as many as 2.5 times more lawn flowers in lawns mowed every three weeks and in general, less mowing resulted in increased bee diversity.

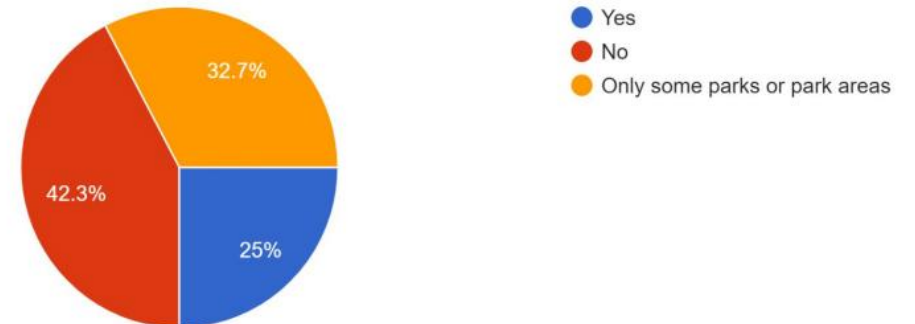
2022 SURVEY REFRESHER

Survey Details

- Responses from 4/29 to 5/31
- 171 respondents
- 5 questions
 - **Are you in favor** of the Parks Department not mowing any city parks for one month to seven weeks (this would include the time it would take to get caught up)?
 - What **concerns** would you have if the Parks Department did not mow some or all parks for one month to seven weeks?
 - What **benefits** do you think our community would gain if the Parks Department did not mow some or all parks for one month to seven weeks?
 - At **which parks** do you think it would be appropriate to try a no-mow month?
 - What **other ideas** do you have for how the Parks Department can support pollinators and reduce greenhouse gas emissions?

Are you in favor of the Parks Department not mowing any city parks for one month to seven weeks (this would include the time it would take to get caught up)?

168 responses

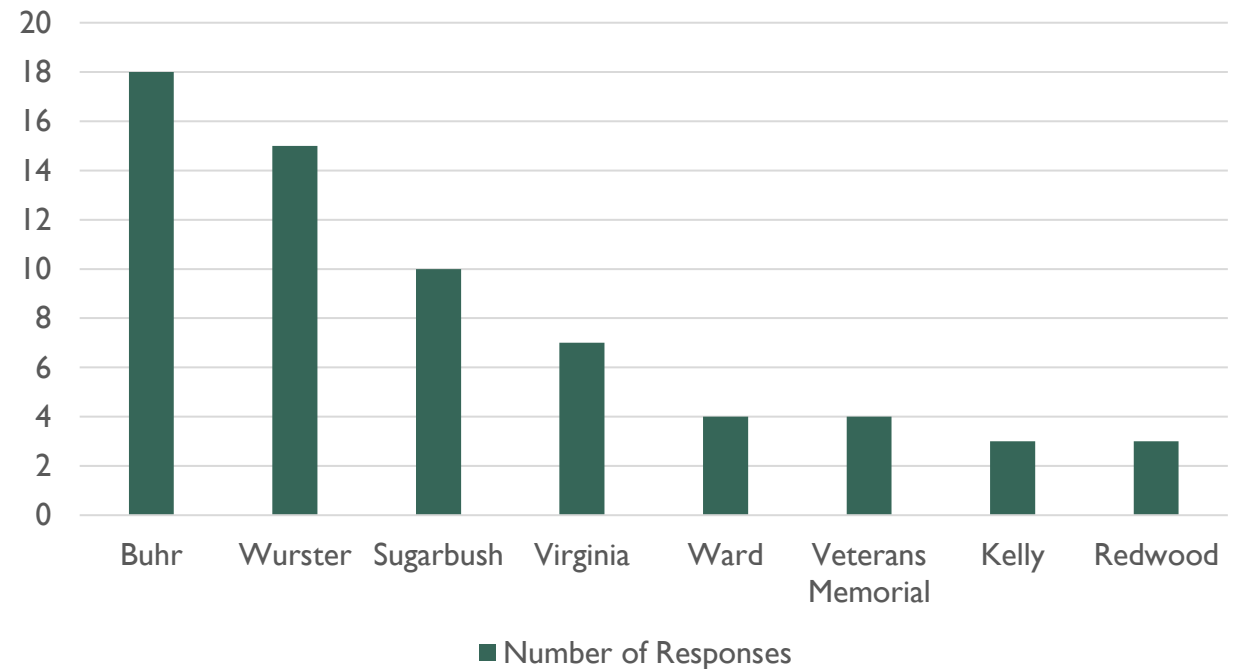


GIVE

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

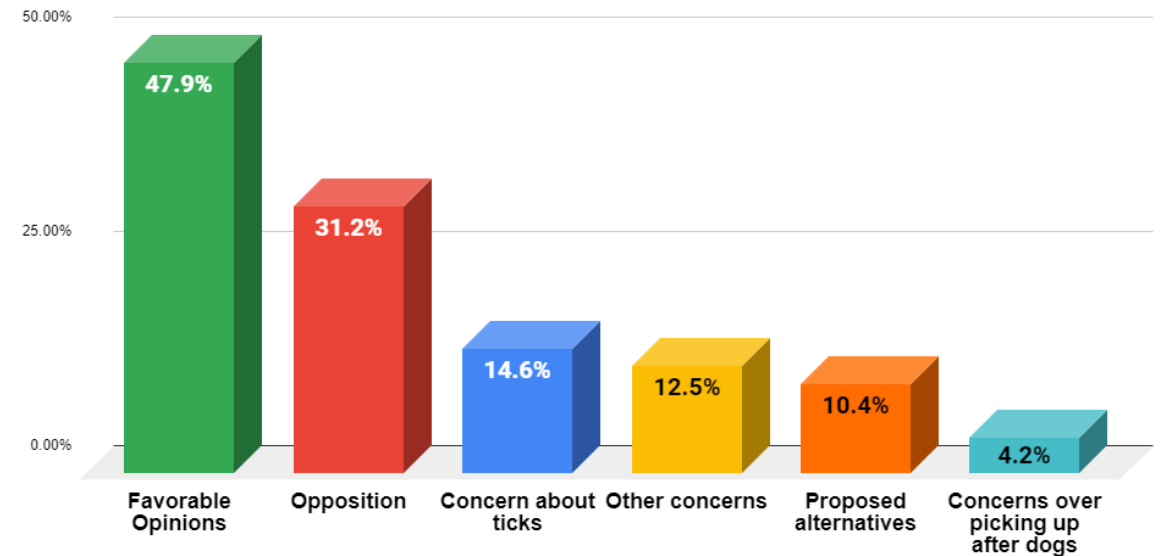
- 48 survey responses
- Feedback received throughout the pilot
- Buhr, Wurster, and Sugarbush Park received the most comments

Survey Responses by Park



Feedback Summary

- 48 survey responses
- 23 with some sort of negative comment
 - + 2 See Click Fix –neg comments
 - + One phone call
- 24 positive comments
- A few misc comments



Some Favorable Responses

This is a great initiative and does not in any way diminish the beauty of the park. Please continue the initiative.

I appreciate the spirit of this experiment and hope it was deemed successful and will continue! I didn't pay close attention to the mowing rhythms at Buhr, but my general sense is that it might be a good idea to mow a modest portion of these larger park spaces more regularly (so that they can be used for playing fields and the like) while letting the grasses and such grow for pollinators in the balance of the space. Thank you for seeking out creative ways to contribute to the health of our community, pollinators, and planet! :)

Thank you! It looks and feels more like a lovely field and the dogs and birds and bees and kids all love it! Hope this program "grows"! :)

Some Opposed Responses

They look terrible! Dandelion and other weeds are spreading their seeds to all yards, which promotes even more weeds. "Not Mowing" to you means "Not Spending" money on care and maintenance of our parks. Very disappointing!

Less mowing makes it less enjoyable to use the park. The benefits to mowing far outweigh the minimal environmental impact. Please mow regularly so I can enjoy the parks we pay to maintain.

"The field was also too overgrown for us to play on." ... "City of Ann Arbor has an unfortunate history of diverting unused park funds to the "general" budget designation to pay for the new city hall that voters twice voted to deny a millage for. The park funds were made available by not mowing our city parks, sides of roads and other areas the City was responsible for. Private citizens took it upon themselves to mow some of the areas and a man was actually killed crossing the road with his mower at the intersection of Washtenaw and Stadium to mow the triangle of grass on the concrete divider where the two roads converged." ...

PARK SITES



Buhr Park



Kelly Park



Redwood Park



Sugarbush Park

PARK SITES CONTINUED



Virginia Park



Ward Park



Wurster Park



Veterans Memorial Park

BUHR PARK OBSERVATIONS

4/27



5/16



5/25



Community comments from the survey:

- I appreciate the concept of trying to allow time for pollinators, however that must be balanced with the fact that this is a “city park”. More and more space continues to be consumed by rain gardens and “no mow” areas. Please consider that folks want to throw a frisbee or otherwise enjoy a city park without the encroachment of these various efforts.
- This is a great initiative and does not in any way diminish the beauty of the park. Please continue the initiative
- I think the program is a great way to promote native plants and native pollinators.

WURSTER PARK OBSERVATIONS

4/27



5/15



5/25



Community comments from the survey:

- I have serious concerns about tick control and usage of our parks space for picnics and games in un-mowed areas. Our children cannot use the hills of this park for play with the un-mowed areas as marked.
- Less mowing makes it less enjoyable to use the park. The benefits to mowing far outweigh the minimal environmental impact.”
- Love this initiative! I’m in favor of trying anything potentially helpful for pollinators and reducing emissions.
- Excellent initiative! Thank you. Adding more no-mow areas would be even better.

SUGARBUSH PARK OBSERVATIONS

5/4: 6-18"



5/18: 6-25"



5/30: 6-28"



Community comments from the survey:

- This spring we've been having hotter than usual temperatures and less rain than the ecosystem is accustomed to. The unmowed areas are still green and vibrant, where typically they would be brown and parched by this point. As a resident of the Sugarbush neighborhood I can clearly see the benefits of this program from both an aesthetic and ecological perspective.
- You need to mow it because there are not any spaces for children to play when the weeds are waist high. Keep pollinating areas separate from parks so that they are still usable
- We're delighted with the alternative mow initiative. Already more space for pollinators!

VIRGINIA PARK OBSERVATIONS

5/4: 5-10"



5/18: 6-18"



5/30: 6-26"



Community comments from the survey:

- Is there a plan or strategy in place to communicate or address a possible increases tick presence. Any information about tick population increases would be great. Thanks!
- I live at 528 Virginia. My apartment backs up onto the proposed no mowing area. I think it is a fantastic idea. My child and I would love to explore the effects of not mowing.
- Research has shown that setting mow heights a little higher during May is the best alternative. Not mowing at all is harmful both to the grass and insects in the long run.

WARD PARK OBSERVATIONS

5/4: 1-4”



5/18: 4-12”



5/30: 3-26”



Community comments from the survey:

- Wonderful! I love this!!!! Please do this every year. :) How can I support?

KELLY PARK OBSERVATIONS

5/4: 3-10''



5/18: 6-25''



5/31: 6-28''



Community comments from the survey:

- The long grass and weeds resulting from the "No Mow/Pollinator" program makes it much more difficult to find and clean up dog poop!
- Please continue to decrease mowing anyway possible. the pollution and noise from large gas mowers is terrible for the environment. electric mowing, more meadows and wildflowers please!!!

REDWOOD PARK OBSERVATIONS

5/4: 4-12''



5/18: 6-25''



5/30: 6-48''



Community comments from the survey:

- ...Access for these recreational activities became impossible. I support the ideology behind the pilot program, but this tiny parks' function is obliterated when you let the grass grow for that long. Sometimes even two weeks makes it difficult to pick up dog poop.

SITE RECOVERY



Buhr Park – 6/12



Wurster Park – 6/12



Ward Park – 6/8



Kelly Park – 6/8

SITE RECOVERY CONTINUED



Virginia Park – 6/8



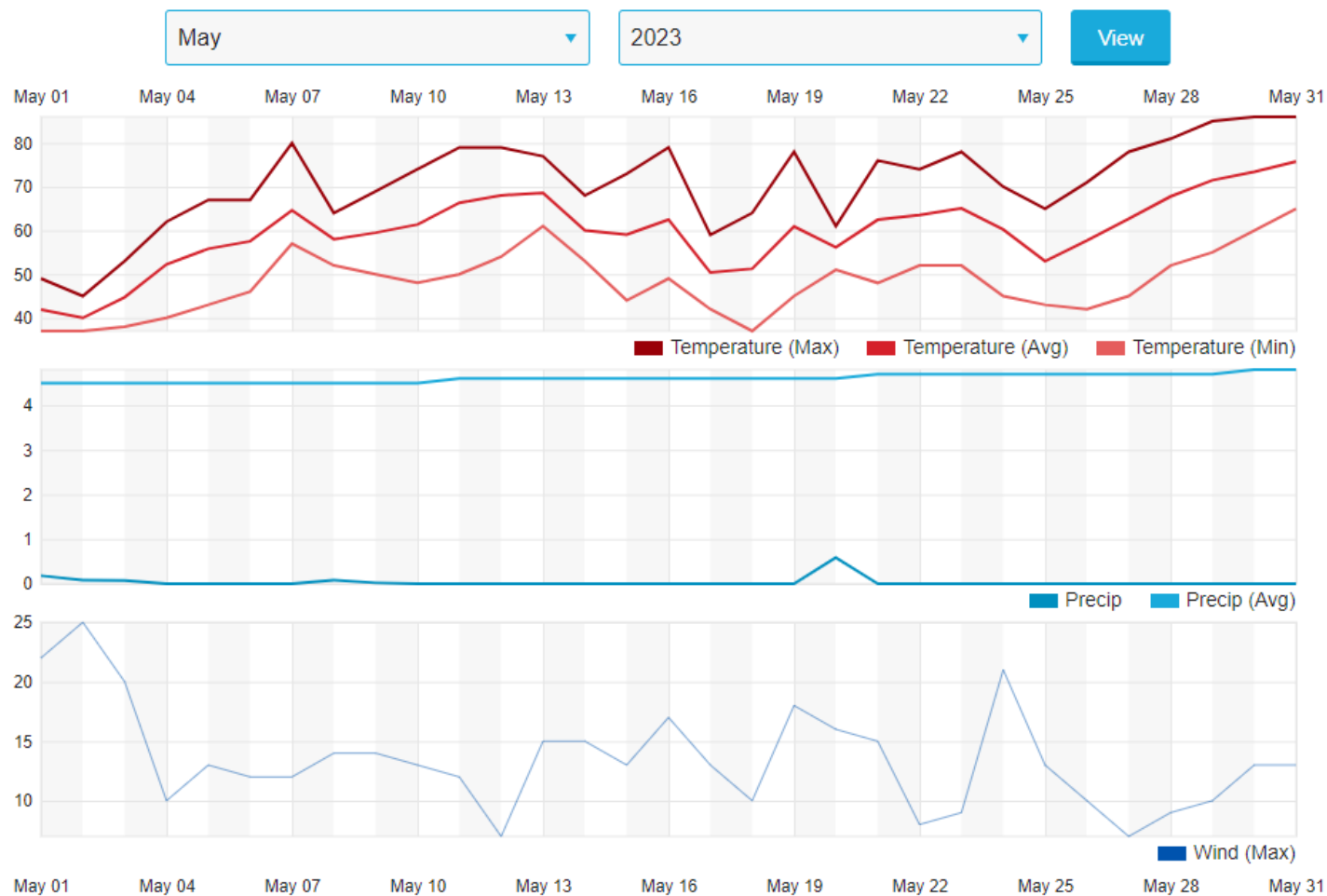
Sugarbush Park – 6/8



Redwood Park – 6/8

WEATHER

- 1.13 inches of water in the month of May
- 23 days with no precipitation (not consecutive)
- Average high degree: 74°



RECOMMENDATIONS

- Continue to explore no mow areas/opportunities in city parks.
- Identify areas in Veterans Memorial, Buhr, Wurster, Sugarbush, and Gallup for alternative mowing in spring of 2024.
- Continue to develop the Veterans Memorial alternative lawn demonstration garden with informational signage to inspire awareness and examples of sustainable ground cover.
- Keep smaller, neighborhood parks on normal mow cycle in spring.
- Provide no mow area signage on site. Ensure a2gov.org/parkinitiatives website is current with information about alternative mowing goals and objectives.

