

State Government Finance and Elections
Rep. Michael Nelson Chair

Testimony of Dell Eriksson
Brooklyn Center, MN
Tuesday December 15, 2022

Before the State Government Finance and Elections Committee

In the Matter of: HF2618 (Hansen) Cities required to allow native landscapes on private land, and vegetation overgrowth within cities prohibited. Companion: SF2514.

I thank the Committee for the opportunity to deliver this testimony before it today.

Environmentalists and legislators who know me, some for many years, would be surprised to see that I am opposed to HF-2618. However, for, at least, the reasons outlined below, please do not support HF-2618.

1. It literally requires homeowners and others to become agronomists;

For example, Native Thistle's. Many species of bees, butterflies and other wildlife rely on native thistle flowers for nutrition. For example, rather than Milkweed, monarch butterflies use native thistles more than any other wildflowers in places returning to Mexico.

However, how many residents can tell the difference between the native Flodman's Thistle and the noxious Canadian Thistle?;

2. One person's plant is another's weed;

3. Seeds from one yard will go to other yards and areas in the community;

Some people like dandelions in their yards, most do not. However, even the few who grow them will create a forest of dandelions in the community. Residents used to take care of their yards, and removed dandelions; now there are dandelions all over the community, notably in city parks;

4. Native plant communities are loved for their species diversity. However, that implies the areas will harbor native and all sorts of other animal critters; all sorts of critters that many people may not want to entertain, nor have their domestic, dogs and cats, pets physically or disease threatened;

5. There are no provisions for oversight or penalties for infractions; the legislation is the wild-west in this regard;

6. People live in an area and move into an area because they think it is beautiful. This legislation makes a hodgepodge of neighborhoods;

7. People move into a neighborhood because they feel their values are reflected in the area. This legislation would overrule community standards and values of those in the community. The legislation will appropriately apply to new developments;

8. The legislation will pit homeowners against homeowners increasing disharmony in the area. The definition of a community is homogeneity of values and harmony;

9. Including trees and shrubs in the legislation implies that certain homeowners could literally make a forest of their yards. This legislation will also excite owners of condos, apartments and other commercial buildings since it eliminates them from maintaining lawn areas requiring care;

10. Cost to forfeit a grass yard and replace it with native species is extremely expensive. The legislation should include language denying state, county, or city financial inducements or subsidizes.

Moreover, those funds certainly will be at the expense of other homeowners and State residents. The environment would be much better served if those funds and subsidizes would be used to buy and protect natural habitats in the city;

11. Although, it is very true these habitats are pollinator and bird friendly, the problem of decreasing numbers cannot significantly be solved by homeowners and residents in Minnesota.

For example, Monarch Butterflies have lost 2/3 of their overwintering habitat in Mexico. Planting Milkweed in a Minnesota garden will provide Monarch local food, a reproduction site, and beauty in our backyards, but clearly not contribute to increasing their numbers. Only protective legislation in Mexico will make a difference;

12. Providing natural habitat of all kinds, necessarily is the responsibility of the city, not the resident or homeowner;

Therefore, this legislation should include provisions that:

- * Cities plant curbside in residential, commercial, and boulevard streets, native shade trees which are at least 50' tall at maturity;

- * City parks ought to be required to have not less than 30% of contiguous park areas maintained as natural prairies or woodlands; and

- * Since habitat fragmentation cannot be remedied by individual homeowners, cities need to provide large segments of natural areas. Residents would love it!;

13. Expand acquisition of natural State and local habitats:

* Minnesota is serious about increasing habitats for plants and animals, ecosystem improvement;

Therefore, the best method is to:

* Add many more SNAs and several WMAs to the list of protected habitats;

* Live up to its expectations, the Legacy Funds, Heritage fund and the Water fund needs to purchase many miles of habitat every year.

Committee, what may appear to be beneficial legislation on first reading, becomes unsupportable when more fully considered. Please do not pass HF2618 (Hansen).

Thank you for hearing my testimony.

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