

**City of New Port Richey Environmental Committee
Annual Report
2023
(fall 2022 through fall [December] 2023)**



**Chair: Dell deChant
Vice-Chair: Rose Mohr
Secretary: Linda Blake**

**Members
Amber Blais
Tia Rowe
Tom O'Neill
Rob Marlowe**

**Alternate
*Open***

**Staff Liaison
Colin Eichenmuller**



**City of New Port Richey Environmental Committee
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**Annual Report
Presented July 2, 2024**

The Environmental Committee of the City of New Port Richey, Florida, seeks to develop ecological understanding and advance sustainability for the benefit of the City and its residents.

The committee relies chiefly on volunteer support and contributions from members and friends of the committee.

Meetings of the committee occur monthly, with special meetings called from time to time.

The committee works closely with city staff on projects and planning related to the ecological health of New Port Richey, advancing sustainability, and improving resilience in the City.

The committee serves as the Arbor Board of the City, oversees and administers the City's urban agriculture program, endorses and supports various events consistent with its mission, advises the City Council on ecological issues, and recommends policies and programs to restore the City's ecological systems.

This report covers activities from Fall 2022 through Fall (December) 2023

The Committee

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The Environmental Committee is composed of seven regular and two alternate members; the alternates serve as members in the absence of a regularly appointed member. Members of the environmental committee must be "resident electors" of the City of New Port Richey. A quorum consists of four members. Members are appointed to terms of two years, and renewable. Committee policy is to advance alternate members to full membership when openings occur, subject to approval by City Council.

2023 Events, Projects, Proposals

Hosted 34rd annual Arbor Day celebration in January 2023 (established in 1989)

Supported and endorsed annual Collards Festival (January 2023)

Supported and endorsed annual Loquat Festival (Florida's only) (March ,2023)

Assisted with planning and organization of annual "Okra Occasion" (August 2023)

**Maintained and further developed City's membership in Milan Urban Food Policy Pact
(New Port Richey is one of only two Florida cities in the MUFPP)**

Maintained (in support of Public Works) the "Fruit Tree Peninsula" (opened April 20, 2018)

Supported and endorsed continued development of Grand Gardens

**Proposed & spearheaded the City's pursuit of "Green City" certification
* application is dormant and should be revisited**

**Proposed & spearheaded the City's successful award of "Monarch City U.S.A." certification
* Supported and developed plans for a regular Monarch Festival
- First annual festival in 2022**

Reaffirmed proposed polystyrene/Styrofoam prohibition at City events (October 2022)

Reaffirmed review (with recommendations) of the City's *Alleyway Management Plan* (September 2023)

Recommended increase in number and type of trees in the City's reforestation program (August 2023)

Reaffirmed recommendation for opposition to "New Port Corners" development

Maintained Tree City USA status (ongoing)

Maintained community garden initiative (ongoing)

**Reviewed Urban Agriculture Applications (ongoing)
* Reaffirmed recommendation to include use of public/City property for Community Gardens**

Related City Projects Supported by Environmental Committee

Tasty Tuesday (weekly)

Yard Debris to Mulch Recycling (ongoing)

Developing Local Food systems (ongoing)

New Port Richey Library Seed Exchange (ongoing)

Urban Agriculture Project (ongoing)

Recommendations Looking Ahead

The committee offers proposals with minimal cost and high return

Benefits of these proposals

- 1. Economic**
- 2. Ecological**
- 3. Cultural**
- 4. Public Safety**
- 5. Quality of Life**
- 6. Points of Pride**
- 7. Regional Leadership**

1. Promote City's Environmental Programs and Initiatives

Develop a source for information about all City environmental programs and initiatives. City residents have limited awareness of the City's environmental programs and initiatives and there is very little information available about these programs and initiatives. There is no directory and no source or contact site for general information. Proposal calls for a designed site on the City's webpage for listing of environmental programs and initiatives and regular educational events throughout the year. Print and visual vehicles also should be considered.

2. Designation of Environmental and Food Systems City Support Services

***Note this recommendation is a modification of previous proposals for an Environmental and Food Systems Director for the City (first proposed in 2016).**

As noted in previous annual reports, the City will benefit from an Environmental and Food Systems Director/Facilitator. We stand by this recommendation without offering it as a proposal this year. Instead, this year's report proposes an intermediate step: Designation of Environmental and Food Systems (Agro-ecological) Support Services.

Designating these services will significantly contribute to improving the City's natural ecology and its food systems. Considering the environmental and food crises facing the nation and world, the importance of these services cannot be overstated. The need is much greater today than when first introduced in 2016.

Absent a director or an office centralizing management and development of Agro-ecological activities, we propose (1) identifying distinct programs, support services, and initiatives, *and* (2) specifying the departments and staff positions responsible for management and development of each.

Programs, services, and initiatives include (for example): adopt-a-tree, farmers' markets, mulch program, native vegetation installations, recycling, seed library, community gardens, fertilizer use, local CSAs, grant writing, media relations, seasonal food festivals, pesticide use, garden registration, volunteer recruitment, educational programming and many others.

The global ecological crisis and the deterioration of food systems compromise the health and quality of life of City residents. Global, national, and local challenges are escalating. Existing programs while admirable and noble are unsustainable without staff support and dedicated managerial leadership. Although all current programs and projects can be pursued without clear and coherent organization and management, their impact will be minimal and their continuation problematic.

In this same area: The committee encourages the Council to support repeal of state restrictions on home rule for urban agriculture ordinances and public policies. The committee also encourages the Council to support improvement of the state's cottage industry policies to include expansion of approved cottage industry products and sales venues.

3. Discourage Use of Polystyrene (Styrofoam) Food and Drink Containers at City Approved Events (modification of proposal first offered in 2019)

The committee reaffirms the value of eliminating polystyrene (Styrofoam) food and drink containers, which are harmful to the environment, a significant source of litter, and seldom recycled. Short of prohibiting the use of polystyrene, the City can at least discourage its use and recommend more responsible alternatives to all businesses and *especially* all organizations requesting use of City properties and services.

Our proposal is focused only on City approved events and aims to reduce non-recyclable materials from the waste-stream and the natural environment by discouraging the use of a product that is both unnecessary and toxic – the elimination of which will have an immediate impact on the most problematic of all the non-recyclable single-use plastics. We note that several cost-effective, compostable, non-toxic alternatives are readily available (e.g., paper, cane, cardboard, bamboo, Sal leaf, and others), and are being used at local events. All events using City properties and services should be encouraged to use such products.

Whatever one pays for these products, there is an externality, a hidden cost, of using *any* amount of Styrofoam or polystyrene. The manufacturing process, distribution, and after-use effects of these materials are each (and all together) unsustainable, harmful to humans, damaging to ecosystems, and culturally unappealing.

There are two counties (Orange and Seminole) and at least sixteen cities in Florida that have banned the use of polystyrene on public property. The cities include some of our largest, like our neighbors, Tampa and St. Petersburg, and some of our smallest, like Dania Beach (population: 31,723) and Sunny Isles Beach (population: 22,342). We have reviewed ordinances from two of these cities, visited with leadership from one of them, and researched available promotional materials that can be used to inform the public on the project and its merits.

See this link to various municipalities with restrictions on use of polystyrene and plastics:

<https://plasticfreefl.org/sample-legislation/>

Here is the list of the Florida cities:

Largo	Tampa	Orlando	St. Petersburg	Atlantic Beach
Tallahassee	Ft. Lauderdale	Boca Raton	Delray Beach	Hollywood
Boynton Beach	Winter Park	Lauderhill	Dania Beach	Sunny Isles Beach
Palm Beach Gardens				

*Note: SB 1126 and HB 1641 (Home Rule preemption on municipal bans on plastic and polystyrene) failed.

4. Herbicide/Pesticide-free Zones & Non-Toxic Community (originally proposed in 2017)

As is occurring in other areas of the nation and the world, and in furtherance of our original (2017) proposal to move toward becoming a non-toxic community, we propose the City reduce the use of herbicides and pesticides on public properties and establish select herbicide/pesticide-free zones. In the zones native plants, insects, and animals would have an opportunity to thrive and adjacent areas would be safe and healthy for all of us as well. The City would encourage home owners to adopt this approach in their own yards and gardens. This approach could be promoted with educational materials, workshops, and signs. Having these zones is another step toward restablbing a healthy ecosystem in the city and beginning to reverse the impact of poisons on our environment and our health.

5. Native Planting Ordinance

A companion proposal to the “Pesticide-free Zones” proposal establishes a program to allow native vegetation to thrive in the City. The program would be developed from an ordinance “Promoting the Use of Appropriate Native Vegetation,” for which a model is available (see “NATIVE PLANTING ORDINANCE” included with this report). The City in conjunction with native plant societies and local growers could host seasonal events promoting the installation of native plants and promoting their distribution at agro-ecological festivals. The impact of such a program would be substantial: allowing insect and bird populations to thrive during breeding season, reducing irrigation, limiting toxic run-offs, and cooling properties and whole neighborhoods where native vegetation is installed. This ordinance is a natural companion ordinance to the urban agriculture ordinance and a compliment to the City’s re-forestation initiative.

6. Increase Tree Planting/Reforestation

Originally proposed in August 2023, this proposal calls for expansion of the City’s reforestation program. The proposal calls for an annual increase of 100 native hardwood trees, preferably Live Oaks, 10-12 feet high. Committee also recommends Live Oaks as the primary tree offered to property owners in the adopt-a-tree initiative. The committee recommends an annual allocation of a minimum of \$10,000 for adopt-a-tree program, and active promotion of the program.

7. Pursue Agro-Tourism Designation

Proposal to immediately pursue agro-tourism designation for the city’s urban agriculture activities and initiatives from seasonal food festivals to urban gardening programs and various locally-sourced fresh food markets. See <https://visitfloridafarms.org/>

√ Committee pledges full support and assistance to the Council and City Staff in pursuit of these proposals.

√ Committee requests Council endorsement of these proposals.

√ Committee welcomes inclusion of these items on upcoming council agendas and/or at work sessions.

Respectfully submitted:



Dell deChant
Chair, Environmental Committee, City of New Port Richey



City of New Port Richey Environmental Committee