



THE CITY OF SPRINGFIELD, MASSACHUSETTS

MAYOR DOMENIC J. SARNO

HOME OF THE BASKETBALL HALL OF FAME

PRESS ADVISORY

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Springfield Department of Parks, Buildings and Recreation Management

Springfield to Accept Award from NOFA

*City of Springfield to Receive Organic Leadership Award at NOFA Annual Gathering of Organic Land Care Professionals
Exemplary Pilot Organic Land Care Program Expands to 50 Schools and 900 Acres of Public Land*

Derby, CT, December 2, 2015 – Northeast Organic Farming Association of Connecticut (CT NOFA) is pleased to announce The City of Springfield, Massachusetts will receive an Organic Leadership Award from NOFA Organic Land Care at the 10th Annual Gathering of Organic Land Care Professionals on December 14, 2015 in Sturbridge, Massachusetts. Accredited Organic Land Care Professionals (AOLCPs) from across New England gather at the event each year, along with non-members and the public, to learn the latest organic practices from top industry professionals and honor leaders who are expanding organics in their communities.

Mayor Domenic J. Sarno announced The City of Springfield, Massachusetts will receive an Organic Leadership Award in recognition of their work transitioning twenty-two acres of public land to organic management, including parks, athletic fields and traffic medians. The properties include the Frederick Harris School grounds, Sweeny Athletic Field at the High School of Commerce, Forest Park athletic field, Tree Top Park, Camp Wilder and the terrace at Mason Square. The results from these pilot sites have provided the foundation to expand the program to 50 school properties and 900 acres of managed public land.

“Springfield is one of only a few U.S. cities that has taken action to change their protocols and practices surrounding land management in order to reduce exposures to toxic materials for the citizens of Springfield, as well as to protect their natural resources,” said Chip Osborne, Founder and President of Osborne Organics in Marblehead, Massachusetts and lead project consultant to the city. “Springfield was awarded a UMASS Lowell Toxics Use Reduction Institute (TURI) grant which funded horticultural consulting, staff training and soil amendments, but the City shifted its own budget expenditures to purchase the equipment and products needed to build healthy soil and reinvigorate their turf without chemicals,” he said.

“The green industry now offers organic products that are affordable and will have a long-term impact on improving the overall health of our turf eco systems,” said Patrick Sullivan, Executive Director of Springfield Department of Parks, Buildings and Recreation Management. “We also will be saving money in the long run.”

Approximately two years ago, Mayor Sarno received a letter from city resident, Maryann Jule, requesting the City to implement organic turf practices on public lands. Although the Department of Parks and Buildings had been exploring organic management, the information available on for municipal lands was mostly limited to integrated pest management. This did not meet our goals due to the impacts to people and the environment. In addition, the lawn industry did not offer a viable strategy, or the organic products to initiate a program.

The project became a reality with funding from TURI, support from the Mayor and the City’s Department of Health and Human Services, and extensive work with community representatives, Maryann Jules and Barbara Giammarino with support from Better Life Whole Foods. These two community partners helped obtain resources for this project, as well as conducting extensive outreach to the community and local municipalities.

Mayor Domenic J. Sarno invited the cities of Northampton and Holyoke as formal partners, which enabled us to share the project’s training and written resources.

Mayor Sarno stated, “This project helped them begin to address the active interest expressed from their residents. Other communities have contacted Springfield to learn from the project. The project consists of 8 pilots on a variety of sites to use as a basis to develop a transition plan for meeting our ultimate goal of transitioning all of the City’s 900 managed acres in the next three years.”

Patrick Sullivan stated, “Our work will counteract the myths created by the synthetic fertilizer and conventional lawn care industries that the only way to have healthy turf is to use their synthetic four step program. It is time we change the tide, and work city by city to share how feasible it is to maintain our open space organically. This change is imperative because the bottom line is everything we place on our lawns ends up in our local water bodies, builds up in the soils, destroys beneficial microorganisms, and kills the bee population. Ultimately, it does not allow the natural ecosystem to feed the turf. The Department of Parks and Buildings is pleased to accept this award from NOFA. The City’s goal is to move away from using synthetic fertilizers that can leach into groundwater, streams, rivers and lakes and cause algae blooms,

which often result in chemical management. In the long term, synthetic fertilizers damage the natural makeup of soil by killing beneficial organisms.”

Mayor Sarno further stated, “I encourage everyone to take the time to learn how simple, financially competitive and sustainable it is to implement an organic lawn care program. Yard by yard, park by park, we can ensure our environment will be healthier and stronger.”

Helen Caulton Harris Stated, “Organic land care is about maintaining healthy soil biology, using proper fertilization levels for optimum plant health, using preventative strategies and products to control turf weeds and choosing the right grasses. Ultimately, this approach also eliminates the need for pesticides. We need everyone to take this approach to protect public health and the environment.”

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