AGENDA

Fertilizer Ordinance Meeting

Wednesday December 11 at 4:00pm
South Portland Community Center, 2nd fl conference room

Ad Hoc Working Group Members

Julie Rosenbach, Sustainability Coordinator
Fred Dillon, Stormwater Program Coordinator
Jesse O’Brien, Agronomist, Downeast Turf
Chip Osborne, Osborne Organics – (absent)
Linden Thigpen, Resident
April Caricchio, City Councilor
Rick Peruzzi, Athletic Fields & Golf Course Manager, Parks & Rec Dept.
Cathy Ramsdell, Friends of Casco Bay
Breece Sleeper, Always Green Tree Lawn and Landscape – (absent)
Rachel Mason Burger, Resident – (conference call)
Andrew Capelutti, Resident

Guests
Newell Augur – Pierce Atwood
Palmer Higgins – Mainely Grass

Agenda

1. Review of last meeting & updates
   - FD to provide previous draft meeting minutes for review and approval by FWG

2. Continue discussion of prohibitions
   a. Update on changes to “new development and re-establishment”
   b. Discussion of options for “all other turf”
   c. Finalize “performance turf”
      - Review of new language; minor corrections (see Julie’s draft ordinance version)
      - Question about hydroseeding and overseeding
      - Question about application rates
1 lb max per season or 1 lb 2 times per season?

- JO’s explanation about importance of establishing dense turf
- JR’s conversation with Chip: because pesticides have been banned fertilizers can’t be banned too otherwise the pesticide ordinance won’t work; he also talked about all other turf – doesn’t recommend fertilizer prohibition but does recommend mandating organic fertilizer only – no synthetics
  - N is N – either org or synthetic can pollute
  - JO: Chip has said for NOFA certification there are applications for synthetics – e.g., when soil temps are cool
  - Palmer: org-synth distinction has already been addressed in existing language; issue is really quick vs slow – needs to be min slow release – orgs come in diff release formulations as well – issue is too fast / too much
  - Issue with organics resulting in excess P application
  - Orgs don’t give precise formulations
  - Question about compost use: it’s not regulated so the analysis isn’t definitive
  - JO: state soil scientist Bruce Hoskins says compost is a soil conditioner without a guaranteed analysis; shouldn’t be treated as fertilizer – if it’s used as such can create imbalance; can also exceed P if overapplied
  - Suggestion to clearly define what org and synth ferts
  - Address compost in BMPs

- All other turf for health and hardiness: 1.25 lb/1000 sf up to 3.25 lb/1000 sf
  - Question about whether 1lb per app is enough: in some instances yes but in others no
  - Suggestion about changing behaviors away from lawns so there’s less turf to manage
  - The driver for the 3.25 lb per season
  - Question about buffers / design standards for lawns: ref to Landscaping by the Water’s Edge as very helpful resource
  - Ref to DEP’s LakeSmart program to reduce P
  - Need robust education & outreach program

- Concern about being close to coastal areas but also need to recognize that SW system is distributed through most of City and serves to deliver a variety of pollutants (including fertilizers) to freshwater resources; even though a lawn may not be near or next to the water, the SW system can still transport polluted runoff to surrounding water resources

- What are the “right” application rates? What’s the empirical science say?
  - Well-established turf is largely retentive of N
The issue of N runoff is mostly due to misapplication – e.g., over-application, applying on steep slopes or just before significant rain events.

If we’re not going to prohibit fertilizers then let’s aspire to set number low enough to push people in the direction of less lawn.

Periodically there are homeowners who over apply and result in localized algal blooms.

Even though science doesn’t support contention that lawns are significant N source, public perception creates reality that lawns really are big part of the problem.

If fertilizer is applied properly it stays on site BUT it needs to be done right.

Are we going to prohibit it for all other turf (other than performance turf)?

If the ordinance isn’t strong then what’s the point?

Slow release is incredibly important – requiring 50% slow release is significant improvement.

WHAT TO DO WITH ALL OTHER TURF? (established turf)

- If we're really trying to cut back we need to curtail opportunities for DIYers to misuse
- Do we want to go with current best practices or do we want to push the envelope?
- How much should we dictate what folks can do on their lawns?
- N is adversely affecting Casco Bay; put water resource protection ahead of residential lawns.
- What would happen if fertilizer applications on all other residential lawns is prohibited?
  - Worst case scenario grass could start thinning out and weeds could invade to 90%
  - Disagreement that fertilizers are needed to maintain lawns
  - Proposed language is already well beyond the status quo (e.g., slow release requirement)
- How badly would this effect land care professionals?
  - Could they live with ban understanding that “loophole” exists for re-establishment?
  - Better to continuously feed N throughout season rather than doing it with seeding
  - Would adversely affect professionals
  - Banning justified to protect the Bay
Concern with government overreach; it'll be hard to keep a lawn in good condition with a ban; need to make sure we're sticking with a fertilizer rather than lawn reduction.

- Established lawns need to be “fed” throughout the entire year.
- Are there other products that can address lack of N on all other turf?

- Differing views / lack of consensus on whether fertilizers should be banned for established turf.
  - Performance turf: concern with whether 3.25# is enough – 3.5-4#/yr is more needed depending on season.

- Next meeting: focus on BMPs.
- Suggestion to consider incorporating design standards into ESC ord (which will be required by next State Stormwater Permit).