

# INFORMATION PAPER



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Planning, Building and Development  
Director Eric Waggoner

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## **SUBJ: NATIVE TREE AND PLANT ZONING AMENDMENTS**

### **Summary:**

Lake County is Illinois' most biodiverse county with unique plant communities at the convergence of two eco-regions and unique ecosystems including oak savannahs, ravines, bogs, and upland forests. These habitats and biodiversity are threatened by the loss of native habitat and an increasing number and prevalence of invasive species. The County can address this problem in part through amendments to Chapter 151 Unified Development Ordinance (UDO), including updating the Plant Materials List and the Landscaping sections to increase species diversity requirements. This topic was first presented to the Public Works, Planning and Transportation (PWPT) Committee on August 3, 2022, and again on October 5, 2022, for discussion of proposed amendment concepts. In early 2023, Openlands was engaged to conduct a market analysis to evaluate if the nursery industry could accommodate potential changes to the Landscaping Section of the Unified Development Ordinance.

### **Background:**

- Lake County currently has 30% canopy cover; in its assessment of canopy opportunities, the Morton Arboretum and the Chicago Region Tree Initiative have suggested this could be increased significantly.
- The County has established goals to expand and improve wildlife habitat, increase water conservation and retention, reduce flooding and improve local air quality. Increasing the number of native trees and other plants contributes to these goals.
- Residential districts are the largest land use category in Lake County and have the greatest potential for increased tree canopy cover according to the Chicago Region Tree Initiative.
- The UDO can encourage or require the planting and preservation of native trees, plants, and habitats, which would support local ecological resilience.

### **Openlands' Market Analysis & Scenario Testing**

Please see attached document, "Openlands Memo & Scenario Tests 02.2023".

### **Proposed Amendments:**

Based upon staff research and Openlands' recommendations, the following draft amendments to the UDO may be proposed.

- Definitions (Ch. 151.271)
  - Refining the definition for "Native Plant Species".
- Landscaping (Ch. 151.167)
  - *Intent*. The intent statement will be expanded to include an overall goal of supporting "ecological sustainability, stormwater management, and climate resilience".
  - *Plant Units*. Plant units are designed for aesthetic screening using a mix of canopy trees, evergreens, and shrubs, but can serve a dual purpose by incorporating a native species requirement.

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<sup>1</sup> All statistics presented are from the Morton Arboretum and the Chicago Region Tree Initiative (CRTI). Source: Morton Arboretum (2021) 2020 Chicago Region Tree Census Report. Available online: [https://mortonarb.org/app/uploads/2021/05/2020-Chicago-Region-Tree-Census-Report\\_\\_FIN.pdf](https://mortonarb.org/app/uploads/2021/05/2020-Chicago-Region-Tree-Census-Report__FIN.pdf).

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- *Material size.* Younger and/or smaller transplanted trees can adapt to new sites more readily. Reducing the minimum caliper width of canopy trees will require more trees per reforestation requirements.
- *Species Diversity Requirements.* Planting standards currently limit a single species to no more than 40% of the overall planting. Increasing the mix of tree species can limit the spread of pests and lessen the overall impact of pests on surrounding trees. Amendments will determine the appropriate maximum percent for any given species.
- Appendix A: Plant Materials List
  - The Plant Materials List is used as reference for both landscaping standards for new development (§ 151.167) and for replanting after removal of woodlands and significant trees (§ 151.071). Native trees are allowed but not highlighted or suggested on the list. Amendments will 1) Remove invasive, disease-prone trees or trees otherwise deemed incompatible with County goals, 2) Add native trees and other native plants generally available locally.

**Next Steps:**

Following this presentation, staff will return to the PBZE Committee in early 2024 to discuss the specific amendment proposals and to obtain direction to draft corresponding regulations for the Committee's subsequent review and action.

*Attachments: (1) Openlands Market Conditions Memo and Scenario Tests*