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**Equality Garden Club**

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**Wilton Manors and Oakland Park, Fla., Take Steps  
To Eliminate Toxic Pesticide Use**

Wilton Manors and Oakland Park, Fla. (June 9, 2020) The Cities of Wilton Manors and Oakland Park have joined efforts to explore ways to reduce and eliminate the use of toxic pesticides on public lands and parks. This is a three to five year process that works on improving the soil, and growing methods.

Both cities will be doing a trial run by using all organic means to maintain two parks in each city. These parks will be pilot programs for both communities. The cities are teaming up with Equality Garden Club’s “Green Initiative Project”, based in Wilton Manors, with training by Beyond Pesticides, a national educational grassroots organization.

The Green Initiative, for the past year, has been working with Wilton Manors Vice Mayor Tom Green, Patrick Cann, Parks and Recreation Director, along with Oakland Park’s Public Works Director Albert Carbon, and Assistant Public Works Director Julie Leonard.

“With increased awareness of the hazards pesticides pose to pollinators, wildlife, and our own health, communities are seeking out alternative approaches to land management that do not put people or the environment at risk,” said Drew Toher, Community Resource and Policy Director at Beyond Pesticides. “We are excited to work with Oakland Park and Wilton Manors on this important effort.”

The goal is to return to safer and effective good cultural practices, sound soil and healthy playing fields and parks. The Club adopted a resolution in May, 2019 to work with local communities to eliminate the use of the toxic pesticides.

According to Gary Petonke, Chairman of the Green Initiative, “The Equality Garden Club is providing the majority of the funding for the training, in a grant to transform two parks in each city. We are working to change the mindset, to change our thinking from this idea that the Earth will forever be our safe home and start acting like what we do matters.”

“The city of Wilton Manors has implemented several programs to improve environmental resiliency and energy in recent years,” said Wilton Manors Vice Mayor Tom Green. “With 15 parks and boat ramps, Wilton Manors is a unique urban environment that both the City and residents take pride in protecting. The Equality Garden Club’s “Green Initiative Project” is a natural complement to this important work.”

Jane Bolin, Esq. Vice Mayor of Oakland Park, added, "I want to thank the Equality Garden Club for bringing this initiative to Oakland Park. This is an impactful way to continue the successful implementation of our Climate Action Plan with our neighbors in Wilton Manors. A win-win for our residents and our planet."

There is a large and growing body of evidence in scientific literature suggesting that pesticides use adversely affects endocrine, neurological, immune, and respiratory systems in humans, especially children and pets, even at low levels. Organic landscaping practices improve the soil's ability to sequester carbon and filter and recharge groundwater. This also leads to water conservation and healthier plants with less pests and disease.

Pesticides are also toxic to pollinators. Many beneficial insects are under threat. Monarch butterfly populations are in decline. Pesticide runoff is harmful to aquatic organisms and ecosystems. Synthetic fertilizers can cause algae blooms that deplete oxygen and devastate the local environment. Some forms of algae can be highly toxic, posing additional threats.

Petonke added: “Humans are dependent on the health of the planet and all of the natural systems in it. We need to recognize that people exist in a complex living system, full of unique smaller systems that act in concert, rather than in isolation, and even the ground is alive. Humans need to take total responsibility for the health of our home, and community.”

Oakland Park previously passed a resolution on November, 21, 2019 to ban the use of glyphosate on public grounds.

#### **About Equality Garden Club**

**Equality Garden Club** is a 501(c)3, non-profit garden club, based in Wilton Manors, FL. The club meets the 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday of the month at 7:00 p.m. in the Wilton Manors Hagan Park Community Center, providing world-class speakers to educate and entertain the membership. Currently the Club is providing these as virtual meetings via Facebook Live and Zoom. Additionally the club sponsors the popular annual Tropical Plant Fair in March at Richardson Park, in Wilton Manors, along with The Green Initiative and by providing grants to local gardening related projects and organizations.

<https://www.equalitygardenclub.com/>

#### **About Beyond Pesticides**

**Beyond Pesticides** (formerly National Coalition Against the Misuse of Pesticides) is a 501©3 nonprofit organization headquartered in Washington, DC., which work with allies in protecting public health and the environment to lead the transition to a world free of toxic pesticides. Beyond Pesticides believes that people must have a voice in decisions that affect them directly. They believe decisions should not be made for the public by chemical companies or by decision makers who either do not have all of the facts or refuse to consider them. <https://www.beyondpesticides.org/>

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