City of Charleston

Charleston, IL

Mayor Dr. Brandon Combs

Pledge Summary

Charleston is a city in east central Illinois with a population of roughly 17,000. The city is home to Eastern Illinois University, beautiful Lake Charleston, and is nearby the Warbler Ridge Conservation Area and Fox Ridge State Park. These amenities create a conservation corridor that spans over 4,000 acres. In partnership with the Urban Butterfly Initiative, the City has created 12 dedicated butterfly habitat “hotspots” in and around the City. With these efforts, from 2020-2022 the NWF announced Charleston a "Monarch Champion" community and Charleston has been named the “Butterfly Capital of Illinois”. Mayor Combs has committed to saving the monarch butterfly and other pollinators with the signing of the Mayor’s Monarch Pledge and looks forward to engaging residents in building more pollinator habitat throughout the city.

Action Items Committed for 2023

Communications and Convening

- Issue a proclamation to raise awareness about the decline of the monarch butterfly and the species’ need for habitat. This proclamation must incorporate a focus on monarch conservation.
- Launch or maintain a public communication effort to encourage residents to plant monarch gardens at their homes or in their neighborhoods. (If you have community members who speak a language other than English, we encourage you to also communicate in that language; Champion Pledges must communicate in that language.)
- Engage with community garden groups and urge them to plant native milkweeds and nectar-producing plants.
- Engage with city parks and recreation, public works, sustainability, and other relevant staff to identify opportunities to revise and maintain mowing programs and milkweed / native nectar plant planting programs.
- Engage with gardening leaders and partners (e.g., Master Naturalists, Master Gardeners, Nature Centers, Native Plant Society Chapters , other long-standing and influential community leaders) to support monarch butterfly conservation.
- Engage with Homeowners Associations (HOAs), Community Associations or neighborhood organizations to identify opportunities to plant monarch gardens and revise maintenance and mowing programs.
- Engage with developers, planners, landscape architects, and other community leaders and organizers engaged in planning processes to identify opportunities to create monarch habitat.
- Create a community-driven educational conservation strategy, initiative, or practice that focuses on and benefits local, underserved residents.

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- Create a community art project to enhance and promote monarch and pollinator conservation as well as cultural awareness and recognition.

Program and Demonstration Gardens

- Host or support a native seed or plant sale, giveaway or swap.
- Facilitate or support a milkweed seed collection and propagation effort.
- Plant or maintain a monarch and pollinator-friendly demonstration garden at City Hall or another prominent or culturally significant community location.
- Convert vacant lots to monarch habitat.
- Plant milkweed and pollinator-friendly native nectar plants along roadsides, medians, or public rights-of-way.
- Launch or maintain an outdoor education program(s) (e.g., at schools, after-school programs, community centers and groups) that builds awareness and creates habitat by engaging students, educators, and the community in planting native milkweed and pollinator-friendly native nectar plants (i.e., National Wildlife Federation’s Schoolyard Habitats program and Monarch Mission curriculum).
- Earn or maintain recognition for being a wildlife-friendly city by participating in other wildlife and habitat conservation efforts (i.e., National Wildlife Federation’s Community Wildlife Habitat program).
- Host or support a monarch neighborhood challenge to engage neighborhoods and homeowners' associations within the community to increase awareness, support community unity around a common mission, and/or create habitat for the monarch butterfly.
- Initiate or support community science (or citizen science) efforts that help monitor monarch migration and health.
- Add or maintain native milkweed and nectar-producing plants in gardens in the community.
- Launch, expand, or continue an invasive species removal program that will support the re-establishment of native habitat for monarch butterflies and other pollinators.
- Host or support a monarch butterfly festival that is accessible to all residents in the community and promotes monarch and pollinator conservation, as well as cultural awareness and recognition.
- Display educational signage at monarch gardens and pollinator habitat.

Systems Change

- Remove milkweed from the list of noxious plants in city weed / landscaping ordinances (if applicable).
- Change weed or mowing ordinances to allow for native prairie and plant habitats.
- Increase the percentage of native plants, shrubs and trees that must be used in city landscaping ordinances and encourage use of milkweed, where appropriate.
- Launch, expand, or continue an effort to change municipal planting ordinances and practices to include more native milkweed and native nectar producing plants at city properties.
- Integrate monarch butterfly conservation into the city’s Park Master Plan, Sustainability Plan, Climate Resiliency Plan or other city plans.
- Reduce or eliminate the use of herbicides, pesticides, or other chemicals that are harmful to monarchs and pollinators and urban wildlife.

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- Launch, expand, or continue one or more ordinances to reduce light pollution to benefit urban wildlife.

Past Pledge Archive

Mayor Name	Program Year	Pledge Date	Achievement
Mayor Dr. Brandon Combs	2026	3/17/2026	
Mayor Dr. Brandon Combs	2023	2/17/2023	
Mayor Dr. Brandon Combs	2022	2/3/2022	Monarch Champions
Mayor Dr. Brandon Combs	2021	2/19/2021	Monarch Champions

Action Items

Selected Action Items

Initiate or support community science (or citizen science) efforts that help monitor monarch migration and health.

How many estimated individuals participated in your community science effort? Please limit your answer to only the number of individuals reached in the answer field (Enter WHOLE NUMBERS only, e.g. 150).

What community organizations, groups, or leaders (if any) did you partner with or engage to complete this effort?

Please describe the community science program that you supported or initiated. Provide a link to any relevant programs, if possible.

Add or maintain native milkweed and nectar-producing plants in gardens in the community.

What community organizations, groups, or leaders (if any) did you partner with or engage to complete this effort?

How many plants were planted? (Enter WHOLE NUMBERS only)

Please describe your effort in completing this action.

Launch, expand, or continue an invasive species removal program that will support the re-establishment of native habitat for monarch butterflies and other pollinators.

What is the total acreage of land treated to remove invasive plants? Note: 1 acre = roughly the size of a football field.

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Please describe the extent of revisions or maintenance to invasive species removal programs, as well as the practices or techniques used to remove the invasive plants.

Host or support a monarch butterfly festival that is accessible to all residents in the community and promotes monarch and pollinator conservation, as well as cultural awareness and recognition.

How many estimated individuals attended the event? Please limit your answer to only the number of individuals reached in the answer field ((Enter WHOLE NUMBERS only), e.g. 500)

What was the date of your festival?

What community organizations, groups, or leaders (if any) did you partner with or engage to complete this effort?

Please describe the details of your monarch butterfly festival and how you ensured the event was accessible by all residents in the community (e.g., events, length, notable successes, outreach, location).

Display educational signage at monarch gardens and pollinator habitat.

How many garden signs are being displayed and where are they located? (Enter WHOLE NUMBERS only)

Please describe the educational information on the sign(s), and provide any links to externally purchased sign(s).

Remove milkweed from the list of noxious plants in city weed / landscaping ordinances (if applicable).

What community organizations, groups, or leaders (if any) did you partner with or engage to complete this effort?

What is the status of this action? Please limit your answer to either "complete" or "in progress" in the answer field below.

If this action is Complete, please include the date it was completed and share a 1-2 sentence description. Please include a copy of the policy by uploading or linking below.

If this action is In Progress, please describe your progress and a target date when you plan to complete action.

Change weed or mowing ordinances to allow for native prairie and plant habitats.

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What community organizations, groups, or leaders (if any) did you partner with or engage to complete this effort?

What is the status of this action? Please limit your answer to either "complete" or "in progress" in the answer field below.

If this action is Complete, please include the date it was completed and share a 1-2 sentence description. Please include a copy of the policy by uploading or linking below.

If this action is In Progress, please describe your progress and a target date when you plan to complete action.

Increase the percentage of native plants, shrubs and trees that must be used in city landscaping ordinances and encourage use of milkweed, where appropriate.

What community organizations, groups, or leaders (if any) did you partner with or engage to complete this effort?

What is the status of this action? Please limit your answer to either "complete" or "in progress" in the answer field below.

If this action is Complete, please include the date it was completed and share a 1-2 sentence description. Please include a copy of the policy by uploading or linking below.

If this action is In Progress, please describe your progress and a target date when you plan to complete action.

Launch, expand, or continue an effort to change municipal planting ordinances and practices to include more native milkweed and native nectar producing plants at city properties.

What community organizations, groups, or leaders (if any) did you partner with or engage to complete this effort?

What is the status of this action? Please limit your answer to either "complete" or "in progress" in the answer field below.

If this action is Complete, please include the date it was completed and share a 1-2 sentence description. Please include a copy of the policy by uploading or linking below.

If this action is In Progress, please describe your progress and a target date when you plan to complete action.

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Integrate monarch butterfly conservation into the city’s Park Master Plan, Sustainability Plan, Climate Resiliency Plan or other city plans.

What community organizations, groups, or leaders (if any) did you partner with or engage to complete this effort?

What is the status of this action? Please limit your answer to either "complete" or "in progress" in the answer field below.

If this action is Complete, please include the date it was completed and share a 1-2 sentence description. Please include a copy of the policy by uploading or linking below.

If this action is In Progress, please describe your progress and a target date when you plan to complete action.

Reduce or eliminate the use of herbicides, pesticides, or other chemicals that are harmful to monarchs and pollinators and urban wildlife.

What community organizations, groups, or leaders (if any) did you partner with or engage to complete this effort?

What is the status of this action? Please limit your answer to either "complete" or "in progress" in the answer field below.

If this action is Complete, please include the date it was completed and share a 1-2 sentence description. Please include a copy of the policy by uploading or linking below.

If this action is In Progress, please describe your progress and a target date when you plan to complete action.

Launch, expand, or continue one or more ordinances to reduce light pollution to benefit urban wildlife.

What community organizations, groups, or leaders (if any) did you partner with or engage to complete this effort?

What is the status of this action? Please limit your answer to either "complete" or "in progress" in the answer field below.

If this action is Complete, please include the date it was completed and share a 1-2 sentence description. Please include a copy of the policy by uploading or linking below.

If this action is In Progress, please describe your progress and a target date when you plan to complete action.

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Issue a proclamation to raise awareness about the decline of the monarch butterfly and the species' need for habitat. This proclamation must incorporate a focus on monarch conservation.

Date of Proclamation:

May 16, 2023

Title of Proclamation (i.e. – Monarch Day or Pollinator Week):

A Resolution and Proclamation Recognizing May and Monarch Month

Upload a copy of your proclamation.

23-R-41--Monarch Prolamation (CC 5-16-2023).pdf

Launch or maintain a public communication effort to encourage residents to plant monarch gardens at their homes or in their neighborhoods. (If you have community members who speak a language other than English, we encourage you to also communicate in that language; Champion Pledges must communicate in that language.)

Please describe the methods of public communication below (e.g., printed materials, social media, print media).

Every year, the Coles County Soil and Water Conservation District hosts an annual native plant sale that includes communication through printed materials and social media on milkweed sales to plant monarch and pollinator gardens.

Engage with community garden groups and urge them to plant native milkweeds and nectar-producing plants.

Please describe the groups you engaged with and how you engaged with these groups below.

We've worked with the Coles County Master Gardeners and Coles County Health Department to integrate butterfly / pollinator friendly plants in their efforts.

Engage with city parks and recreation, public works, sustainability, and other relevant staff to identify opportunities to revise and maintain mowing programs and milkweed / native nectar plant planting programs.

How many community organizations and groups participated? Please list them below.

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Coles County Health Department, CCAR, City of Charleston. In 2023, additional milkweed / native nectar areas have been planted on City owned sites in order to minimize mowing in areas where pollinator sites can be established.

Please describe the extent of engagement with these groups and revisions/maintenance implemented for mowing or planting programs.

Mowing schedules have been modified. For example, at our local lake, mowing continues to be shifted to late October to accommodate monarchs.

Engage with gardening leaders and partners (e.g., Master Naturalists, Master Gardeners, Nature Centers, Native Plant Society Chapters , other long-standing and influential community leaders) to support monarch butterfly conservation.

How many community organizations and groups participated? Please list them below.

Coles County Master Gardeners, Coles County Soil and Water Conservation

Please describe the extent of engagement with these groups and their monarch butterfly conservation efforts.

We continue to inform community organizations about our efforts and to get them to help spread the word. One tangible outcome: groups are specifically including monarch/pollinator plants in their local spring plant sale.

Engage with Homeowners Associations (HOAs), Community Associations or neighborhood organizations to identify opportunities to plant monarch gardens and revise maintenance and mowing programs.

How many community organizations and groups participated? Please list them below.

Coles County Soil and Water Conservation and Master Gardeners

Please describe the extent of engagement with these groups and revisions implemented for mowing and maintenance programs.

Charleston is a small community without active HOAs or neighborhood organizations. However, on a broader scale, engagement continues with community members through social media, presentations, informational tables at street fairs, and pollinator areas are maintained to encourage community members to adjust their current approaches to gardening and "lawn."

Engage with developers, planners, landscape architects, and other community leaders and organizers engaged in planning processes to identify opportunities to create monarch habitat.

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Please describe the extent of engagement with these groups and associated opportunities to create monarch habitat.

We continue milkweed seed collection at local sites for use in our new habitat creation and propagated milkweed at designated sites. New city development continues to look for opportunities to include native plantings. For example, at a newly constructed trailhead, areas were planted with milkweed and other pollinator plants. And through the visibility of our butterfly hotspots throughout the city, our marketing as the "Butterfly Capital of Illinois," we hope developers/planners/leaders continue to come to us with new opportunities.

Create a community-driven educational conservation strategy, initiative, or practice that focuses on and benefits local, underserved residents.

Please describe the process to create the strategy , the strategy goals and content, and/or results of implementation. Please also identify who was engaged in this process, what partnerships were established, and how you engaged these groups. Provide a link, if possible.

We have a prominent butterfly garden/habitat at the Charleston Carnegie City Library, at highly visible sites at the much-visited city lake, and continue to develop butterfly habitat along a popular biking/walking trail. The City of Charleston adopted its 2020 Comprehensive Plan which encourages coordination with local groups to continue to find ways to expand our programs. The plan specifically identifies coordinating with schools and EIU to expand this work to all areas of the community. The City's Comprehensive Plan can be found at www.charlestonillinois.org.

Create a community art project to enhance and promote monarch and pollinator conservation as well as cultural awareness and recognition.

What community organizations, groups, or leaders (if any) did you partner with or engage to host the event?

Coles County Arts Council, Coles County Soil and Water Conservation

How many individuals were engaged in this effort? Please limit your answer to only the number of individuals reached in the answer field (Enter WHOLE NUMBERS only, e.g. 50).

100

Please describe the community art project that was implemented in your community and how it contributed to cultural awareness and recognition (e.g., number of art installations, type of art).

The Coles County Soil and Water Conservation District held its photo contest in 2023 in the areas of conservation practices, close-up conservation and conservation in action. The Coles County Art Council also features on their website the " Pollinator Project: A Community Art Adventure" and a "Pollinator "Quilt" Art Challenge" as part of their Member's

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Art Show. We do not know the actual number of people who viewed the displays but the locations are heavily visited so 100 is a very conservative estimate.

Host or support a native seed or plant sale, giveaway or swap.

How many plants were sold and/or given away at your event? (Enter WHOLE NUMBERS only)

100

How many people attended your event? (Enter WHOLE NUMBERS only)

100

What community organizations, groups, or leaders (if any) did you partner with or engage to host the event?

Native plant sales occur as part of the Coles County Master Gardeners, Douglas Hart Nature Center, and Grand Prairie Friends. Combined they have 100's of participants and sell hundreds of plants.

Facilitate or support a milkweed seed collection and propagation effort.

How many people attended your event? (Enter WHOLE NUMBERS only)

3

What species were collected or propagated?

Common Milkweed, Butterfly Weed, Swamp Milkweed

What community organizations, groups, or leaders (if any) did you partner with or engage to host the event?

City of Charleston

Please describe the milkweed seed collection and propagation effort that you hosted.

We have organized milkweed seed collection at local sites for use in our new habitat creation and propagated milkweed at our local pollinator sites.

Convert vacant lots to monarch habitat.

Where is the monarch habitat located? (Please provide an address, if possible)

5th and Van Buren

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What community organizations, groups, or leaders (if any) did you partner with or engage to complete this effort?

City of Charleston and volunteers maintain the site.

What is the total acreage of land that has been converted? Please limit your answer to only the number of acres in the answer field below (e.g., 2 acres). For reference, 1 acre = 43,560 square feet and is about the size of a football field without the end zones. Note: 1 acre = roughly the size of a football field.

1

How many lots were converted to monarch habitat? Please limit your answer to only the number of lots in the answer field below (e.g., 3)

4

Please describe when the lots were converted to monarch habitat and the planned maintenance schedule.

We have converted abandoned lots to habitat, including sites at the city library that total approximately 1 acre.

Plant or maintain a monarch and pollinator-friendly demonstration garden at City Hall or another prominent or culturally significant community location.

Where is the demonstration garden located and how does this location relate to the cultural significance of the monarch (if relevant)? (Please provide an address or coordinates, if possible)

Coles County Health Department, 825 18th Street and the site is a public access space for all to enjoy.

What community organizations, groups, or leaders (if any) did you partner with or engage to complete this effort?

Coles County Health Department and local volunteers maintain the site.

What is the size of the demonstration garden (in acres)? Please limit your answer to only the number of acres in the answer field below (e.g., 0.5 acres). For reference, 1 acre = 43,560 square feet and is about the size of a football field without the end zones. Note: 1 acre = roughly the size of a football field.

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Plant milkweed and pollinator-friendly native nectar plants along roadsides, medians, or public rights-of-way.

Where are the medians, roadsides and public rights-of-way? (Please provide an address or coordinates, if possible, or describe the location)

We have planted more than 1 acre of native butterfly habitat along public right-of-way that coincides with a popular biking/walking trail and are including butterfly plants for our adopt-a-corner gardens along the main city avenue. We are currently working with IDOT to study the feasibility of converting right of way into pollinator habitat along State Highways in the area - specifically starting with Highway 130 between Woodyard Park and Lake Charleston. IDOT has provided signage to the City stating "Under Construction" "Operation Habitat" to help make sure these areas are not mowed by IDOT crews and to educate the public. This project is ongoing.

How many milkweed and pollinator-friendly native nectar plants were planted? (Enter WHOLE NUMBERS only)

1000

What is the total acreage of median and public right-of-way that has been planted with milkweed and pollinator-friendly native nectar plants? Note: 1 acre = roughly the size of a football field.

1

Please describe the maintenance schedule for these planted areas.

Sites are maintained by City of Charleston and volunteers. The City completed its first scheduled burn of several of the sites in 2021. Additional burns are planned for and we hope to burn on a 3-5 year schedule for each site.

Launch or maintain an outdoor education program(s) (e.g., at schools, after-school programs, community centers and groups) that builds awareness and creates habitat by engaging students, educators, and the community in planting native milkweed and pollinator-friendly native nectar plants (i.e., National Wildlife Federation’s Schoolyard Habitats program and Monarch Mission curriculum).

What program was launched or maintained to complete this effort? If you are involved with another National Wildlife Federation program, please mention that below. (Please include a link to the program, if possible)

In 2023, a local community action group called Charleston C.A.N. was established and they have included enhancing pollinator awareness in their work. We have also worked with Charleston High School students to imagine pollinator space on the school grounds, work is ongoing.

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How many schools, community groups, leaders, or centers were engaged in this effort? How many of these collaborations and partnerships are "new"? (Enter WHOLE NUMBERS only)

10

Please list the names of the schools you are working with.

Charleston High School

What resources, if any, are you providing to educators?

Educators have access to on-line butterfly guides and native pollinator garden tips.

How many students and educators would you estimate are being reached? Please limit your answer to only number of adults and youths engaged in the answer field (e.g., 200 students and 20 educators).

20 students and 1 educator

What community organizations, groups, or leaders (if any) did you partner with or engage to complete this effort?

Charleston High School

How many acres of monarch and pollinator habitat have been planted through this effort? Please limit your answer to only the number of acres in the answer field below (e.g., 0.5 acres). For reference, 1 acre = 43,560 square feet and is about the size of a football field without the end zones. Note: 1 acre = roughly the size of a football field.

0

What is the maintenance schedule to ensure planted habitat is maintained?

Same schedule as for other public sites (regular volunteer maintenance plus annual clean up)

Earn or maintain recognition for being a wildlife-friendly city by participating in other wildlife and habitat conservation efforts (i.e., National Wildlife Federation’s Community Wildlife Habitat program).

What community organizations, groups, or leaders (if any) did you partner with or engage to complete this effort?

City of Charleston, Monarch City-USA, Pheasants Forever, NWF

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What program was launched or maintained to complete this effort? (Please include a link to the program, if possible)

NWF Certified Wildlife Habitat Sites at Reasor Park, Woodyard Park and the Lincoln Prairie Grass Trail, Monarch City-USA; 2018-2019 Polaris Habitat Stewardship Award (Pheasants Forever / Quail Forever)

Host or support a monarch neighborhood challenge to engage neighborhoods and homeowners' associations within the community to increase awareness, support community unity around a common mission, and/or create habitat for the monarch butterfly.

How many estimated individuals participated in your challenge? Please limit your answer to only the number of individuals reached in the answer field (Enter WHOLE NUMBERS only, e.g. 100).

20

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