City of Knoxville

Knoxville, TN

Mayor Indya Kincannon

Pledge Summary

Knoxville Tennessee is a progressive and rapidly growing city known for the Sunsphere, vibrant arts scene, rich history, beautiful marble, the University of Tennessee (Go Vols!), the Urban Wilderness, and so much more. The Tennessee River runs through the city and provides beauty as well as a space for water sports like fishing, canoeing, and rowing. Knoxville was once the first capital of the state, is the gateway to the Great Smoky Mountains National park, hosted the 1982 World's Fair, and is now the new home to One Knox Soccer and the Knoxville Smokies! Knoxville is in Knox County Tennessee and has about 199,000 residents and is the third largest City in the state behind Memphis and Nashville. The City has also become a leader in Sustainability. We have electric buses, electric fleet cars, charging stations throughout the city, all of the streetlights were converted to LED about 7 years ago, we have solar panel lots, and we are Certified as a Wildlife Habitat. Taking care of our habitat is important to us. Educating neighbors and creating spaces for the Monarch Butterfly is one piece of this work that we are proud to now engage in. Last year was our first year and our team got so excited about the work, that we will now be doing 4 times the number of action items.

Action Items Committed for 2026

Communications and Convening

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

Program and Demonstration Gardens

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

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- 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.
- Display educational signage at monarch gardens and pollinator habitat.

Systems Change

- 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.

Past Pledge Archive

Mayor Name	Program Year	Pledge Date	Achievement
Mayor Indya Kincannon	2026	2/22/2026	
Mayor Indya Kincannon	2025	4/15/2025	Signatories

Action Items

In total, how many individuals have been reached through the Mayors' Monarch Pledge in your community this year (Jan-Dec)? Please limit your answer to only the number of individuals reached in the answer field below (Enter WHOLE NUMBERS only.).

1392

In total, how many acres of monarch habitat have been created in your city in the last 12 months? Please limit your answer to only the number of acres in the answer field below (e.g., 3). Note: 1 acre = roughly the size of a football field.

9

Where was the habitat created this year? Example locations may include residences, schools, places of worship, rights-of-way, roadsides, community gardens, shared public spaces, and more.

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Neighborhood vacant lots, City Parks, and ROW

How are you leveraging the Mayors' Monarch Pledge program to engage marginalized communities, such as low-income communities or communities of color?

We are utilizing the program to educate folks in all areas of Knoxville. Some lower income neighborhoods might not want trees in their yard as they may feel that the maintenance is cost prohibitive. We offer suggestions of lower growing flowering plants for pollinators and have given away milkweed seeds to anyone wanting them.

What was your community's motivation for taking and continuing to work on the Mayors' Monarch Pledge?

There are many motivating factors to continue this work: it reduces mowing, it brings interest to areas, it beautifies, it provides food for bees and butterflies, increases biodiversity, encourages folks to care for our habitat, and it has created many more collaborations in the community that are beneficial for community improvement projects.

What resources have been most helpful to you thus far and what new resources would you like to see to help meet your goals? What resources would be useful to help expand equitable engagement in community processes and access to high-quality, usable nature?

The NWF website has been helpful in finding resources to share in the past. We did not use it as much this year mainly I believe because we had the information from last year. We did not seek grant funding for your projects or help expand equitable engagement; however, that is something that might help.

What else should we know about your monarch butterfly conservation efforts over the last year?

The City of Knoxville is working on increasing biodiversity efforts by highlighting native species, removing invasive species, and sharing over 2500 packets of milkweed seeds to individuals and community groups throughout the City.

Selected Action Items

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.

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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.

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.

Within the City we engaged with Parks and Recreation, Office of Sustainability, Office of Neighborhood Empowerment, and our Public Works Department - Horticulture, Urban Forestry, and Maintenance. We also collaborated with Waste and Management as well as our Codes Department.

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

We worked with Parks and Rec to create a meadow, we worked with Sustainability and Office of Neighborhood Empowerment to help with getting the word out to community members, and Public Works did the heavy lifting of purchasing the plants, planting them, and maintaining them. Urban Forestry is helping to eliminate invasive plants and Codes is helping us allow natural landscapes and educating folks.

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.

We have partnered with Ijams Nature Center and their Weed Warriors, the James Agee Gardeners, Old City Gardens, Native Plant Rescue Squad, Master Gardeners, Wild Ones, and Smokey Mountian Chapter.

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

We have either worked with them directly to help with our invasive species removal, through providing them with booth space to get the word out about what they do, connecting them to resources, or working with them to get the word out about what the City is doing.

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

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

This committee wasn't as engaged with this action item as others in the City were. We do have an ordinance that new developers are encouraged to use native or non-invasive trees from a list that our Urban Forester provides. If they are not able to plant trees on their site due to small spaces, they need to pay into a bank that will plant trees in other areas. This year there was a new staff position created to help review developers landscape plans and encourage natives as well as pollinators.

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)

331

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

331

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

This was the Neighborhood Resource Fair on Saturday, Aug. 29. We had City Departments, County Departments, and non-profits totaling 120 booths. Public Service's Booth gave away milkweed seed packets to plant this fall.

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

Upload any relevant documents, images, or other attachments related to your effort on this action.

Gay Street Bridge Native Planting.jpg

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)

It is at the corner of Gay Street and Hill Avenue, which is next to the City County Building. After the closure of the Gay Street Bridge to cars because it was no longer safe, the City

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put money into it so that it could be a pedestrian bridge. When they reworked the areas around the bridge, they planted all natives.

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

This was supported by the community but the City staff did the work. Vandals pulled it all up shortly after it had been planted and City staff went back and replanted it very quickly so that folks would not have to see the mess.

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.

0.25

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)

The City planted milkweed in the ROW on 11th Street, along the roadside in Fountain City, and in the medians on Magnolia Ave.

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.

They are planted, weeded once, maybe twice in the season, and left to grow.

Convert vacant lots to monarch habitat.

Upload any relevant documents, images, or other attachments related to your effort on this action.

Gay Street Bridge Native Planting.jpg

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.

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2

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?

The Office of Neighborhood Empowerment has kept the City Certified as a Wildlife Habitat. We gained certification in 2018 and have re-certified each year since then.

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

https://communitywildlifehabitat.nwf.org/Community?communityId=171

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.

When did this challenge take place?

We provided education and encouraged folks, through our Neighborly Notice newsletter, to participate in No Mow March and Leave the Leaves this year; however, we did not think to make it a challenge. We do not have numbers on this, but we have heard people talking about these two initiatives more now.

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).

50

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

Trees Knoxville, Knox County Schools, University of Tennessee

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

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The City supports and partners with Trees Knoxville and they created a Micro Forest at the City's Inskip Recreation Center. They had volunteer from their organization, Knoxville Garden Club, and the university. https://knoxvilleinsider.areanewsevents.com/p/issue860

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

Please describe your effort in completing this action.

The City's Public Works Department planted milkweed, as well as native plants that the monarch need for food all around City spaces. They also gave out over 2500 seed packs for folks to plant milkweed on their own property.

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

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.

The City has now initiated a Kudzu removal plan for the next several years. They are spraying, but with the least troublesome herbicides they can use. The Kudzu has already begun to die back. And then the City has partnered with Trees Knoxville to come in after a couple of years of removing the plants and restoring the areas. The spraying has just started so there aren't any acres to count yet. https://www.knoxvilletn.gov/1395/Ecological-Restoration

Display educational signage at monarch gardens and pollinator habitat.

Upload any relevant documents, images, or other attachments related to your effort on this action.

Signage.jpg

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

100

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

The City has created signs to show "No Mow Zones" as well as areas they are trying to encourage wildflowers. The areas may not look as well kept as before so they are placing signs out that educate and also remind contract mowers not to mow in certain areas. The sign is attached.

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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?

New this year, the City has a new staff working with all developers working on properties in the City limits.

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

Complete

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.

Although I marked this as complete because we have new staff helping with this, this work could always be expanded.

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

The new staff member in Public Service that is reviewing Landscape designs from developers is also requiring a percentage of their work to be done in native plants/trees.

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