

Understanding the Village of Cayuga Heights 2024 Proposed Local Law: Property Maintenance

Why does the Village need this new law?

This law is intended to give residents of the Village and those who enforce our local laws a framework that clarifies policies and procedures necessary to address conditions, situations and nuisances regarding property maintenance that may affect all of us as neighbors. It is a refinement of requirements currently existing within the Village's Zoning Law.

What does this law seek to do?

The law seeks to strike a balance between the rights of residents to choose how their properties look while being part of a community with a shared vision. It encourages property owners to maintain a vibrant, flourishing landscape, incorporating evolving ideas about creative, ecologically sensitive landscapes. It clarifies minimum standards for property maintenance as well as a timely method to investigate and remedy violations.

What has changed from the previous law?

Meadows will now be allowed in side and back yards that do not abut village streets. Requirements regarding what items may be stored in which parts of a yard have been refined. Enforcement will no longer go through the Village Court system, which can take considerable time.

What is a meadow?

A meadow is an open habitat or field composed of regionally native herbaceous plant communities, consisting mainly of grasses and other non-woody plants not including noxious and/or invasive weeds.

What is considered to be a "front yard"?

The front yard extends the front facade of the principal building (house) forward to the front lot line, extending also from each rearmost exterior corner of the front façade to the adjacent side lot line. In addition, any yard that abuts a public or private street shall be considered a front yard for the purposes of this law. Thus, any corner lot, and any other lot with frontage on more than one public or private street, shall have a "front yard" adjacent to each street.

What is not allowed in the front yard?

- unstacked firewood for more than two weeks (note that stacked firewood is permitted);
- compost piles and brush piles;
- furniture that is not lawn furniture;
- motor vehicles on an unimproved surface;
- boat, utility, vehicle or camping trailers on an unimproved surface;
- storage units (including "PODS") and shipping containers for longer than thirty (30) days;
- building materials, commercial and industrial goods, equipment, or tools, except while construction is occurring on the lot; and
- meadows.

What about the rest of my yard?

Yards must be maintained free of refuse, accumulations of stormwater except in locations designed for stormwater management, and sources of infestation by rodents or other pests.

Yards may not be used to store abandoned appliances, nor more than one unregistered motor vehicle.

What is the street right-of-way and what are requirements there?

Street right-of-way means the lands under and bordering the travelled portion of a public street, road, or highway, to the width owned by the Village, and typically encompasses sidewalks if present. This law requires the street right-of-way be kept free from hazardous conditions from decaying or damaged trees or other natural growth, from dangerous overhanging or projecting objects, and from accumulations of ice and snow. (Note that a separate law, the Village Tree and Shrub Law, clarifies that property owners are responsible to prune or remove trees located on their property which impact the street right-of-way by creating a hazard if they were to fall, as well as trees or shrubs that obstruct streetlights, obstruct the passage of pedestrians on sidewalks, or obstruct the ability of drivers to see traffic signs or any intersection).

What lawn maintenance is required?

Lawn areas must be maintained not to exceed 10 inches. Areas subject to this requirement include traditional lawns growing turf grass as well as any area on which has been allowed to grow noxious weeds or unmanaged plant growth including gravel driveways or parking areas and other areas including paths or patios constructed with slabs of rock placed at grade. Areas that are NOT subject to mowing requirements include environmentally sensitive areas (such as areas with steep slopes, streams, wetlands, drainage swales and protective buffer areas), as well as areas covered by trees or shrubs, ornamental grasses and ground covers, gardens and rain gardens, regionally native plants, or planned natural landscaping.

What about the strip of vegetation between the sidewalk and the road?

This law specifies that vegetation or lawn areas between the edge of pavement of any public street and the property line be maintained similarly to vegetation or lawn area within the adjacent lot. This means lawn mowing should not stop at the sidewalk, but continue to include the strip of grass between the sidewalk and the road. However, the Village shall be responsible for maintenance of any street trees in this area. Also, if any portion of these areas consist of a steep slope or other hazard, the owner of the lot may request assistance with such maintenance from the Village of Cayuga Heights Department of Public Works.

Do I need to convert my woodland or stream border or natural habitat to a mowed lawn?

No, it is not the intent of this law to require nor encourage residents to convert areas that are not currently lawn into lawn areas.

Must I learn what plant species are invasive in order to remove them?

No, this law does not require that you learn to recognize invasive plant species.

I'm having a hard time understanding this law.

Please feel free to discuss this law with either the Code Enforcement Officer, Brent Cross or with Village Trustees.

I can't afford to pay these penalties!

It must be emphasized that it is the purpose of this law that our residents will always have notice and an opportunity to discuss with the appropriate Village official(s) their individual property situations. It is our intention only to penalize and enforce the rules when a less drastic measure has failed. We strongly encourage discussion before any other actions become necessary.