

## Middletown commits to helping monarch butterflies

By HANNAH HIMES,

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Mayors' Monarch Pledge Month has arrived for Middletown after Burgess John Miller signed the National Wildlife Federation's pledge to provide suitable habitats for monarch butterflies.

The pledge commits the town to taking 14 actions to help save monarch butterflies and other pollinators, including educating people about how they can help monarchs.

According to the NWF, the eastern populations of the monarch butterfly have declined by 90 percent, and western populations have dropped by 99 percent in recent years.

"We have a super-engaged Green Team or Sustainability Committee here in Middletown," said Cindy Unangst, Middletown staff planner and Sustainability Committee co-chair. "This group is just an amazing, dedicated group to all things sustainable."

Unangst credited "dynamic" committee member Ann Payne with bringing up the Monarch Pledge. The pledge was then passed on to Miller, who welcomed and signed it.

The Sustainability Committee has worked hard to raise awareness about the monarch butterfly and the species' need for habitat, Miller said in a prepared statement.

"Our town and the committee engage with citizens and community garden groups and urge the planting of native milkweeds and nectar-producing plants. We are proud of our progress and recognize that there is more to do to protect the monarch butterfly," he said.

Middletown is no stranger to efforts like this. Last year, the town became the first municipality in Frederick County to be designated a Bee City USA municipality. The town is also a Tree City USA member and became Sustainable Maryland certified in 2016.

“[The pledge] certainly seemed like something that would be easy to help do,” Unangst said. “Because with the Bee City USA designation, we need to create pollinator gardens, so kind of, that goes hand in hand with the whole Monarch Pledge.”

The Monarch Pledge has action items in different areas including communications and holding programs and demonstrations.

“There are items from each of those kind of broad categories that Burgess Miller put in his pledge that we would try to do,” Unangst said. “As far as the communication, a lot of it is kind of engaging with the public, engaging with community garden groups or engaging with homeowners associations or engaging with gardening leaders, like Master Gardeners ... to support monarch butterfly planting programs and that kind of thing.”

The committee is looking at planting pollinator friendly demonstration gardens in town for people to see and learn from. Middletown Elementary School is also part of the Schoolyard Habitat Program and has an outdoor education area.

“They have planted a lot of pollinator friendly plants there, and so certainly we would want to work with the teachers over there to help them out with what they’re doing,” Unangst said.

Other considerations include changing mowing or weed ordinances to allow for native prairie or plant habitats in town, as well as implementing regulations about the kinds of plants or trees that are planted in town.

“Even one person can help make a difference,” Unangst said. “We have over 4,000 residents here in town, and if even a fraction of that would help put in pollinator gardens and stuff to attract the bees and butterflies and other pollinators, that’s going to go a long way.”

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Burgess John Miller has signed the National Wildlife Federation's pledge to provide suitable habitats for monarch butterflies in Middletown.

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