

Keeping Our Waterways Clean

Among the many “jewels” within our Town, certainly the canals have to rank right up there with the best of them. Not only are they attractive in appearance, but they also provide a constant source of recreation for both our residents and for visitors to our fine community. Additionally, whether or not one lives within view of our waterways or participates in the aquatic activities, our waterways (including our adjacent Trent River and the nearby Neuse River as well) serve to enhance the property values of all of our residents. And, many prospective residents are drawn to our Town precisely because of its water access. In short, our waterways benefit us all.

However, our waterways are not without some minimal degree of upkeep and maintenance. The Environmental and Waterways Advisory Board (EWAB) organizes a periodic clean-up of not only our Town’s waterways, but also of the banks of the Trent River adjacent to River Bend as well. And while our homeowners and renters are always welcome to join in on these clean-ups (and enjoy a nice day out in kayaks and rowboats in the process), there are other things that one may do to help keep our waters clean and attractive for all to enjoy.

Probably one of the simplest “adjustment” a property owner or renter can make that will have a dramatic effect on improving our water’s condition is in ensuring that their grass clippings do not make it into the waterways - either intentionally or inadvertently. In the past, some persons have been observed by neighbors actually dumping their bagged grass clippings (and other material) into our canals and rivers. However, it may also be as simple as a person mowing the grass near the water’s edge with their mower discharging the grass clippings into the water. Either way, intentional or unintentional, it is a violation of the Town’s “Nuisance Ordinance” and may result in warnings and fines. But, even more important, one should refrain from allowing lawn detritus to make its way into the canals because it simply is the “right thing to do.”

Why do we care about something as innocuous as grass clippings? The simple truth is that grass clippings are not “innocuous” when allowed to make their way into the water. These clippings contain the fertilizing agent nitrogen. When allowed to blow into the water, its fertilizing effect encourages the growth of “algae mats” along the water’s surface. This has two effects, both detrimental. First, it shades the water and aquatic life below the mat, thereby reducing the amount of photosynthesis that would otherwise take place. When this happens, oxygen producing plant life tends to die off, thereby contributing both to the loss of spawning grounds for many of the smaller forms of marine life (upon which many larger fish depend for food). These algae mats also rob the water of vital oxygen, thereby exacerbating the oxygen depletion in that area. Without oxygen, fish die or move to other areas, and other beneficial plant life withers and dies.

Algae mats also play havoc with recreational boaters, who must try to navigate around such aquatic “structures.” These mats are particularly abundant in the canals near Harbor Town and the Quarterdecks, in part because these waterways do not enjoy an active “flow” in and out. With the water relatively stationary, these mats can reach sizes of ten feet in diameter or more.

What can be done to help prevent these algae mats from forming? Two things really! First, limit the application of fertilizer to your lawn, as a good portion of this will simply wash into the waterways during the first heavy rain. Secondly (and the topic of this article), is to simply run your mower in the direction that will blow the lawn clippings back onto your lawn, rather than into the canals or rivers. The mulching of grass clippings that will take place has the added benefit of returning those nitrogen nutrients into your lawn’s root system - natural (and free) fertilization!

We, the members of the Environmental and Waterways Advisory Board, ask each of you to help protect one of our Town’s most valuable resources - our waterways. Please, when you mow, or when you employ someone else to mow on your behalf, run the mowers in the direction AWAY from the water. If you see your neighbor mowing his or her lawn and the clippings are blowing into the water, please advise him or her that, not only is it harmful to the health of our Town’s waterways, but it’s also illegal. If you belong to a homeowners association, please inform the folks you have contracted to mow your common

areas to be ever mindful of our waterways and direct the clippings AWAY from the water. With your help and that of your neighbors, we will all benefit from the clean and unobstructed waterways within our Town. Thank you!

Environment and Waterways Advisory Board