

PRESS RELEASE
FROM PRINCETON MAYOR AND COUNCIL

LANDSCAPING REGISTRATION ORDINANCE INCLUDES INNOVATIVE
PROVISIONS TO ADDRESS WAGE THEFT

June 16, 2014

At Monday night's Princeton Council meeting a landscaping registration ordinance was introduced that requires commercial landscapers to register with the Town. They must acknowledge that they have received a copy of Princeton's leaf, branch and log collection program, as well as a copy of the Federal and New Jersey State wage and hour laws and New Jersey State workers' compensation insurance laws. The registration must be renewed annually. The proposed ordinance states that a landscaper's registration may be suspended or revoked for violations of law, including wage theft law and other Princeton ordinances, or for good cause prejudicial to the public health, safety or welfare.

A public hearing on the ordinance and probable final vote will be held on July 14.

Liz Lempert, Princeton's Mayor, said: "It makes sense for Princeton to address both leaf and branch pickup, and employment practices, in our landscaping ordinance. In addition to guarding against wage theft we will remind employers that New Jersey law requires that they carry workmen's compensation insurance. This protects workers, the landscapers themselves, and the homeowners and businesses which they serve."

Bob Hough, Director of Infrastructure & Operations, stated: "It has been 18 months since implementation of the leaf, branch and brush pickup schedules, which have been customized to the needs of different parts of Town. This ordinance gives us the enforcement tools we need to provide services efficiently, while ensuring public health and safety."

Princeton's Executive Director of Human Services, Elisa Neira, said "The men who provide landscaping work very hard and we in Princeton appreciate the services they provide. Most have families to support, and in any case there is no excuse for not paying them what they are owed, and overtime when they deserve it. In cooperation with our Police Department, we have reached out to immigrant communities in town to assure them that we are working to protect all their rights as American residents and workers. For example, we collaborated with the Police Department and LALDEF (the Latin American Legal Defense & Education Fund) to develop a new intake form and process that will allow workers to seek help from any of these agencies, in English or Spanish."

John Heilner, Chair of the Human Services Commission's Immigration Subcommittee stated: "While we recognize that most landscapers do not engage

in shoddy practices like wage theft or failure to carry workmen's compensation insurance, unfortunately we have encountered some cases of this. We also know from surveys carried out around the state by New Labor, a workers' rights activist organization, and others, that wage theft is way underreported because of fear of losing one's job, or threats to turn in undocumented workers to the federal agency (ICE) for deportation. The federal and NJ State wage and hour laws make it very clear that all workers are protected - citizens and undocumented alike."

Princeton Councilwoman Heather Howard, liaison to the Human Services Commission, added: "If this ordinance is passed, Princeton will become just the second municipality in New Jersey to cover wage theft in a local ordinance. We will be looking for other opportunities, for example in restaurant inspections and regulations, to ensure that workers' basic rights are adequately protected. We will also be looking for ways to better protect construction workers. Our Human Services Commission and Police Department are working with New Labor and LALDEF to increase education of workers about their rights."