

How to establish a peaceful backyard retreat

Backyards have undergone quite a transformation over the last decade-plus. The days when patios and decks were all a backyard living space had to offer are largely a thing of the past, as homeowners have realized just how valuable it can be to commit to a stunning backyard.



The real estate experts at Zillow estimate that homes with backyard features such as outdoor televisions, outdoor showers and outdoor kitchens command 3.1 percent more than expected upon reaching the market. If 3.1 percent doesn't sound like a lot, it actually equates to nearly \$11,000 on a typical home. But there's more to gain than money when converting a backyard space into a relaxing respite. Such spaces can provide a welcoming escape from the hustle and bustle of daily life, all the while giving homeowners and residents a comfortable space to soak in the great outdoors. With that in mind, homeowners can take the following steps to establish a peaceful backyard retreat.

Refresh the landscape. Even if your vision is centered on outdoor furniture and a space that accommodates movie

nights under the stars, it's still best to refresh the existing landscape if it needs a little upkeep. Overgrown trees, hedges and bushes can create the same cluttered vibe that dominates interior spaces overrun with items. If necessary, work with a local tree service or landscape architect to trim, or even remove, trees and hedges that are crowding the backyard and making it feel claustrophobic or giving it an unkempt look. Aim for a landscape that affords a balance of sun and shade so the space is as comfortable as possible throughout the day.

Set up multiple gathering spaces, if possible. Once a backyard retreat is established, everyone who calls the property home might find the space hard to resist. Keep this in mind when planning the space and aim to set

up multiple gathering spaces. An outdoor kitchen with a nearby dinner table can be a great space to enjoy al fresco dining, but a separate area to read a book or watch a movie or ballgame can make the space more versatile. Some may want to relax away from the noise of the grill area, and multiple gathering spaces ensures there's always a peaceful spot to unwind out back.

Add a water feature. Running water has a way of calming the nerves, and that's good to keep in mind when planning a backyard retreat. Water features run the gamut from garden ponds to koi ponds to fountains to hot tubs. Homeowners can identify which feature best aligns with their idea of relaxation and then work with a landscape architect to ensure it's installed in their backyard

oasis.

Don't forget shade. Temperatures are rising in many areas of the globe, and that's worth noting when planning a backyard retreat. Even the most ardent sun worshippers likely won't want to be exposed to the

sun at all times when relaxing in their backyards. Strategically chosen means of providing shade can make spaces enjoyable all day long. Consider umbrellas, gazebos, pergolas, and even retractable awnings to cover patios and decks when the sun

is at its highest each afternoon. If you plan to spend ample time in the grass, make that more enjoyable by planting shade trees, which also can protect the grass from drought and make it more comfortable underfoot.

-metrocreativeconnection

Benson County Township Officers Association --

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townships roads that intersect. Also, Todahl indicated that he was trying to get graveling schedules into a regular cycle. Regarding his emergency management duties, Todahl reported on his attendance at a webinar with the state and said the future of grants was uncertain.

Commissioner Dick Horner acknowledged the highway department for the job it did and said Benson County had one of the best road departments in the state. He noted that some ARPA funds had gone toward upgrading highway department equipment. Commissioner Horner said that the issue of property tax abatement may be one of the last topics addressed in this legislative session.

Commissioner Horner encouraged public contact with the county commission and noted that public comment had led to the board taking action on a resolution opposing SB 2174 and looking into developing a zoning policy for wind farms. One attendee asked whether county road speed limits could be increased from 55 to 65, noting that other North Dakota counties had a 65 mph limit. Commissioner Horner said the county engineers and state's attorney would have to be consulted on the safety end, but the issue could be looked at.

Brian Maddock of the Benson

County Water Board gave a presentation, saying that one of the main problems the water board has addressed in recent years is flooding at Lake Ibsen south of Leeds. He said the water board would furnish culverts if needed, but it has been hard to find contractors.

Randy Thompson gave an overview of the county's tolerance levels for agricultural, commercial and residential values and how the numbers are calculated. He reported that with ag values at 99.75%, commercial at 95% and residential at 93.1%, all were within tolerance. He said that legislation may provide property tax relief for these areas.

Chair Jaeger referred attendees to a handout regarding a course to be held May 6 in Bismarck regarding finding grant opportunities and how to write grants. She said the NDTOA website also had grant resources.

Chair Jaeger reported that townships should have received \$9,400 in Prairie Dog money and cited the role of township lobbyists in getting the funds. She encouraged the officers to do needed road work and demonstrate the importance of funding for townships.

Chair Jaeger requested that officers provide email addresses so they could receive the NDTOA

"Grassroots" newsletter. She provided information on the Grassroots Leadership Award, which Victor Thomas of East Fork Township had received in 2015. She said that according to Bonnie Erickson, about half of Benson County townships were using the Annual Township Ledger Report (ATLR) software that the NDTOA encourages for financial record-keeping.

Regarding property tax reform, Chair Jaeger said the NDTOA supports it but the caps may be problematic. Dale Schmitz said there was an amendment that would exempt townships from the property tax caps. Chair Jaeger said a number of bills this legislative session attempted to remove local control.

The township officers approved a motion to have Christie Jaeger and Val Wright added to the BCTOA checking account signature card at Bremer Bank. Discussion was held on the BCTOA bank account balance, which has been dwindling since 2017, and whether dues should be increased, as the \$25 fee has been in place for many years. The officers approved a motion to increase dues to \$50 starting in 2026.

Christie Jaeger, Val Wright and Bonnie Erickson were elected to their BCTOA positions by unanimous ballots.

More bills signed as session continues --

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objectives. A charter school would be a public school within the state's system. A charter school is not subject to state or local laws, rules, regulations, policies or procedures. It is subject to federal education laws and regulations.

Health care

Under HB 1341, a person who assaults a hospital worker while the worker is caring for patients can be charged with a Class C felony, which carries a penalty of five years in prison and a \$10,000 fine.

HB 1468 allocates \$16 million to increase the number of beds at behavioral health facilities in the west central human service center region. The region provides counseling and mental health services in Burleigh, Emmons, Grant, Kidder, McLean, Mercer, Morton, Oliver, Sheridan and Sioux counties, as well as the Standing Rock Indian Reservation and part of the Fort Berthold Indian Reservation.

Under HB 1511, a physician may not perform an abortion unless they have reviewed an instructional course within the previous two years.

Elections

Under HB 1297, approval voting or ranked-choice voting may not be used in any North Dakota election. "Approval voting" allows voters to vote for all candidates that the voter approves of in each race for public office; the candidates receiving the most votes are elected until all necessary seats are filled in each race. Ranked-choice voting describes a method in which a qualified elector may rank candidates for public office in order of preference, and all submitted ballots are tabulated in multiple rounds until a single candidate attains a majority of votes. The bill abolishes the use of ranked-choice voting in Fargo, where it is used to elect the mayor and four city commissioners. Fargo voters approved the ranked-choice option in 2018.

Under SB 2269, an elected member serving on a city, park district or school board is subject to recall by a petition of electors equal to 35% of the voters from the most recent election. This also applies to a member who was appointed to fill a vacancy.

Infrastructure

Under HB 1058, the Department of Environmental Quality will adopt rules about maintaining, reporting, taking corrective action, and establishing standards for construction and performance of above-ground petroleum fuel storage tanks.

Under HB 1258, before an electric transmission facility is approved, the applicant must comply with the road use agreements of the impacted political subdivision. When an application for a facility is filed, any affected townships, cities and counties must be notified and have a public hearing.

SB 2204 requires sellers of real property to disclose to the buyer any knowledge of radon concentrations on the property. The seller must provide any test results and evidence of mitigation to the buyer.

Grant opportunities

HB 1591 designates \$1.5 million for grants to county agriculture fair associations for the planning, designing and construction of infrastructure projects. Local fair associations would have to provide at least \$1 for every dollar of state support.

HB 1581 allocates \$100,000 for tribal tourism grants. A tribal government in the state may apply for a grant up to \$20,000 to promote and enhance tribal tourism opportunities. The tribal government must match any grant funds.

HB 1603 allocates \$500,000 to the State Historical Society for the purpose of providing compliance with the federal Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act. The act was enacted in 1990 to address the return of Native American remains and cultural objects that were illegally taken from their homelands. The bill also establishes a compliance committee consisting of tribal historic preservation officers or designees from each state tribe.

SB 2228 allocates \$1 million for one-time sustainability grants to preserve or reopen rural grocery stores. Many North Dakotans live in "food deserts," which are areas where residents must travel 10 or more miles for fresh or perishable foods.

Rules and regulations

Under HB 1303, the state, a political subdivision, or institution of higher education may not adopt or implement a sanctuary city policy.

Under HB 1305, an individual who unlawfully detains, occupies or trespasses upon a residential dwelling is guilty of a Class C felony for the first offense and a Class B felony for a second or subsequent offense that occurs at the same dwelling. A Class C felony is punishable by five years in prison and a \$10,000 fine; a Class B felony is punishable by 10 years in prison and a \$20,000 fine.

Under HB 1375, an individual who refuses to provide proof of identification upon request of a peace officer at a licensed premise that serves alcohol is guilty of an infraction, which carries a maximum punishment of a \$1,000 fine.

Under HB 1203, a registered qualifying patient or designated caregiver may not possess more than 500 milligrams of a cannabinoid edible product at one time.

HB 1351 defines a sexually expressive image as a real, altered or computer-generated photograph or visual representation that exhibits a nude or partially nude human figure. The previous law did not include computer-generated images.

HB 1361 creates mandatory minimum sentencing requirements of 20 years, 10 years or five years, based on the class of felony, for human trafficking offenders.

HB 1429 makes a person guilty of an offense if they use a robot to frighten or harass someone else with no legitimate reason for doing so.

Miscellaneous

Under SB 2069, a state agency may request immediate publication of a notice on the ND Newspaper Association's public notice website if a newspaper fails to publish a legal notice in the newspaper.

HB 1479 designates October 1 as ND Constitution Day. Voters approved the state constitution on Oct. 1, 1889. The governor typically issues a Constitution Day proclamation upon request. HB 1479 would make the commemoration part of state law.

Notice of Public Organizational Meeting and Election Leeds Rural Ambulance District

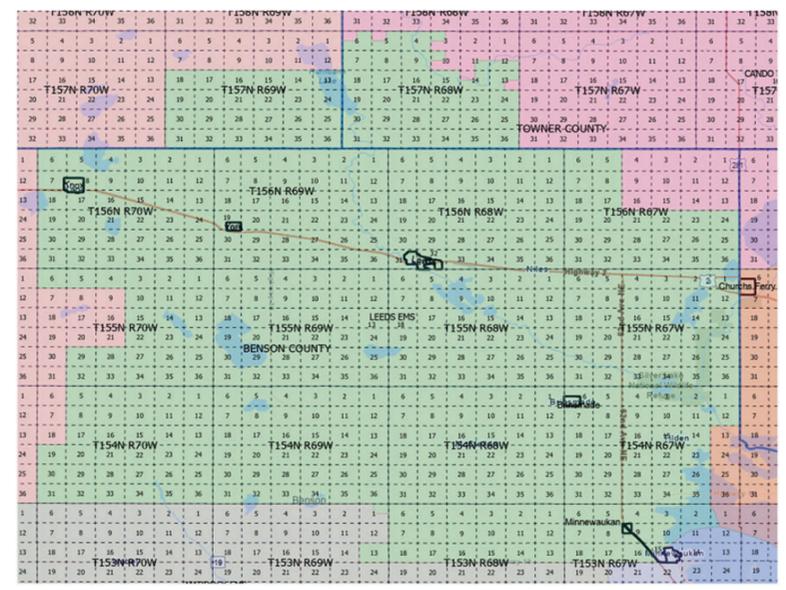
Notice is hereby given to all qualified electors living within the boundaries of the district, May 21, 2025 at 6 p.m. at Leeds Fire and Ambulance Facility, 130 1st Ave. NE, Leeds, ND 58346 an organizational meeting will be held to elect Leeds Rural Ambulance District Board of Directors. Immediately following the organizational meeting, the District's Board of Directors will hold a public meeting with the following agenda.

1. Call the Meeting to Order
2. Nomination and Election of officers
3. Current ambulance service overview to District Board
4. Present draft governance bylaws for board review
5. Mill Levy authority - consideration and resolution
6. Set next meeting date
7. Adjourn

TERRITORY OF THE LEEDS RURAL AMBULANCE DISTRICT

| County | Township | Township/Range | Sections |
|--------|--------------|----------------|---|
| Pierce | | 157 69 | 13-36 |
| Towner | Springfield | 157 68 | NW ¼ of 3, 4, 5 excluding NW ¼, 6 excluding NW ¼, 7-9, NW ¼ of 10, SE ¼ of 11, S ½ of 12, 13 excluding SW ¼, 14 excluding NW ¼, 15-36 |
| Benson | Knox | 156 70 | 1-36 |
| | York | 156 69 | 1-36 |
| | Leeds | 156 68 | 1-36 |
| | Irvine | 156 67 | 5-8, 17-36 |
| | Twin Lake | 155 70 | 1-6, 10-15, 22-29, 32-36 |
| | Beaver | 155 69 | 1-36 |
| | Lake Ibsen | 155 68 | 1-36 |
| | Normania | 155 67 | 1-36 |
| | Broe | 154 70 | 1-5, 8-17, 19-36 |
| | Butte Valley | 154 69 | 1-36 |
| | McClellan | 154 68 | 1-36 |
| | Riggin | 154 67 | 1-12, 14-23, 26-35 |
| | Albert | 153 69 | NW ¼ of 1, 13, |
| | West Bay | 153 67 | 2-10, 16-18 |

All of the City of Knox
 All of the City of York
 All of the City of Leeds
 All of the City of Brinsmade



Pastureland values and cash rental rates --

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the lowest increase of 5.4%. The rest of the regions in North Dakota increased between 8.2% and 8.9%, which is close to the statewide average.

Rental rates across the state were a bit more mixed. While every region saw an increase, there was a wide range in the magnitude. The lowest increase in pastureland rents in North Dakota occurred in the southwest region, increasing less than 1%. The largest increase occurred in the southeast, where region rents moved up over 16% from 2024 to 2025. The east central region saw a rental increase of 8.2% per acre, while the northwest region increased almost 9.7%. The increases in the north central and south central regions were a bit lower, increasing 5.5% and 4.7% respectively.

Overall, since 2021, pastureland values are up 51.5% statewide while cash rental rates are up 18.6% over that same period of time. As a result, and much like cropland values across the state, pastureland rental rates continue to lag way behind pastureland values. As of 2025, pastureland rental rates are 1.7% of the overall market

value. While rents for pastureland have typically been a lower percentage of the overall market value compared to cropland rents versus values, 30 years ago pastureland rents were around 6% of the market price. By 2010 this ratio had fallen to 3.64%, and now in 2025 that ratio has fallen to a multi-decade low.

"With 2024 and 2025 experiencing a multi-decade low in

cattle inventories, the demand pressure from ranchers to push pasture rental rates upwards hasn't been there despite record-high cattle prices," says Parman. "It can take years for beef cattle inventories to adjust to market prices, and therefore, high prices in the cattle markets are likely seen in land prices well before they would have an impact on rental rates."