

Shearwater Grounds and Landscaping Committee Report September 2014

Update on landscaping evaluation and planning

- ❖ In July and August, the Landscaping Committee continued to survey the grounds and meet with members of the community to identify areas of concern and ideas for improvements, both short and long term.
- ❖ This information is being used in the development of a landscaping master plan that will state our goals and objectives, identify our assets, recommend ongoing maintenance practices, and propose future improvements that are consistent with our goals for a beautiful, healthy, sustainable landscape and shoreline.
- ❖ As part of this effort, the Landscaping Committee has compiled a list of fall, winter and spring projects. To date, we have spent about \$1,000 of our \$15,000 budget. The remainder of this year's reduced budget will need to cover the fall and spring planting seasons, when most projects are planned.

Landscaping Committee Procedures

In the coming months, we'll be working with the new property management company to formalize procedures for identifying and addressing landscaping issues. We encourage members of the community to come forward with their ideas and concerns. Send ideas/requests to:

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Phragmites

A project now underway is the elimination of phragmites from our shoreline. Phragmites is an invasive reed that will soon overtake more beneficial perennial grasses if left untreated. It's been expanding rapidly on all parts of the bay, and can be seen overtaking parts of Spa Creek. Two separate colonies have been expanding at the water's edge near Buildings 7 and 14, and this year the landscaping committee, with Maryan Cummins taking the lead, sought assistance from the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR). After consulting with experts from DNR and the Maryland Department of Agriculture, a permit was requested and granted. The first step toward eradication of the phragmites was successfully completed on September 11; the treated reeds must remain undisturbed as they fade into winter and decline. We will continue to monitor and treat again if needed, until they are completely eliminated.

Status of Irrigation System

On September 8, Terra Nova, the company who installed and maintains our irrigation system, performed a mid-season checkup. The Landscaping Committee Chair accompanied the technician on his walk-through, and learned that overall the system is in good working order. However, there are a few heads that should be adjusted for location or height because, due to changes in vegetation, they no longer

reach all parts of the areas they were designed to irrigate. Some adjustments have already been made; others will be made this fall or in the spring.

Update on large tree issues and recommendations for immediate action

- ❖ Over the summer, the Landscaping Committee met several times with certified arborists from Bartlett Tree Experts and Davey Tree Expert Company to develop a detailed assessment of tree conditions at Shearwater. Our trees define and enhance our landscape, and contribute to the sustainability of Spa Creek and the Bay. They constitute a significant portion of the value of our property. To protect our investments and the beauty of our grounds, they must be maintained and sustained.
- ❖ Based on an initial survey and analysis, in mid-August we submitted a preliminary tree assessment and prioritized cost estimate for the Board's consideration. In response to the Board's requests for additional information, we held further discussions with representatives from Bartlett, Davey and Highlands, our landscape contractor.
- ❖ As a result of those discussions, some of the initially listed work items were recently performed by Highlands; other items were removed from the list because they can be performed by Highlands at a later date in conjunction with other work. Other items were added or modified as a result of multiple discussions with Bartlett and Davey, on site and by phone.
- ❖ Subsequently, we have further refined our assessment and broken down our priorities into four categories:
 - 1A Major trees adjacent Buildings 15 and 16 that are dead or dying and must be removed as they pose imminent risk and liability.
 - 1B Other trees that are dead or dying and must be removed as they pose probable risk and liability and trees whose proper maintenance is critical to members of the Shearwater community at large. This includes, among others, the dead pines lining the driveway between Buildings 8 and 13 and the oaks lining our shady entrance drive.
 - 2 Trees that pose possible risk to property or that require repair or maintenance in order to stay healthy and preserve the integrity of our landscape. This includes trees with splits, breakage or insect infestation, trees that overhand our parking areas, and trees whose branches touch our buildings.
 - 3 Trees that impact our views. Unfortunately, most of these trees are in the Critical Area Buffer regulated by the City, County and State governments. Work in these areas requires approval of a Critical Area Buffer Management Plan. We need time to design a solution that will be accepted by the governing parties.
- ❖ Although funding for tree removal and maintenance is not covered under the landscaping committee's budget, at the Board's request we have obtained a preliminary estimate for this work. Estimates provided by Bartlett Tree Experts for budgeting purposes are as follows:
 - 1A \$8,000
 - 1B \$5,000
 - 2 \$4,000
 - 3 \$3,000

- ❖ In addition, the Landscaping Committee, at the request of the Board, has requested formal proposals from the two companies that have performed Shearwater's tree work in the past: Bartlett and Davey. We understand from both companies that cost reductions can be obtained by having work performed in the winter months, by grouping work in such manner as to reduce mobilization costs and by staging implementation. We await their formal proposals.
- ❖ **To keep the ball rolling and to ensure that the work is performed in a timely manner, the landscaping committee recommends the following for the Board's immediate action:**
 - That the Board accepts our plan that identifies critical trees and prioritizes tree maintenance work, in consultation with licensed tree experts, in order to reduce liability and achieve maximum benefit for the community.
 - That the Board allocates a budget amount of \$15,000 out of the general maintenance budget (or other funds as appropriate) to cover the cost of critical tree work needed this fiscal year. It's our understanding that some of the critical tree work was deferred from previous years due to budgetary constraints. Continued deferment will only increase liability and potential costs, as confirmed by the tree experts we consulted.
 - That the Board authorizes the Landscaping Committee to negotiate with licensed tree companies to obtain the best competitive price for work in categories 1A, 1B and 2. To reiterate, these are the trees that pose imminent, probable or possible risk and/or impact the greatest number of people in the community. Although the preliminary estimated total for those three categories comes to \$17,000, we believe that by grouping work items for maximum efficiency and taking advantage of winter price breaks, we can negotiate all or most of the work within a budget of \$15,000.

Submitted by:

Deborah Birch
Chair, Shearwater Landscaping Committee
September 14, 2014