

GREENBRAE

FALL 2018 GREENBRAE LANDSCAPING REPORT

PUBLISHED BY THE GREENBRAE PROPERTY OWNERS ASSOCIATION
POST OFFICE BOX 383, KENTFIELD, CA 94914

info@greenbrae.org; 415-461-7338

greenbrae.org

By Scott Sherman, Ph.D. (landscaping@greenbrae.org)
Greenbrae Homeowner and GPOA Landscaping Chairman
M.S., Horticulture/Viticulture—UCD, Certified Arborist, Landscape Contractor

In this Issue

**Fire Prevention, Mitigation, and
What We Can Do Now**

**Landscape Improvements: Past &
Future**

What are CSA 16 and GPOA?

**What is Our Greenbrae
Landscaping Budget?**

**When Will Our Median Be
Improved?**

**Optimizing Value with Our
Limited Budget**

Sustainable Landscape Design

Water Conservation

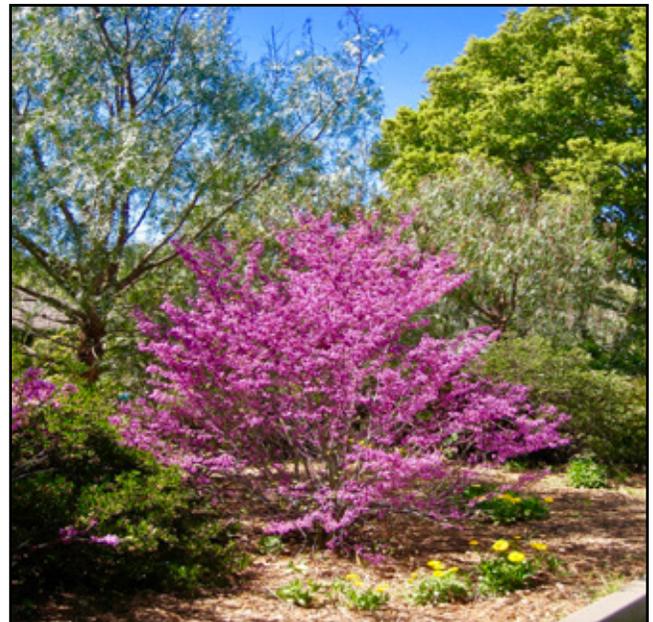
Landscape Maintenance Calendar

Wildflower Seeds Across Greenbrae

**Pruning Our Heritage Trees and
Shrubs**

**Owl Boxes to Control Rodents and
Integrated Pest Management**

**Our Community Web Site and
Email List (Sign Up!)**



*Beautiful native 'Red Bud' (Cercis occidentalis)
in a Los Cerros median island. Late winter,
early spring color.*

Fire Prevention, Mitigation, and What We Can Do Now

We all are very concerned about our northern California fires and the potential for fires in our community. We had one off Vista Grande just a month ago. It burned about an acre, possibly caused by a bird in the high-voltage wires. A couple of concerned, thoughtful neighbors have stepped up to help with community education. Plus, our Kentfield and Central Marin Fire Departments will



help us with education and prevention, just ask them.

Here are some valuable resources to help educate each of us and to help take specific actions on our properties:

http://cenapa.ucanr.edu/Resources_for_Fire_and_Disaster/

http://cesonoma.ucanr.edu/Disaster_Resources/

http://cesonoma.ucanr.edu/Disaster_Resources/Landowner_Resources/

http://cecentralsierra.ucanr.edu/Living_with_Wildfire/

The Greenbrae Property Owners Association (GPOA), the Advisory Board for our County Service Area 16 (CSA 16), which consists of the area on the north side of Sir Francis Drake Boulevard (SFD) from Eliseo to Manor), and the Marin County Roads Department have done much to mitigate fire fuel in our medians. We've removed over 50 Eucalyptus trees, numerous dead and dying Pine trees, pruned out dead and dying shrubs and branches, and mulched intensively to maintain the health of trees and shrubs. We've also cleaned up illegal dumping in the La Cuesta median and placed boulders to prevent unauthorized access.

Landscape Improvements: Past & Future

Our annual landscaping parcel tax has remained \$150 since 1993 (25 years!) Two recent ballot measures to raise the parcel tax did not pass. Though costs have increased significantly for all aspects of landscaping, the CSA 16 Advisory Board and the GPOA must make do with our limited funds:

- Diverse activities of maintenance, such as:
 - o Pulling abundant French Broom
 - o Maintaining the SFD frontage as a “safe route to schools”
 - o Pulling dead and dying plants due to the drought
 - o Reducing and pruning island hedges to open up views to the Ross Valley
 - o Extensive weeding and mulching
 - o Rotating seasonal, colorful entry plantings
 - o Pruning our numerous heritage trees in medians and curbside
 - o Managing irrigation carefully to conserve yet maintain plant health.
- Drought-driven irrigation system improvements, “retiring” of entry lawns, and reducing irrigation costs.
- Professional design and gradual installation of improvements to our numerous medians, parks, mile-long SFD frontage, and entrances. This includes not only new improvements recently completed on Corte Cayuga, but also planned improvements to Via Cheparro and Eliseo's 2nd island. Work on our upper medians of Via Barranca, Via Navarro, Via Cheparro, and Via la Paz is on hold pending available budget. Similarly, planned improvements to the Eliseo entry and La Cuesta entry are on hold pending completion of the SFD Rehabilitation Project over the next couple of years.



What are CSA 16 and GPOA? What is Our Greenbrae Landscaping Budget?

In coordination with the Board of the GPOA and the CSA 16 Advisory Board, each comprised of Greenbrae homeowner-volunteers, the County administers the funds and activities for our community landscaping. The County first alerted us to the reality that imminently the funds generated by the current \$150 parcel tax (~\$200,00/year) will be insufficient for future improvements, except projects that could be completed every few years after funds accumulate.

In 2016, approximately 85% of the parcel tax funds were used just to maintain the existing landscaping. The increased costs since 1995 to maintain our community landscaping, even with professional management and competitive bids to control maintenance costs, now eats up the majority of our funds annually.

What will accrue each year, after maintaining a small, yet necessary reserve, will be about \$40,000 for improvements. For a vast community as Greenbrae, this is insufficient to do any meaningful improvements but every few years going forward. With this financial projection and in view of all the needed landscaping improvements (see below), both the GPOA Board and the CSA 16 Advisory Board unanimously recommended to the County Board of Supervisors that they approve creation of ballot Measure A to increase our annual parcel tax. They unanimously approved creation of Measure A. **This measure did not pass, twice.**

To answer a question that arises often, our landscaping budget comes from our CSA 16 assessment—not from our voluntary GPOA dues.



Colorful, pollinator-friendly perennials at our La Cuesta entry.





Summer Flowering Crape Myrtles in Greenbrae. Drought tolerant and flowering when most other trees are not.

Landscape Improvements: Past & Future

Here's a summary of landscape improvements completed over the past 23 years plus planned future improvements. Professional landscape designs exist for a few of the planned projects.

Past: Capital Improvements Completed, 1995 - 2017 (Design, Irrigation, Planting)

- Raised curbs at Eliseo and La Cuesta entrances and other entrance islands
- Eliseo Median Islands
- Los Cerros 1st Island
- La Cuesta Forest Island
- New Entries at Corte Comoda and Manor Road
- Upgrade Entrances at Eliseo and La Cuesta
- Almenar - North Almenar intersection
- North Almenar – Selective Clearing and Infill Planting
- Corte Lodato
 - Via La Cumbre North Island, North End of Middle Island
 - Via La Cumbre Middle Island (South Nose)
 - Via La Cumbre Middle Island - Selective Demolition



- Bretano Way Selective Clearing and Infill Planting
- Sir Francis Drake Corte Morada Park frontage
- Sir Francis Drake Manor Road to Corte Comoda
- Sir Francis Drake La Cuesta to Corte Morada Park
- New Entry Structure – North end of Via La Cumbre North Island
- Via La Cumbre Middle Island (South Nose)
- Via La Cumbre Middle Island - Selective Demolition
- Via Chepparo – Selective Clearing, Pruning, Perimeter hedge reduction
- Corte Cayuga 1st and 2nd Islands

Future: Capital Improvement Projects

Our CSA 16 Advisory Board and the County designed beautiful, major improvements to the SFD entrances at Eliseo and La Cuesta. Due to the 5-year drought, these projects had to be put on hold. We have been able to prune, clear, repair, and paint both the La Cuesta and the Eliseo entrances in the interim. The SFD Rehabilitation Project will reconfigure the first islands at both entrances by adding dedicated left turn lanes as part of a systematic design to facilitate traffic flow on SFD, which keeps these two entry projects on hold.

Further projects may include (if/when budget accumulates):

- | | |
|----------------------------------|-----------|
| • Eliseo and La Cuesta Entrances | \$200,000 |
| • Los Cerros at La Cuesta | \$100,000 |
| • Eliseo Long Island | \$200,000 |
| • SFD La Cuesta to El Portal | \$100,000 |
| • Via La Cumbre – South Island | \$200,000 |
| • Via La Cumbre – North Island | \$200,000 |
| • North Almenar | \$ 50,000 |
| • Corte Morada | \$ 25,000 |
| • Other Islands | \$200,000 |
| o Corte Anita | |
| o Corte Elena | |
| o Vista Grande (2) | |
| o Corte Ramon | |
| o Corte Lodato | |

Total: **\$1,275,000**



When Will Our Median Be Improved?

Occasionally, neighbors contact us inquiring, “When will our street’s median be improved?” In time, we intend to make improvements to all islands across Greenbrae. It takes time, money, and personal effort (not just telling others you want it done.) Entrances, medians and islands with the highest visibility and traffic were improved first so the greatest number of residents and visitors could experience the improvements. And areas where eucalyptus trees were removed years ago after the Oakland Hills fire were a priority (Eliseo, Bretano Way, Almenar, North Almenar). To advocate and participate in planning improvements to an island near your home, please organize your neighbors, select a congenial Block Captain, and contact GPOA at landscaping@greenbrae.org and info@greenbrae.org.

Optimizing Value with Our Limited Budget

We wish we could do more landscape improvements and do them faster, but doing this professionally and safely requires significant resources as outlined above. We pay for these improvements through our annual CSA 16 tax assessment. This assessment has not changed since 1993 in step with the increasing costs of construction, so we work within our budget and do new areas as we save up the resources.

Sustainable Landscape Design

Our community’s plant palette and landscaping philosophy include native trees and shrubs (e.g., Oaks, Red Buds, Manzanitas, Matilija Poppies) and other plants (e.g., Rosemary, Australian Fuchsia, Plumbago, Lemonade Berry) well adapted to our soils and environment—including our climate, deer, insects, and fungi. Plants are selected according to many seasonal factors including flower color and size, leaf form and colors, and the size and the density of the tree or shrub when mature (to provide some privacy yet retain views).

A major objective is to enhance our landscape with beautiful plantings that require limited maintenance and irrigation once established. This controls maintenance costs, frees up resources (e.g., money and irrigation water) for other improvements, and helps to ensure landscaping that flourishes and matures for generations to come. Other objectives include safety of pedestrians and vehicles, protection of heritage trees, and fire hazard mitigation.



Water Conservation

Did you know that approximately 1/3 of the water that our water district (MMWD) supplies goes to landscaping? In spite of the incredible rains the 2016-2017 season, drought concerns and conservation are key to responsible landscape design and management. Our landscapers and automated systems regularly adjust irrigation run times to provide just what the plants need to be healthy. We installed “smart” irrigation controllers at our 3 SFD entrances along Eliseo and in our 2 parks. These controllers measure daily temperatures and water more and less depending on current temperatures. For other specific resources and suggestions, see www.marinwater.org.

Greenbrae is a commercial leader in water management while we maintain and improve our community’s medians, SFD frontage, and parks. We will install more of the “smart” irrigation controllers.

Landscape Maintenance Calendar

Below is a general calendar of major landscaping activities. The County and I direct a professional landscaping company to perform ongoing maintenance for our community. We have a signed agreement with very specific weekly and monthly activities identified over many years managing our complex site.

GPOA ANNUAL LANDSCAPE MAINTENANCE CALENDAR				
	Spring	Summer	Fall	Winter
Ongoing Maintenance	X	X	X	X
Heritage Tree Pruning		X		X
Oak & Pine Spraying	X		X	
Shrub Pruning	X	X	X	X
Landscaping Improvements (larger projects)	X		X	
Hand seeding of wildflowers			X	

In the winter and spring (and as needed for safety), we prune shrubs back from the roadways. Then, flower buds develop to provide all the color we love in the spring and summer. Larger landscaping improvement projects tend to be in the spring and fall, avoiding the heavy rain and erosion season, allowing for gentler rains and cooler seasons to establish our plantings. All of these efforts are complemented by the wildflowers and flowering perennials seeded occasionally onto our open hillsides. Notice the colorful displays that begin in late winter and continue through early summer. Look on our website, www.greenbrae.org, for photos of flowering medians from recent springs and summers.





Wildflower Seeds Across Greenbrae

In the past, in the fall around Halloween, we sprayed seeds of wildflowers and flowering perennials onto open spaces in medians across Greenbrae. The seed mix included a broad variety of spring- and summer-flowering annuals and perennials. Every spring, the show of flowers is stronger as certain species take hold and sow their seeds, too. We increased the seed count of the most successful plants to date and added new shade-tolerant and butterfly-attracting species and others from areas similar to microclimates and conditions across Greenbrae. We do not include any grasses in our mix to minimize potential fuel for fire on our hillsides and islands.

Each median and hillside has unique characteristics of exposure, soil depth, and rock. So, from the same mix of seeds, each area uniquely germinates and establishes itself. Some areas blossom with many species. In other areas we see only a few (or no) species germinating and growing to size. Yet, overall the number of wildflowers is increasing and many new areas are flowering as never before. Our most significant successes are along the Sir Francis Drake frontage and along Almenar, Bretano, and Via la Cumbre—streets with large open hillsides. We will continue to seed these areas as well as Via Cheparro, Via Navarro, Via la Paz, and Via Barranca and hope to see an even better show of flowers everywhere in coming years.



If you are interested in seeding your property, some of the species most successful to date are Clovers (in various colors, good for drawing nitrogen out of the air to the soil); Calendulas; California Poppy; Coreopsis; Farewell-to-Spring; Gazania; Lupines; Pride of Madeira; Tidy tips; Baby Snapdragon; Shasta Daisy; and Yarrow. These are the common names and you can find them in the **Sunset Western Garden Book**.

Pruning our Heritage Trees and Shrubs

On a 5 to 6-year rotation, and as needed based on growth rates, following professional arborist standards we structurally and architecturally prune small to large heritage trees in the islands and curbsides to keep them healthy and to minimize limb and tree failures.

Each summer and winter, we prune many heritage trees along curbs and in Greenbrae's medians. This includes trees planted by Greenbrae's developers, such as Sycamores and Silver Maples, as well as native and planted Oaks, Bays, and Pines. Professional pruning preserves and enhances trees by removing dead and dying branches and creates a strong branch structure to minimize structural failures. This improves long-term beauty and safety. We credit the systematic, professional pruning and monitoring of our community trees for the quite limited branch and tree failures in recent winters compared with the past.

Curbside trees are pruned to similar standards and we have developed beautiful canopied roads. Stroll or drive the Eliseo entrance, Corte Morada, Via Cheparro, and the 1st block of Bretano Way (between Almenar and La Cuesta). Manor Road curbside tree pruning is an exception—PG&E “directionally prunes” the Sycamores to keep growth out of the power lines and the trees don't have the natural canopied look we have developed on the other streets. If you have a curbside heritage tree in front of your home, you own it and can do what you wish with it. If there is a hazardous condition with a tree or your block is not up in the rotation for pruning in the next round or two, we recommend you have the condition or tree professionally addressed or pruned for structural integrity, beauty, and to create a canopied road. Some homeowners over the years have removed their curbside trees which is in your rights if you so prefer.



Native Coast Live Oak professionally pruned for structural strength and beauty in one of our Greenbrae medians.

We also prune out diseased and dying branches on small and large shrubs throughout our medians. As with the SFD frontage, older, disfigured, hazardous, and woody shrubs are pruned to the ground to rejuvenate them. At first, this creates gaps. Healthy plants rejuvenate with fuller fountains of growth. This helps to keep our hillsides green and growing and eliminates fuel for fires.



Owl Boxes and Integrated Pest Management



Working with County Parks experts, we follow “Integrated Pest Management” (IPM) principles to control pests (rats, gophers, moles, insects) and fungi (Sudden Oak Death, “water molds” and others). Read about principles and practical methods here, <http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/>. We mulch heavily to control weeds, preclude the need for herbicides and, as the chips break down, improve our soil and consequently the health and beauty of our landscaping.

Barn owls are part of an IPM program. Owls are voracious consumers of rodents (gophers, rats, moles, voles) that promise to really help control our rodent populations without the need for us to use pesticides. If you have rodent problems (whether it’s gophers and moles in your garden or mice and rats in or near your home), first exclude, prevent, and try to trap them; plus, protect the owls. The Hungry Owl Project will recommend pest control companies that don’t use poison and can help with any concerns. See www.hungryowl.org, call (415) 454-4587, or email info@hungryowl.org.

Years ago, we installed 4 owl boxes in median islands to help control the diverse rodent population living in our ivy, lawns, hillsides, and gardens. Several homeowners in the greater community also have owl boxes with resident owls. The barn and screech owls that take residence across Greenbrae are moving in from west and north Marin. These owls hunt up to 3 miles from their homes and typically not in the immediate area of their home. With more boxes throughout the community, we all stand to benefit from fewer rats, mice, gophers, voles, and moles. You can order a box from the Hungry Owl Project, part of **Wildcare** in San Rafael, www.hungryowl.org.

We ask residents to NEVER poison rodents.

The owls, in their nighttime hunting, eat poisoned or dying rodents and die. So do other raptors and wildlife that eat poisoned rodents.

As related by Alex Godbe, the Director of HOP, “Having Barn Owls in the community is such a joy. I have found that once



the owls move into a neighborhood they soon become the celebrities and are furiously protected ... they become 'our owls.'" Building nesting boxes as a community and family project can be wonderful. Seeing a glimpse of these pale, ethereal hunters of the night never fails to inspire. If you are lucky enough to have a family move into a nesting box close by, it will be irresistible to go and watch them each night along with your neighbors. Please do respect that these magnificent little birds need to be left in peace and do not disturb the boxes in any way. Once juvenile owls fledge, anytime from May to August, you will be able to see the youngsters just after the sun goes down in the trees close to their nest box for several weeks before they disperse.

Listen at night for the Barn Owls eerie scream, which can be heard at <http://www.owlpages.com/sounds.php>. See if you recognize any owls from the barn owl and screech owl samples. We have a screech owl somewhere in our immediate neighborhood of North Almenar and have heard it at night for years. Here is a photo of a screech owl that took up residence in our community owl box on Corte Lodato:



A Screech Owl in an owl box up on Corte Lodato, November, 2008.



Our Community Web Site and Email List (Sign Up!)

In 2000, the GPOA launched www.greenbrae.org to communicate about Sudden Oak Death and other information of interest and value to our community. [Sign up for our Greenbrae homeowner e-mail list at greenbrae.org](#), Click on Contact, then the upper-right link to the Mailing List! We use this list and NextDoor to keep in touch with homeowners on issues of importance to us all.

Please feel free to let us know what you think by emails to landscaping@greenbrae.org and info@greenbrae.org. We love to hear the **compliments** as well as the **issues** and **suggestions**. Have a happy and healthy fall and holiday season!

Scott Sherman, PhD

GPOA Landscaping Chairman



California Poppies and Crimson Clover in the Spring in Greenbrae. Drought tolerant they attract beneficial insects as well as improve soil fertility.



GREENBRAE PROPERTY OWNERS ASSOCIATION

POST OFFICE BOX 383, KENTFIELD, CA 94914

415.461.7338 • INFO@GREENBRAE.ORG