

TO: MEADOWS FERNDALE HOA BOARD
FROM: MEADOWS FERNDALE LANDSCAPE COMMITTEE
SUBJECT: LANDSCAPING COMMON AREAS

MEADOWS FERNDALE HOA PLANTING STRIP LANDSCAPE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Meadows Ferndale HOA (MFHOA) landscape committee (LC) was formed to assist the board with further analysis of the planting strip landscape. “Planting strip” means that portion of the right-of-way between the outside of the curb and the inside of the sidewalk. City of Ferndale (COF) Municipal Code further defines planting strips as:

12.16.080 Planting strips.

It shall be the responsibility and duty of the abutting property owner to maintain, repair and reconstruct adjacent planting strips in an attractive and safe manner. Planting strips shall be maintained, repaired or reconstructed with an approved material and free of vegetation which tends to impair the utilization of the right-of-way for public purposes. Nonliving material shall be level with the top of the curb and the sidewalk and shall be contained within the planting strip so as not to be a hazard to the persons using the sidewalk or street or crossing the strip going to or from a vehicle. Living vegetation exclusive of street trees placed in the planting strip shall be of a height that does not interfere with the lawful and safe use of the public right-of-way and shall be maintained by weeding, spraying, fertilizing, watering and trimming. Approval shall be obtained from the City Engineer prior to the installation of materials within the planting strip. (Ord. 618 § 1, 1980)

The MFHOA 6.6 Home and Lot Maintenance (CC&R 5.11) states “The MFHOA is responsible for maintaining grass and trees between the sidewalk and the street”.(Planting Strips)

Considering the COF municipal code requirement for reconstructed planting strips needing approval, the landscape committee contacted the city planner for guidance and clarification.

1. Do you need to approve our finalized plan?
Yes. The landscaping plan was part of the plat approval. Any revisions must be approved by the City.
2. Do you exclude specific materials? For example rock. 2-4" cobbles have been suggested. I'm concerned about the potential tripping hazards rock will cause and potential harm to street trees.
Not specifically. We do discourage cobbles, however. The City would be concerned about them getting in the streets as you mentioned.
3. Do you exclude specific plants? For example planting an eco-friendly meadow seed mix to attract beneficial insects. I like this design choice in the parking strip parallel to the wetlands. For the strips parallel to homes using a summer dry garden designed with low growing sedums, grasses, bulbs, drought tolerant perennials topped with gravel.
The City does not have a species list for street trees. We do discourage trees that, in the opinion of the landscape architect, could impact the sidewalk or street. Meadow seeds are ok if the HOA is ok with it and the strip is properly maintained.
3. Can we replace the turf with wider sidewalks? I know the impervious requirements for the individual lots but not the right-away.
In theory, this may be a possibility. The impervious surfaces for the development would have to be recalculated to determine if the pond has adequate capacity. While each lot has a maximum, so does the development. All impervious surfaces are included in the pond capacity calculation.

Jesse Ashbaugh – Assistant Planner
City of Ferndale

Having clarification from COF and MFHOA on the responsibility of maintenance and the revision of the parking strips, the LC was able to complete an analysis and make recommendations. With parking strips abutting individual property and common area wetlands, the LC separated the two areas and applied analysis to each area accounting for differences in use of the PS landscape. The LC believes it's important that the property owners understand the COF code assigning responsibility to the abutting property owner on maintaining the PS, although, MFHOA is taking the responsibility of maintenance, the COF will send letters to the property owner for non-maintenance violations.

Western WA Summer Dry Gardening/New Construction/Maintenance Impact to Parking Strips

The dry summers of western WA are not the sole contributor to the thinning turf within the parking strips. When the Meadows was developed the turf and trees were planted prior to house construction. This is standard development in any community USA. As a result the parking strips become stressed with soil compaction from the house construction, and lack of care. In our development builders were inconsistent about repairing the damage from their construction. Where the builder re-sodded the parking strip sod looks better.



The quality of the sod initially installed may also be a factor. The sod coming from Professional Turf Growers, used in the MFHOA development is a three way mix of rye grass. Some Rye grass varieties are more disease resistant than others. Whatcom

Landscapes told the LC they don't use Professional Turf Growers turf because they found the turf to have disease issues. Rye is a clump forming grass. If not properly watered and fertilized after initial installation, one or more of the rye varieties is weakened with fungus, and or drought, and dies. This leaves the bare spots for wind to blow top soil away, and weeds to germinate.

Proper maintenance also influences the success of any turf grass. Non irrigated turf should not be fertilized in the late spring, and the mower height should be raised in the summer. A longer blade of grass shades the root area during the hotter summer. Windwood, the current maintenance contractor, is fertilizing April, May, July, and Sept. per contract, and mowing with large riding mowers that scalp the turf. A further note on the mowing, the LC was told by William French, that he was charging more to mow the PS with a push mower, which they are not. Also, the mowing schedule is weekly in June, and bi-weekly in July, August, and Sept when the non-irrigated turf is dormant and not growing.

Turf grass requires 1" of water per week to maintain good health, continue to grow, and retain green color. The turf grass will turn brown and go into dormancy without the 1" per week. However, to remain in a healthy dormancy 1" of water per month is needed. Western WA doesn't always get that amount. With the COF asking property owners to allow turf grass to go dormant in the summer and in keeping with the water conservation schedule, the LC believes the boards previous water truck option to maintain green grass is not consistent with COF water conservation requests. However, properly maintaining turf grass to allow going dormant in the summer is consistent with COF water conservation practices.

The use of rock previously recommend for use in the PS has problems that was not previously considered. The COF does not recommend cobble rock, due to "a hazard to the persons using the sidewalk or street or crossing the strip going to or from a vehicle". Although, smaller gravel rock, may be approved by the COF, the installation becomes a hazard to the street trees. To comply with COF code that "Nonliving material shall be level with the top of the curb and the sidewalk", the area would require excavation disturbing the tree roots. The gravel would also add weight compacting the soil and creating additional heat surrounding the trees. The LC questions risking the health of the trees after spending thousands of dollars hand watering the trees to get them established.

Proposed Alternative Courses of Action

With the COF not recommending rock, the LC have three alternatives previously not considered. The LC discussed other options, however, without knowing a budget, it was challenging to get contractors to be responsive. Therefore, option C was designed by LC chairperson, Ann Lesan BS, Landscape Design, using estimation tools from her former Landscape Architecture employer, applying retail material costs

and labor rate from a local contractor. Option B (Envirolawn) and C are used in other communities. Reference: Flip Your Strip program - Utah Water Savers <https://utahwatersavers.com/Program/2/flip-your-strip> . Perhaps MFHOA could be trailblazers in the COF and work with the city to start our own WA Water Savers Flip Your Strip.

- A. Alternative 1: Have the responsibility of the PS abutting individual property assigned to the property owner. Consider a cost reduction in the monthly dues to compensate all property owners for the cost saving the MFHOA would receive from the Landscape maintenance company.
- B. Alternative 2: Have the parking strips refurbished with drought tolerant turf grass seed and Envirolawn seed.
- C. Alternative 3: Have the parking strips abutting the property owner and front entrance replaced and planted with a summer dry garden. This being the most expensive option could be used as a hybrid with options B, in selective PS and installed in phases.

Cost of Alternatives

- A. Alternative 1: \$0 to MFHOA. The landscape maintenance cost performed by Windwood would be reduced and could be passed onto the individual property owners to compensate for their additional maintenance costs.
- B. Alternative 2: \$25,999 initial installation but with no maintenance costs provided by Windwood. \$17,085 initial installation with \$13,164.45 maintenance costs provided by ATSI. Note the bids are not for the same installation work, the methods differ.
- C. Alternative 3: \$1,291 is initial installation cost for lot 129, summer dry garden with 129 square feet on the PS. MFHOA has 114 lots with at least some PS abutting their property. The lot sizes vary greatly, therefore, each lot would require individual design work. This may not be affordable to our MFHOA, even after considering installation in phases. If the board determines this option maybe affordable the LC chair is willing to volunteer addition design time for the remaining lots.

Non-Financial Pros & Cons

- A. Alternative 1: Property owners caring for PS would comply with the COF code, eliminating confusing responsibility of maintenance with the COF in the event of code violation. For example tree limbs impairing the utilization of the right-of-way. Also, comments were made to the LC "I can take care of the

PS better than the MFHOA Landscape Company”. This would require a vote to change the CC&R.

- B. Alternative 2: Envirlawn seed is low growing and won't impair the utilization of the right-of-way for public purposes, as required by COF. Environmentally friendly, attracting beneficial insects, and the nitrogen fixing the soil will benefit the street trees. Drought tolerant, fewer mowing, complements the look of the wetlands. Some people may not like the look and attraction of bees. MFHOA can campaign to educate the benefits of this type of planting and how bees if left alone won't sting. This will require COF approval. The drought tolerant turf is a conventional PS. The active growing roots reduce soil compaction, promoting healthy soil to benefit the trees. Better turf selection than the rye that was initial installed. Will not require COF approval. Will go dormant and look golden brown in summer. May require over seeding after three to five years.
- C. Alternative 3: This is designed to be a summer dry garden. Summer dry gardens are watered the first summer then little or no supplemental water after the first year. The design complies with COF code with low soft plants that won't "impair the utilization of the right-of-way for public purposes". The pavers are "level with the top of the curb and the sidewalk and shall be contained within the planting strip so as not to be a hazard to the persons using the sidewalk or street or crossing the strip going to or from a vehicle". The plants were selected to have year round interest. Although, this is a low maintenance plant palate designed to have plants grow together, some weeding will be needed. Plants die and need to be replaced. This is not a conventional looking parking strip and people may not like this look. But with COF water restrictions and more frequent summer heat events we need to be non-conventional in our design approach. Therefore, the LC suggest this design approach be planted around the mail boxes as a test site overseen by the LC and volunteers.

Recommendation

The LC believes it's logical to divide the PS abutting common ground wetland areas (1) and PS abutting property owners (2) into two categories. The use and look of each area is different. Property owners will view the parking strips abutting their property differently than the PS abutting the wetlands. Having the board move forward with the wetland PS will be less personable to them and more accepting. The PS in front of properties is often viewed as personal property. How the property looks becomes personable. Allowing property owners to vote by ranking their preference to choices about the landscape in front of their property, psychologically, gives them ownership in the selection process. This also allows time for the last remaining lots to finish construction,

allowing the board to instruct the builders to refurbish the PS. It's shameful the condition builders have left the PS.

The LC recommend budgeting for the Envirolawn abutting the wetlands PS for next year, with a summer dry garden option C planted around the mail boxes and the front entry PS, as a test site overseen by the LC and volunteers. Send a survey out to property owners ranking options in their preference for PS abutting property. 1. Vote to have the PS maintenance turned over to property owners. 2. Refurbished PS with a drought tolerant turf grass mix and watered 1" per month in the summer. 3. Summer Dry Garden, if the board determines this is affordable.

With the estimates being different the LC cannot make a recommendation for which contractor should do the work. If the board could make a decision which options to proceed with, the LC can then ask for bids with scope of work being the same.

Future Tasks

Street trees are missing from lots, 47,68,70,74,97,101,103,105,118. The development design guidelines states "each lot shall install one (1) street tree from approved list". It's unknown if these lots were just missed when the trees were originally planted or died. Lot 33 lost a tree from a previous winter snow event. These trees should be budgeted and expensed as regular maintenance. All existing trees are established enough to have developmental pruning for structure. Limbs are needing to be removed as they are obstructing pedestrians' use of the sidewalk, and will eventually obstruct parked cars. Pruning of trees should be budgeted for this as regular maintenance. Stop watering the trees as scheduled this past summer. The gator bags are designed for newly planted trees where the roots have not extended out of the root ball. Trees that have been in the ground for several years like ours have roots growing beyond the drip line, it's those feeder roots that need water. Watering around the trunk at this stage could cause rot. If you overwater (for example, too frequently), you don't allow enough air for the roots to "breathe," and rot or disease can set in. Our trees are planted in clay soil that dries out very slowly and over watering is a concern. Also budget regular maintenance to have the tree rings top dressed with a coarse mulch. Properly top dressing every two to three years will keep mowers and trimmers from damaging the trunk and dress up the PS.