

## Grounds Committee Meeting Minutes

February 20, 2025

**Please note: Highlighted, bordered items are recommended for Board action**

### ATTENDEES

Mary Gray, Chair

Jane Brown

Paula Connors

Joanne Massoni

Theresa McCrackin

Excused: Don Ellwanger

Bill Newbill – not present/is he still on the Committee??

Board Liaison: Courtenay Delfin

Nepenthe staff: Nicole and Trevon

Homeowners: Nancy Cochrane, Don Landsittel, Carol Loew,

Attending on zoom: Karen Lowrey, Cheryl Nelson

### AGENDA

#### Homeowner Comments Part I

Nancy Cochrane, representing the homeowners, addressed the Committee regarding ongoing issues with 1423 Commons, highlighting the homeowners' frustration over several years; thanking Nicole Marks for attention to safety issues in the common area on the left side of the property; thanking the Committee and Board for approving ivy remediation (currently delayed by an 'ivy shortage"); and thanking the Committee for including 1423 Commons on the current recommendation list for remediation of the front yard portion of the property, while awaiting more complete information about the scope of improvements.

#### Agenda Item #1

##### **Action: Recommend Board Approval of 10 Homeowners' Requests and Five Tree Remediations based on Garth Ruffner Walk Notes and Recommendations**

The attached table "Specific Address Observations and Recommendations" lists findings and specific recommendations for 15 properties viewed by Grounds Committee members on Feb 10. The recommendations include appropriate plant names and proposed locations which address the issues raised in the homeowners' requests. To facilitate the communication process with the landscape contractor, the committee included a recommendation to place landscape stakes and flags in situations where plant or tree location, or access to irrigation is critical to the recommendation. In addition, the Committee will be providing a specific table with number of plants and work to be done for Oscar to do the cost proposal. The Committee desires to minimize the impact related to the \$500 crew activation fee charge, by grouping the requests by location.

Nicole Marks outlined the process for next steps as follows:

1. Grounds Committee initial recommendations forwarded to the Board
2. Board considers and approves/denies recommended actions on individual properties
3. Cost Proposals are requested of Carson; a clarification meeting of Oscar, Nicole, and Mary scheduled as needed
4. Carson Proposal reviewed by Grounds Committee
5. Grounds Committee Recommendations forwarded to the Board

Nicole Marks indicated that the Grounds Committee would need to request reimbursement for expenditures to purchase stakes and flags.

Moved: McCrackin  
Seconded: Massoni  
Vote: Unanimous

#### **Agenda Item #2**

##### **Action: Recommendation regarding removal of tree in front of 1004 Dunbarton Circle**

In the course of the community walk, Mr. Ruffner noted a tree in front of 1004 Dunbarton because it was placed too close to the residence with some branches almost touching the residence and is leaning over the pedestrian walkway due to insufficient sunlight.

Moved: Massoni  
Seconded: McCrackin  
Vote: Unanimous

#### **Agenda Item #3**

##### **Action: Recommendation of Board consideration of general Observations resulting from Feb 10 Community walk with Garth Ruffner, landscape consultant**

The attached table ‘General Observations for Further Consideration’ summarizes a wide range of community-wide issues and takeaways from the Feb 10 consultation walk. The Chair and other members discussed broader community-wide actions, some of which could be implemented quickly and inexpensively, and some of which require further information or study.

#### **Recommendations for immediate implementation**

##### **Grass Issues:**

- Raise the mowing height to 2 ½ inches, especially in winter, to minimize scraping grass and exposing dirt patches.
- Utilize one hour of Garth Ruffner contract to provide recommendations on grass remediation, appropriate irrigation, and aphid spraying for crepe myrtles. This information would be used in evaluation of specific homeowner requests, on these subjects.

Moved: Connors  
Seconded: Brown  
Vote: Unanimous

**Independent Arborist:** solicit a proposal and presentation from an independent arborist to advise the Committee and Board on preserving the health of the tree population and how to use funds prudently.

Moved: Massoni  
Seconded: Brown  
Vote: Unanimous

#### **Agenda Item #4**

##### **Discussion: Grounds Committee focus on Homeowners’ Requests**

The Chair reaffirmed Board direction that for the current budget year, the primary emphasis of the Grounds Committee would be eliminating the backlog of homeowner requests, and working to minimize unnecessary expenditures. In response to questions, entire Committee will work as

a team to provide consistency of recommendations and pool common requests (like grass or groundcover remediation). Nicole Marks also emphasized that landscape issues are often identified and addressed as a result of regular management walks. The Committee appreciates Nicole Marks' work in developing the Work Order tracker as a method of organizing and evaluating the ongoing pool of homeowners' requests, and the most recent tracker is attached as "**Nepenthe Service Request Tracker – Updated 2-19-25.**"

#### **Agenda Item # 5**

##### **Discussion: Concerns about blocking informal paths through the landscape**

The Chair noted increasing calls regarding informal paths degrading vegetation becoming a security and grounds concern, particularly on University Avenue. Discussion ensued about potential options such as directing Carson to allow paths through ivy to grow back, utilizing physical plant and boulder deterrents, and educating the residents and their contractors about using only paved pathways. The Committee agreed to leave this as an open item to be revisited at the next meeting as more information is obtained.

#### **Agenda Item # 6**

##### **Recommendation for Board approval of updated plant list**

The attached document "**Proposed Updated Nepenthe Master Plant List, 2-28-2025**" is a major component of the contract with the independent landscape architect, in addition to advising on specific approaches to homeowner requests. The document is a comprehensive update to the Nepenthe plant list to emphasize appropriate drought-tolerant landscape improvements.

Moved: Brown

Seconded: Massoni

Vote: Unanimous

#### **Agenda Item # 7**

##### **Discussion: Review of past years' overall landscape expenditures**

The attached document "**Summary of Landscape Expenditures 2015-2023**" was distributed as a way to begin educating the Committee members as to the historical relationship between budgeted operations landscape costs compared to discretionary expenditures, over and above budgeted expenses.

#### **Homeowner Comments Part II**

Don Landsittel provided comments regarding a variety of issues regarding

- Timing and processes for accomplishing thoughtful advice and counsel to the Board
- The updated plant list
- Need for tall trees, and budgeting for replacement when trees are removed
- Rollover of excess or unused funds
- Clarification of the role of an independent arborist

**See Attachments on following pages**

Specific Address Observations and Recommendations by Garth Ruffner– See photos are on last pages		
1	1107 Commons, Tree remediation on alley near back gate	Roots need to be ground out, then excavate and replace. Jane has a photo? Plant New tree: Emerald sunshine elm and Lime tuff Lomandra grass
2	1318 Vanderbilt triangular piece of bare ground	Very over-shaded by redwood trees. "Low odds of success with any kind of planting." "Just leave it." Problematic irrigation. Just leave the duff
3 North	307 Dunbarton; Nandina issues	Keep some of the nandina, softens areas adjacent to fence. Where fence makes an "L" shape remove one on short side, and 2 on long side. In front of the side window on alley, plant lime tuff lomandra, dark green; grows to 30 inches high. Remove nandina at left of gate. Keep nandina to right gate.
3 North	2310 Swarthmore Tree remediation	"Emerald sunshine elm" plus Myoporum Pavifolium
3 North	101 Dunbarton: grass had disappeared , currently a dirt pile	Depends on irrigation location; possible change nozzles on existing irrigation so they water the remaining grass. Extend the current grid drip irrigation along the fence and house down to water the new planting area between the large trees on either side of the door. Use of vinca minor in front between the two large trees from the shrubs to the street
3 South	813 Dunbarton: replace bush stumps,	Excavate shrub stumps on both sides of walkway near front door. Plant 1 or 2 Cool vista Dianella, and Ceanothus to cover tree roots and Iris Douflasii near the fence
3 South	809 Dunbarton; bare area under front window	Plant with Sollya Heterophylla
4	1403 Commons– need to verify correct address and homeowner. Bare grass issues plus Spindly yellow plant between bedroom window and brick half-wall	Leave plant in place but trim back. It is healthy, just needs MAINTENANCE Add 3 shade perennials – Bear's breech/ Winter Bergenia
4	1423 Commons: front yard not compatible with adjacent yards, lots of bare ground	Not too bad; Need to establish defensive line to control ivy. Suggest plant "ceanothus" or "vinca minor" in a sweeping/curving line/S-shape, 24 inches apart or in a circle of 24 inches (not a grid) to break up the solid underlying ground cover, adds variety and color.

		Don't expand ivy; strawberry groundcover is NOT drought-tolerant to heat, which is probably why it looks so bad in the summer.
4	306 Dunbarton: replace dead azalea	Yes: match the existing azalea in terms of size and color.
4	1004 Dunbarton: tree remediation on triangular parcel of common area.	"geranium, "penstemon", "douglas iris", "lomandra" around transition. with groundcover grid drip irrigation.
5	1257 Vanderbilt plant in bare front area	Creeping mahonia
5	1317 Vanderbilt tree replacement	Plant dwarf red Japanese maple with shade perennial such as "creeping mahonia "in front of window on the right side where the azaleas are. Plant a red maple in front grass area
6 South	710 Elmhurst:	Plant Ceanothus with a 3 Carex Divulsa
6 south	510 Elmhurst tree remediation for removal of 2 trees	Plant 3 "emerald sunshine elm": 2 facing Elmhurst, 1 on the side between 510 and 606.
7	1653 University tree remediation on large bare area	Plant with vinca minor ground cover for quick and easy spreading on bare ground

1318 Vanderbilt



510 Elmhurst Photo 1



1317 Vanderbilt Right side of front door



510 Elmhurst Photo 2



1317 Vanderbilt Left side of front door



710 Elmhurst



1257 Vanderbilt



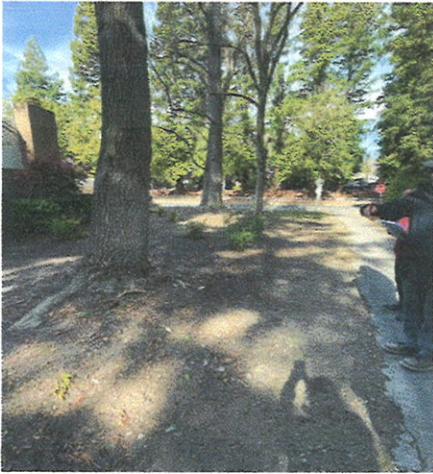
1653 University  
Photo 1



1653  
Photo 2



307 Dunbarton  
Side yard at corner of alley and Elmhurst



809 Dunbarton



2310 Swarthmore



813 Dunbarton

**General Observations from Garth Ruffner for Further Consideration**

- Grass: Sod is better than seed. UC Davis has a new kind of sod, that could be used in addition to sod that is on the list, more drought-tolerant. The issue is the level of effort and cost to appropriately install. The area would need to be dug down and other grass removed. Alternatives include higher grass mowing and groundcovers that are like grass. Utilizing grass-like ground covers does not require the intensive maintenance of grass.
- Grass should be mowed to a height of 2 ½ inches – no need to mow every week in the winter.
- Garth Ruffner suggested that we hire a consulting arborist that does not have a stake in the work to get an unbiased assessment of the health of the trees. Consider consulting arborist, Nichole Harrison with Focal Point Tree, to provide a proposal and presentation on tree health and possible cost savings.
- Low-growing roses around the Dunbarton Sign. Do not prune into balls
- Layering over tree roots, one half inch at a time over time. Only those where the roots are not too high and by putting sand in it would not mound up around the tree
- When considering plants, look at what the maximum size will be and do the planting with a spacing of 50% of that size
- Garth will provide updated plant list.
- Grid drip irrigation should be used

**After-walk Grounds Committee Postmortem Discussion**

- Grass is not an easy fix
- For Grounds Comm of Thursday Feb 20. Need to be specific about location and type and size of plantings. Each address should have photos, and pinpoint location of planting for Carson.
- Suggestion was made for planting landscape flags in the specified locations, the day prior to Carson coming out to do the work. Would need to coordinate to know WHEN Carson would be doing the work.
- Need to combine addresses on work orders to avoid the \$500 charge if plantings are done one-by-one.
- Request Carson to specify number of hours for each house?

**Nepenthe Service Request Tracker - Updated 02.19.25**

W.O. #	Address/Location	Zone #	Current Status
1262776	ENTIRE COMMUNITY	ALL ZONES	Pending Grounds Committee Review
1262816	ENTIRE COMMUNITY	ALL ZONES	Pending Grounds Committee Review
1249091	1318 Vanderbilt	2	Pending Review by Garth
1236920	307 Dunbarton	3	Pending Review by Garth
1239620	813 Dunbarton	3	Pending Review by Garth
1252198	809 Dunbarton	3	Pending Review by Garth
1262480	2330 Swarthmore	3	Pending Grounds Committee Review
1240712	1403 Commons	4	Pending Review by Garth
1253141	306 Dunbarton	4	Pending Review by Garth
1269028	1213 Vanderbilt	5	Pending Zone Steward Review
1235145	1317 Vanderbilt	5	Pending Review by Garth
1249646	1257 Vanderbilt	5	Pending Review by Garth
1229560	310 Elmhurst	6	Pending Grounds Committee Review
1245602	606 Elmhurst	6	Pending Grounds Committee Review
1248489	710 Elmhurst	6	Pending Review by Garth
1265238	1653 University	7	Pending Zone Steward Review
1244838	1449 University	7	Candidate for supplemental planting
1264798	1449 University	7	Pending Zone Steward Review

**NEPENTHE MASTER PLANT LIST (DRAFT, 2-18-2025)**

Type	Botanic Name	Common Name	Height x Spread	Exposure	Foliage	Mass Planting	Entry Accent	Near Ivy	Rain Garden
Trees, Ex. Turf	Acer rubrum 'October Glory'	Red Maple	60'x40'	Sun-Part Shade	Deciduous				
	Betula nigra 'Dura Heat'	River Birch	60'x40'	Sun-Part Shade	Deciduous				
Trees, Large	Pistacia chinensis	Chinese Pistache	50'x50'	Sun	Deciduous				
	Quercus ilex	Holly Oak	50'x50'	Sun-Part Shade	Evergreen				
	Quercus lobata	Valley Oak	60'x70'	Sun-Part Shade	Deciduous				Raised
	Styphnolobium (Sophora) Japonicum	Japanese Pagoda Tree	60'x60'	Sun-Part Shade	Deciduous				
Trees, Medium	Laurus nobilis 'Saratoga'	Greccian Bay Laurel	35'x25'	Sun*-Shade	Evergreen				
	Ulmus propinqua 'Emerald Sunshine'	Emerald Sunshine Hybrid Elm	35'x25'	Sun	Deciduous				
	Ulmus Wilsoniana 'Prospector'	Prospector Hybrid Elm	40'x30'	Sun	Deciduous				
Trees, Small	Cardis reniformis 'Oklahoma'	Oklahoma Redbud	25'x25'	Sun-Part Shade	Deciduous	Minor	Yes		
	Cotinus coggygria 'Royal Purple'	Smoke Tree	20'x20'	Sun	Deciduous	Minor	Yes		
	Lagerstroemia indica (Hybrids)	Crape Myrtle	25'x25'	Sun	Deciduous	Minor	Yes		
	Olea europea 'Swan Hill'	Fruitless Olive	25'x25'	Sun	Evergreen				
	Rhaphiolepis x. 'Majestic Beauty'	Majestic Beauty Indian Hawthorn	15'x15'	Sun	Evergreen	Minor	Yes		
Shrubs, Tall	Dodonaea viscosa 'Purpurea'	Purple Hopseed Bush	15'x10'	Sun-Part Shade	Evergreen	Minor		Fair	
	Heteromeles arbutifolia	Toyon	15'x15'	Sun-Part Shade	Evergreen	Minor		Fair	Raised
	Mahonia x. media 'Marvel'	Columnar Mahonia	8'x6'	Shade	Evergreen	Narrow		Good	
	Xylosma congestum 'Compacta'	Compact Xylosma	12'x12'	Sun-Part Shade	Evergreen	Minor		Fair	
Shrubs, Medium	Arctostaphylos densiflora 'Howard McMinn'	McMinn Manzanita	5'x8'	Sun-Part Shade	Evergreen	Minor		Poor	Raised
	Callistemon viminalis 'Little John'	Compact Bottlebrush	3'x6'	Sun	Evergreen	Major		Poor	
	Carex spissa	San Diego Sedge	4'x3'	Sun-Part Shade	Evergreen	Minor		Good	Bottom
	Rosa californica	California Wild Rose	5'x5'	Sun-Part Shade	Deciduous	Minor		Poor	Raised
	Rosa x. 'Icecap'	Icecap Rose	5'x4'	Sun-Part Shade	Deciduous	Minor	Yes	Fair	
	Sollya heterophylla	Australian Bluebells	5'x5'	Part-Full Shade	Evergreen	Minor		Fair	
Shrubs, Low	Cistus cobariensis 'Little Miss Sunshine'	Variegated Compact Rockrose	2'x4'	Sun-Part Shade	Evergreen	Minor	Yes	Poor	Bottom
	Chondropetalum tectorum	Compact Cape Rush	3'x3'	Sun-Part Shade	Evergreen	Minor		Good	
	Dianella revoluta 'Allyn-Citation'	Cool Vista Dianella	3'x3'	Sun-Part Shade	Evergreen	Major	Yes	Good	
	Lomandra longifolia 'Lomlon'	Lime Tuft Lomandra	3'x5'	Sun-Part Shade	Evergreen	Major		Good	
	Lomandra longifolia 'Roma13'	Platinum Beauty Lomandra	3'x5'	Sun-Part Shade	Evergreen	Minor		Good	

\*Paint trunks w/ white latex paint in full sun

Type	Botanic Name	Common Name	Height x Spread	Exposure	Foliage	Mass Planting	Entry Accent	Near Ivy	Rain Garden	
Perennials	<i>Acanthus mollis</i>	Bear's Breech	3'x6'	Shade	Deciduous	Minor		Good		
	<i>Blechnum spicant</i>	Deer Fern	3'x4'	Shade	Evergreen	Minor		Good		
	<i>Bergenia crassifolia</i>	Winter Bergenia	1'x2'	Shade	Evergreen	Minor	Yes	Poor		
	<i>Cyrtomium falcatum</i>	Japanese Holly Fern	2'x6'	Shade	Evergreen	Major		Good		
	<i>Dietes bicolor</i>	Fortnight Lily	3'x6'	Sun-Part Shade	Evergreen	Major		Good		
	<i>Helleborus argutifolius</i>	Corsican Hellbore	2'x3'	Shade	Evergreen	Minor	Yes	Poor		
	<i>Iris douglasii</i>	Pacific Coast Iris	1'x2'	Part-Full Shade	Evergreen	Major	Yes	Poor		
	<i>Penstemon heterophyllus</i> 'Margarita BOP'	Penstemmon	1'x2'	Sun-Part Shade	Evergreen	Minor	Yes	Poor	Raised	
	<i>Tulbaghia violaceae</i> (non-variegated)	Society Garlic	2'x4'	Sun-Part Shade	Evergreen	Minor	Yes	Poor		
	Groundcovers	<i>Carex divulsa</i>	Eurasian Grey Sedge	1'x3'	Sun-Part Shade	Evergreen	Major		Poor	Bottom
		<i>Ceanothus griseus</i> var. <i>horizontalis</i> 'MATCEAO1'	Highlights Ceanothus (Drip Only)	2'x10'	Sun-Part Shade	Evergreen	Minor		Poor	
		<i>Geranium x. cantabrigiense</i> 'Biokovo'	Biokovo Geranium	1'x3'	Shade	Evergreen	Major		Poor	
		<i>Juniperus sabina</i> 'Buffalo'	Creeping Juniper	1'x8'	Sun-Part Shade	Evergreen	Major		Poor	
		<i>Mahonia repens</i>	Creeping Mahonia	1'x5'	Shade	Evergreen	Minor		Poor	
		<i>Myoporum parvifolium</i>	Creeping Boobialla	1'x8'	Sun	Evergreen	Minor		Poor	
<i>Rosa x. 'Meidrifora', 'Meijocos', 'Meimirrote'</i>		Drift Rose (Coral, Pink, Apricot)	2'x5'	Sun-Part Shade	Deciduous	Major	Yes	Poor		
<i>Vinca minor</i> (low water in shade)		Dwarf Periwinkle	1'x3'	Shade	Evergreen	Major		Poor		
<i>Westringia fruticosa</i> 'Mundi'		Creeping Coast Rosemary	1'x6'	Sun	Evergreen	Major		Poor		

Year	Plantings	Irrigation	Trees	Total	% Increase Spent to Prior Year	Operations Landscape
2015	113,472	7,989	87,371	208,832		314,286
2016	234,653	55,984	135,812	426,449	104.2%	321,876
2017	254,586	198,524	213,747	684,857	60.6%	342,804
2018	333,142	34,615	248,153	615,910	-10.1%	386,940
2019	132,191	48,265	239,656	420,112	-31.8%	418,416
2020	191,127	136,285	195,185	522,597	24.4%	425,548
2021	321,334	369,441	301,472	992,247	89.9%	504,000
2022	671,820	114,335	256,608	1,042,763	5.1%	506,880
2023	831,191	115,900	753,591	1,700,682	63.1%	541,200
2024				1,248,756		586,560