

# **Vegetation Management and Implementation of Master Landscape Plan January 13, 2024**

## **Introduction**

Due to increased awareness of the need for immediate as well as sustained effort to mitigate potential losses to the Hacienda Carmel community (HC) as the result of a wildland fire, several actions have been taken:

1. In August 2021 the Fire Risk Assessment & Mitigation (FRAM) Committee was appointed as an ad hoc committee by the Board of Directors (Board) for the purpose of assessing, determining, and recommending specific actions (both short and long-term), to achieve sustained wildfire mitigation measures. Among the Committee's efforts over the past two years was:

Determining the need for and recommending development of a formal landscape plan as a part of the ongoing fire mitigation process along with management of existing and future vegetation throughout the residential portion of the Hacienda Carmel common area grounds.

2. In July 2021, the Board approved a moratorium to halt planting of vegetation in the common area until a determination was made regarding the types of vegetation best suited for ongoing fire mitigation practices.
3. Beginning October 2021, and continuing through 2022 and 2023 removal of excess vegetation and fuel reduction at the West End area of the property and around the perimeter of the berm surrounding the residential area has been accomplished by the HC grounds crew and outside contractors. To date this work has included removal of a significant amount of brush and undergrowth, removal of dead trees and mastication of piles of old limbs, stumps and debris accumulated over the years.
4. In October 2022, on a recommendation by the FRAM committee, the Board approved the contracted hiring of a landscape architecture company to develop a comprehensive Master Landscape Plan for HC, incorporating, among other goals, a focus on wildfire mitigation and drought resistance for the landscape of the property. The plan was completed in May 2023 and approved by the Board in August 2023.

The governing documents of the Hacienda Carmel Community Association (HCCA) task the Architectural Review Committee (ARC) with the landscaping of the common area of the property. This document is intended to serve as a practical guide for the work of the Landscape Subcommittee of the ARC as it makes recommendations to the Board, management and the grounds staff regarding landscaping of the common area of the property. The goal for all is the successful implementation of the combined strategies of

wildfire mitigation, drought resistance, low maintenance and affordable cost in the maintenance and improvement of the common area landscaping and grounds for the benefit of all Residents.

**The ongoing process of vegetation and landscape management for HC consists of two primary areas: outside the berm (non-residential areas), and inside the berm (residential areas).**

### **Vegetation Management Plan for Areas Outside the Berm**

The Association will continue efforts to mitigate the risk of wildland fires entering the HC property through the following practices:

- Seasonal mowing of annual grasses in the open areas along the eastern, southern, and western sides of the Berm.
- Limbing-up of all trees and maintaining a minimum distance of six feet from the ground for the lowest branches.
- Cutting and pruning of dead trees, branches, or other dry plant material serving as potential fuel sources and the removal of all materials from HC property through the use of the Cypress FPD Chipper Days program, yard waste bins emptied each week, and, if necessary, mastication of a green waste pile.
- Enhancement of fire-break zones between the non-residential and residential areas of HC.
- Ongoing maintenance of vegetation to maintain a 10' clearance of all plant material around all power poles on the property, as indicated by State law.

The above actions will be performed using a combination of HC grounds crew as well as outside contracted services, using Cypress FPD matching grant funding when possible.

### **Vegetation Management and Landscape Plan for Areas Inside the Berm**

The vegetation and landscaping contained within the residential areas inside the Berm includes two distinct categories which are prioritized as follows:

- 1) Planting of new vegetation in locations where previous vegetation has been removed.
- 2) Fire mitigation efforts involving existing trees, shrubs, and other plantings.

**First priority category** – Currently, several locations throughout the residential area have had vegetation removed for various reasons. These areas include the parking area adjacent to the Art Studio, as well as areas adjacent to Units 133, 169, 185, 189 and 197.

Given the sizes of the open spaces and the new list of recommended trees, shrubs, and plants contained in the Master Landscape Plan, the Grounds Supervisor prefers at least at the outset that a third-party consultant be used to determine the specific vegetation and suggested layout for each of these areas. The plans and plant lists would be presented to the Landscape Subcommittee of ARC and then to ARC for review and recommendation to the Board. Owners of Units adjacent to these areas will be invited to attend the ARC meeting when the designs are discussed. The HC Grounds Supervisor and staff will work with the Landscape Subcommittee list of plants and sources to purchase and obtain the plants. The Landscape Subcommittee and/or designer will place the plants according to the design. The HC Grounds Supervisor and crew will be responsible for planting and maintenance.

**Second priority category** – Because of where the HC property is located, it is subject to the statutory requirements for fire mitigation and the creation of defensible space for landscaping surrounding built structures. Zone 1 (5 to 30 feet from a structure) and Zone 2 (30 to 100 feet from a structure) are well defined.<sup>1</sup> The Zero Zone (area of 0 to 5 feet from a structure) awaits further rule-making by California officials, but is anticipated to be restricted to hardscape and low-growing, non-woody (herbaceous) plants that are properly spaced.<sup>2</sup> Significant work is needed to bring the existing landscaping within the residential common area of the community into compliance.

This work includes the limbing-up of trees<sup>3</sup>, trimming trees in close proximity to buildings, removing shrubs that are too close to roofs or buildings, thinning out existing plantings to achieve better horizontal and vertical spacing, removal of dead or dried out shrubs, and in some situations, removal of existing trees and shrubs planted in the Zero Zone of structures. The schedule for this work shall be presented in advance by the staff to the Landscape Subcommittee and ARC.

Reporting and documentation by the Grounds Supervisor of all fire mitigation work done by the grounds crew is required for Firewise USA recertification and Cypress FPD grant funding reports. Reports of time spent, and materials removed shall be provided by staff each month to the Landscape Subcommittee and ARC.

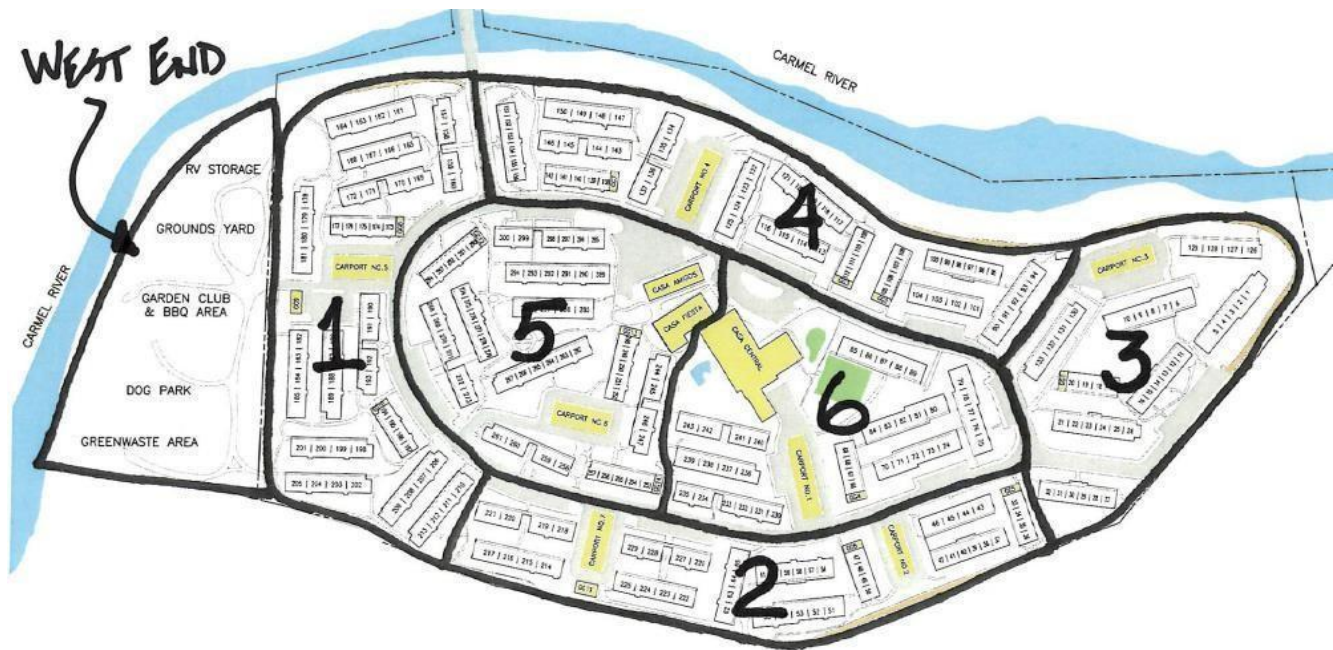
For grounds maintenance the residential portion of HC is divided into six sections, with each section assigned a gardener who has primary responsibility for its care. The HC Grounds Supervisor oversees the six gardeners and may also supplement work efforts in any of the sections as needed. In addition, from time to time there is also other work required at the West End (outside the Berm) that is typically handled with multiple gardeners under the direction of the HC Grounds Supervisor. The six existing gardening sections in the residential area as well as the West End are outlined on the site map on the following page:

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.readyforwildfire.org/prepare-for-wildfire/get-ready/defensible-space/>

<sup>2</sup> The Zero Zone created by California in 2020 awaits final definition and allowed materials.

<sup>3</sup> For evergreen trees and deciduous trees that are leafed out, no more than 30 percent of green plant material can be removed during the growing season. Limbing up small trees should not cause removal of more than one-third of the branches.



The work described as second-priority fire mitigation work on the existing landscaping can be best accomplished with a focused effort using multiple gardeners systematically working on one section at a time, beginning with what has been identified as the most vulnerable area for wildfire risk at the southwest corner of the property, and eventually working through all six sections as numbered on the property site map. This work will be done on a weekly basis as scheduled by the HC Grounds Supervisor in conjunction with the regular section duties of the gardeners as needed. It is anticipated that a great deal of this work can be accomplished through the winter months when turf, plants, and shrubs do not require as much weekly upkeep as in the spring and summer months.

**Going Forward** - Recommendations for refurbishment of larger landscaped areas intended to achieve the desired modeling outlined in the landscape plan may come from the Board, ARC, or staff. Ideas for proposed landscape work will be reviewed and evaluated by the Landscape Subcommittee before presentation to the ARC. ARC will review and make recommendations to the Board. Unit owners in the area under discussion will be invited to attend the ARC meeting when the project is discussed.

The timeline for accomplishing this ongoing work will be subject to the annual amount of funding in the Reserve Study that is allocated for landscape replenishment.

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