

Community Long-Range Landscape Planning

The most successful landscapes are those that are well planned, use mostly long-lived low-maintenance plantings, and receive good maintenance. There are two parts to community long-range landscape planning. First is an analysis of the existing landscape; second is a plan to provide what the community wants.

Producing each part usually requires a completely different skill set.

The Existing Landscape

What do we have now that is of lasting value, and what is not long for this world? A competent professional probably should provide input, while some points listed below require community soul-searching.

1. Identification of, and health and structural analysis of significant trees.
 - 1.1. RULE – remaining useful life expectancy – how long can each tree be expected to continue to perform its function satisfactorily in its situation?
2. Identification of, and health analysis of shrubs, groundcovers, and turfgrass.
 - 2.1. Are the plants still attractive and functional; are they causing problems?
 - 2.1.1. Is renewal pruning or replacement a good option for existing shrubs?
 - 2.1.2. Are we just tired of these plants, and simply want a change?
 - 2.2. Is turfgrass a realistic option in each situation?
 - 2.2.1. In areas where it is not performing well, what are the limiting factors for a lawn, and what options are there?
 - 2.3. What needs to be done to make the turfgrass as healthy as is realistic?
3. Are there other landscape-related issues to be considered, such as fencing, screening, lighting, irrigation, drainage and wet spots, or erosion?

The Future Landscape

Consider the truly valuable plants identified in the existing landscape, and what the community's vision of itself is in ten or twenty years, or longer.

1. What parts of the existing landscape are going to be retained, and what parts are going to be removed?
 - 1.1. What protection or treatments for existing plants will be needed?
2. How will the project(s) be implemented?
 - 2.1. Will a design-build contractor be chosen to do this?
 - 2.2. Will you have your own designer draw up plans and specs, and then put the job out for bid?
 - 2.3. Will volunteers, management, or your designer oversee implementation?
3. When will this be done – all at once or in stages?
 - 3.1. If in stages, how do you determine what to do first; and how long a time period will the project be spread over... five or ten or twenty years?
4. Is there a budget, and how is the community going to pay for the work?
 - 4.1. Cash on the barrelhead; financing; special assessment.

A Few Pitfalls

1. Inertia
 - 1.1. We cannot decide what to do first, so nothing happens.
 - 1.2. We cannot agree on what is the best plan, so nothing happens.
2. Penny Pinching.
 - 2.1. There are places to cut costs on any project, but picking the wrong pennies to pinch may cost a bundle later on.

3. Short Term Perspectives or Individual Agendas

3.1. Residents who, for one reason or another, are only looking at the next few years can dominate the planning process, and may want to postpone solutions and/or spend as little as possible.

3.1.1. Many of your problems today are short-term solutions done yesterday.

3.2. Instant gratification goals... let's make it look real good as soon as possible to generate market appeal right now.

3.2.1. Those who are still here in ten years can deal with the issues then.

3.2.2. To get that full look, there is a natural tendency to plant five of each when in fact three of each is what is appropriate.

3.2.2.1. Be aware that there is a built-in incentive for contractors to encourage this... or at least not to discourage it.

What Is To Be Gained From Good Planning

1. Probably your investment in the property has grown in value.

1.1. The value of the landscape should be somewhat commensurate with it.

1.2. Curb appeal has a lot to do with sales of properties, and the landscape is often the first thing seen in many sites.

2. A well designed properly installed and maintained landscape is usually less costly than a poorly done landscape.

2.1. Over time, the vast majority of landscape costs are related to the maintenance, not to the plants themselves.

2.1.1. Choose low maintenance plants, put them in right, and take care of them.