

LANDSCAPE COMMITTEE UPDATE APRIL 2025

Long-Range Landscape Development Project

It's been way too long since we've posted an update to the website, but updates have been published in the Commentator, so hopefully you've been keeping current there. We've updated the FAQs, so take a look at those as well.

I know that when we launched this project SIX YEARS AGO, we expected that by now Village 4 would have all new landscaping, state-of-the-art irrigation, and all of that, but alas we didn't meet that goal. What happened?

Well, the committee has been working very hard, but as is normal for any project, things change drastically as we learn more and the LRLDP committee has learned a lot. If we want to get to the root cause of what you may reasonably consider project stagnation, we can sum it up in one word (you can probably guess that word): MONEY. To replace our landscaping as we originally envisioned is estimated to cost in the range of \$1.8M – \$2.5M, and this number is a year or two old so it is probably even higher now and growing. Unfortunately, Village 4's founding fathers didn't consider the fact that the landscaping would need to be replaced, so money that could have been accumulating over the last 50 years, was never allocated (the Village 4 Board is now allocating money for landscape replacement, but it will take many years for it to be enough). Funding the project with a special assessment would mean each Village 4 homeowner would be assessed between \$34K and \$47K which would have to be approved by a majority of the homeowners—even the committee members wouldn't vote in favor of that! So, a special assessment is not a reasonable or feasible option. The committee and the HOA Board has looked at numerous other ways of financing the project, but none have proven practical.

So where do we go from here? Just because there's no money doesn't mean that we can jettison the project and do nothing. Our landscaping is getting worse and when the California legislature enacted AB 1572 and the governor signed it into law, the clock started ticking because the law requires that by January 1, 2029, we must replace all our non-functional turf. That means that potentially all our grass must be gone by that deadline. "Non-functional turf" is specifically defined within the law, and by that definition the green belts are gray areas. While we can make arguments that the green belts are functional turf by the bill's definition, those arguments may or may not hold water with the city. We may be able to make some relatively inexpensive additions (such as more benches, picnic tables, etc.) to make the grass "functional" and we think/hope that with those additional amenities, we can make the case for functionality. However, other than the green belts, all grass must go. There is no reasonable argument for the non-green belt areas to be considered functional turf. Like it or not, that is the law.

We are working on drafting a plan to submit to the Village 4 Board on the best way to move forward given the budgetary constraints. We have consulted with our landscaping professionals for ideas and we're taking their advice into account.

Some of the actions under consideration to make this happen are:

- Scaling down – Scale down the plan where possible to save money. This may mean fewer or lower cost replacement plantings and not-so-state-of-the-art irrigation systems.
- Long-term plan – The landscape transformation will be very slow but hopefully constant meaning that we'll do small areas as often as possible.
- Priorities – The committee has prioritized the zones based on various factors such as safety, general condition, and visibility. However, the priorities can change if circumstances warrant.

- As needed changes – Replace bushes and shrubs when needed.
- Catalog updates – In the earlier part of this project phase, based upon input from our landscape professionals we created a catalog of replacement materials that would be appropriate for our village. The committee is reviewing the catalog, adding a few more options, developing recommendations for appropriate uses for specific plants (e.g., good for in front of fences, good for along walkways, etc.), and eliminating some materials that are no longer appropriate or for some other reason (e.g., toxic to animals; one specific deletion is a material that would be a good grass replacement, but is no longer feasible as it meets the definition of “turf” in AB 1572 and therefore cannot be used). The committee will also create suggestions for plant groupings.
- Creative finance – The committee is looking at unique options to fund the upgrades.

We want to do as much as possible as soon as possible. It is important to keep in mind that our current landscape is very expensive to maintain, and the cost increases every year. The new landscaping plan will replace many existing bushes that must be pruned regularly with drought-resistant dwarf varieties which will not require pruning. The new plant materials will require less irrigation, less chemical intervention (fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides, etc.) which will reduce cost, be more eco-friendly, and comply with existing water conservation laws, codes, and ordinances along with those that will undoubtedly be enacted in the future. Less water and less pruning leads to lower maintenance costs. A fringe benefit of eliminating grass is that along with weekly mowing (a huge part of the monthly maintenance cost), no more costly aeration or other turf maintenance will be needed. When we release the plant catalog, you will be surprised at how beautiful the native, drought-resistant, and low maintenance plants, bushes, and ground covers are. They are dramatic, colorful, and are geared toward overall safety by eliminating hiding spots and trip hazards. Additionally, they will be less inviting to unwanted pests such as rats and skunks, and more inviting to desirable critters such as birds and pollinators.

We hope to have more information in the very near future.

Please remember that any changes to the landscaping that are outside your home's "footprint" must be approved through a Landscape Change Request. Failure to do so may require you to return the area to its original state at your expense. If you are unsure if the change is within your footprint, just contact the landscape committee (V4LRLDP@gmail.com).