

GREENBRAE

FALL 2020 GREENBRAE LANDSCAPING REPORT

PUBLISHED BY THE GREENBRAE PROPERTY OWNERS ASSOCIATION
POST OFFICE BOX 383, KENTFIELD, CA 94914

info@greenbrae.org; 415-461-7338

www.greenbrae.org

By Scott Sherman, Ph.D. (landscaping@greenbrae.org)
Greenbrae Homeowner and GPOA Landscaping Chairman
M.S., Horticulture/Viticulture—UCD, Certified Arborist, Landscape Contractor

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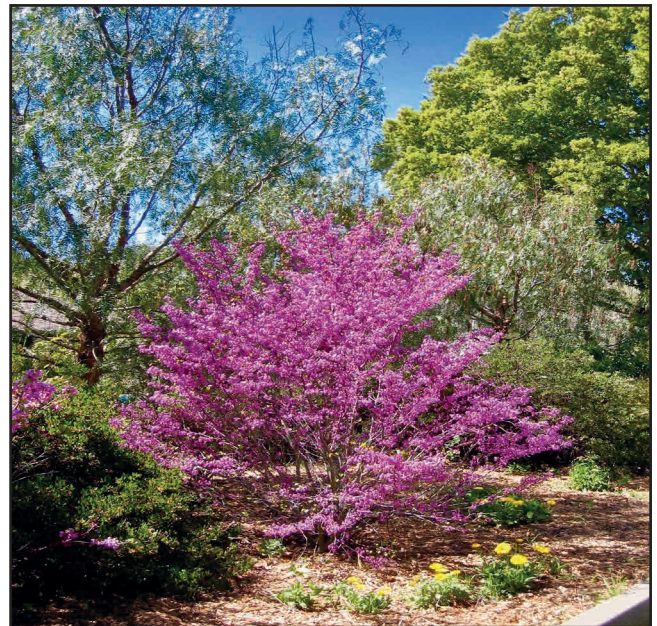
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*Beautiful native 'Red Bud' (Cercis occidentalis)
in a Los Cerros median island. Late winter,
early spring color.*

Fire Prevention, Mitigation, and What We Can Do Now

We all are very concerned about our northern California fires and the potential for fires in our community. We had one off Vista Grande in 2018. It burned about an acre, possibly caused by a bird in the high-voltage wires. Several concerned, thoughtful neighbors have stepped up to help with community education and to help us all—to get our community recognized as a FireWise



USA Community, <https://www.nfpa.org/Public-Education/Fire-causes-and-risks/Wildfire/Firewise-USA>. Plus, our Kentfield and Central Marin Fire Departments will help us with education and prevention, just ask them. There's still so much to do, especially on our own private properties! (See 'Links and Resources' below.)

The Greenbrae Property Owners Association (GPOA), the Advisory Board of County Service Area 16 (CSA 16), which consists of the area on the north side of Sir Francis Drake Boulevard from Eliseo to Manor, our Fire Department Inspectors, and the Marin County Roads Department have done much to mitigate fire fuel in our shared, public medians. We removed over 50 Eucalyptus trees, abundant junipers, virtually all the pine trees in our medians, pruned out dead and dying shrubs and branches, and mulched to maintain the health of trees and shrubs. We cleaned up illegal dumping of woody chips in the La Cuesta median and placed boulders there to prevent future vehicle access. A sincere Thank You to all who express their appreciation and support (thru NextDoor, email, private messages, notes & calls) for what we do each year!

Please help

Dedicated neighbors are coordinating a highly respected program to turn Greenbrae into a FireWise USA Community. <https://bit.ly/3glvSeo>. To help with the application, **please complete this survey**, <https://bit.ly/2CXcrKu> and email it to greenbraehillsfiresafetyctte@gmail.com or mail or drop it off at the front porch box at 10 Eliseo Drive by September 30th.

Links and Resources

Here are links to local, regional and national expert resources on how to protect our properties and neighbors from fire and other disasters. Learn of our **shared fire risks** and how to reduce them, read of grants such as the free Chipper Day Event set for **all of Greenbrae Hills on Wednesday, September 9th**. We might even positively impact homeowner insurance coverage and premiums.

https://www.chipperday.com/marin	Free Chipper Day, Sign Up Before All Slots Are Taken
https://firesafemarin.org/home-hardening	Make Your Home More Resistant to Embers and Fire
https://firesafemarin.org/landscaping	Remove Flammable Weeds, Broom, Plants & Fire 'Ladders'
https://bit.ly/3a0WsY9	Fire Causes & Risks
https://bit.ly/30iU6jY	Napa County Resources for Fire & Disaster
https://bit.ly/2BSyvWf	Sonoma County Disaster Resources
https://bit.ly/2Xk402V	Landowner Resources
https://bit.ly/39NIGYy	Living With Wildfires

Firesafe Tips:

70% of fires are caused by flying embers that blew miles ahead of the wildfire and set houses ablaze because the houses were not "hardened." These houses were then the heat source for adjacent homes. With fire season upon us, we can all do our part as good neighbors. Here are some firesafe housekeeping tactics to "harden" home and mitigate fire risk:

1. Imagine your house is a log. Without kindling, the log doesn't catch on fire as easily. So, remove the kindling—leaf litter and wood piles 5-10 feet around your home including leaves on the roof or around skylights and in the roof's valleys.
2. Remove plants and shrubs adjacent to the home. Keep others hydrated.
3. In the event of an evacuation, if there is time:
 - Close all doors, windows and the garage door. Many homes in the Tubb's fire had open doors and windows!
 - Remove combustibles such as wooden furniture, seat cushions, propane tanks and toys from the 10-foot zone around your home. You can also be prepared on "red-flag days" by moving these items further away from your home.

For more information, go to www.firesafemarin.org It takes a village—our Greenbrae community!



Landscape Maintenance & Improvements

Our annual landscaping parcel tax has remained \$150 since 1993 (27 years!) Two recent ballot measures to raise the parcel tax did not pass. Please remember that when you ask (sometimes demand) more to be done for fire prevention and landscaping improvements! Though costs have increased significantly for all aspects of landscaping since 1993, the CSA 16 Advisory Board necessarily makes do with its limited funds:

- Diverse activities of maintenance, such as:
 - o Pulling and cutting abundant French Broom
 - o Maintaining the SFD frontage as a “safe route to schools”
 - o Pulling dead and dying plants due to the drought
 - o Reducing and pruning island hedges to open up views to the Ross Valley and Mt. Tam
 - o Extensive weeding and mulching
 - o Rotating seasonal, colorful entry plantings
 - o Pruning our numerous heritage trees in medians and curbside
 - o Managing irrigation carefully to conserve yet maintain plant health.
- Drought-driven irrigation system improvements, “retiring” of entry lawns, and reducing irrigation costs.
- Professional design and gradual installation of improvements to our numerous medians, parks, mile long SFD frontage, and entrances. This includes not only new improvements recently completed on Corte Cayuga, but also planned improvements to Via Cheparro and Eliseo’s 2nd island. Work on our upper medians of Via Barranca, Via Navarro, Via Cheparro, and Via la Paz is on hold pending available budget. Similarly, planned improvements to the Eliseo entry and La Cuesta entry are on hold pending completion of the SFD Rehabilitation Project over the next couple of years.



Colorful, pollinator-friendly perennials at our La Cuesta entry.



What are CSA 16 and GPOA?

What is Our Greenbrae Landscaping Budget?

In coordination with the GPOA and CSA 16 Boards, each comprised of Greenbrae homeowner-volunteers (please remember this when you make requests, complain, and demand things), the County administers the funds and activities for our community landscaping. The County first alerted us to the reality that imminently the funds generated by the current \$150 parcel tax (~\$200,00/year) will be insufficient for future improvements, except limited projects that could be completed every few years after funds accumulate.

In 2016, approximately 85% of the parcel tax funds were used just to maintain the existing landscaping. The increased costs since 1993 to maintain our community landscaping, even with professional management and competitive bids to control maintenance costs, now eats up the majority of our funds annually.

What will accrue each year, after maintaining a small, yet necessary reserve, will be about \$40,000 for improvements. For a community as vast as Greenbrae, this is insufficient to do meaningful improvements except every few years going forward. With this financial projection and in view of all the needed landscaping improvements (see below), both the GPOA Board and the CSA 16 Advisory Board unanimously recommended to the County Board of Supervisors that they approve creation of ballot Measure A to increase our annual parcel tax. They unanimously approved creation of Measure A. **This measure did not pass, twice.**

To answer a question that arises often, our landscaping budget comes from our CSA 16 assessment—not from our voluntary GPOA dues.

Landscape Improvements: Past, Current (SFDB) & Future

Good Current News: the County Sir Francis Drake Boulevard (SFDB) Corridor Rehabilitation Project, with extensive planning participation of several Greenbrae Board-volunteers the past several years will markedly improve the Greenbrae entries at Eliseo Drive and La Cuesta Drive plus the sidewalk along the north side of SFDB, <https://bit.ly/3028KvH>. This SFDB project also will involve re-landscaping all the medians of the ~2-mile-long corridor from Eliseo Drive to College of Marin. **This is only feasible thanks to the financial support of CSA 17 (Kentfield) which is providing \$1.25M to enable landscape design and new trees and plants in the SFDB medians (and in the future along the frontages of this boulevard) that:**

- a. provide seasonal interest
- b. incorporate many CA natives
- c. are low or no fire risks (with approval of all proposed plants by FireSafe Marin)
- d. preclude driver and pedestrian visibility risks (low heights at median noses)
- e. are very low maintenance
- f. are long-lived
- g. conserve water and are drought tolerant
- h. are not invasive plants
- i. support native pollinators and wildlife



- j. provide year-round aesthetic beauty
- k. are deer resistant
- l. and work with remaining trees and the general context.



Summer Flowering Crape Myrtles in Greenbrae. Drought tolerant and flowering when most other trees are not

Past: Capital Improvements Completed, 1995 - 2017 (Design, Irrigation, Planting)

- Raised curbs at Eliseo and La Cuesta entrances and other entrance islands
- Eliseo Median Islands
- Los Cerros 1st Island
- New Entries at Corte Comoda and Manor Road
- Upgrade Entrances at Eliseo and La Cuesta
- Almenar - North Almenar intersection
- North Almenar – Selective Clearing and Infill Planting
- Corte Lodato
- Via La Cumbre North Island, North End of Middle Island
- Via La Cumbre Middle Island (South Nose)
- Via La Cumbre Middle Island - Selective Demolition

Below is a summary of landscape improvements completed over the past 26 years in our medians and frontage, plus planned future improvements. Professional landscape designs exist for a few of the planned projects.



Past Capital Improvement Projects

Our CSA 16 Advisory Board and the County designed beautiful, major improvements to the SFDB entrances at Eliseo and La Cuesta. Due to the 5-year drought, these projects were put on hold. Yet, we pruned, cleared, repaired, and painted both entries in the interim.

- Bretano Way Selective Clearing and Infill Planting
- Sir Francis Drake Corte Morada Park Frontage
- Sir Francis Drake Manor Road to Corte Comoda Frontage
- Sir Francis Drake La Cuesta to Corte Morada Park
- New Entry Structure and Plants – North end of Via La Cumbre North Island
- Via La Cumbre Middle Island (South Nose)
- Via La Cumbre Middle Island - Selective Clearing and Re-planting
- Eliseo Entrance and Medians
- Via Chepparo – Selective Clearing, Pruning, Perimeter hedge reduction
- Corte Cayuga 1st and 2nd Islands New Landscaping

Future: Capital Improvement Projects

The SFDB Rehabilitation Project will reconfigure the first islands at both entrances by adding dedicated left turn lanes as part of a systematic design to facilitate traffic flow and improve pedestrian safety along SFDB. That's why we saw trees recently removed at the Eliseo Entry. When complete, new entry islands and entries on both sides will get new trees and plants as part of the SFDB project. Thank the County for including these entry rehabilitations and traffic improvements. And, thank the representatives of our community who volunteered abundant time to guide the County on the improvements and protect our interests (Jack Valinoti, Greg Shaughnessy, Scott Sherman.)

Future projects may include (if/when budget accumulates; remember at ~\$40,000/year and decreasing due to increasing costs of living and landscape maintenance):

- | | |
|--|-----------|
| • Los Cerros and La Cuesta Islands | \$100,000 |
| • SFD Frontage from La Cuesta to El Portal | \$100,000 |
| • Via La Cumbre – South Island | \$200,000 |
| • Via La Cumbre – Middle and North Island | \$200,000 |
| • North Almenar | \$ 50,000 |
| • Corte Morda Park | \$ 25,000 |
| • Other Islands | \$200,000 |
| o Corte Anita | |
| o Corte Elena | |
| o Vista Grande (2) | |
| o Corte Ramon | |
| o Corte Lodato | |

Total: **\$875,000**



When Will Our Median Be Improved?

Neighbors regularly contact us inquiring (sorry to say, sometimes demanding and worse), “When will our street’s median be improved?” In time, we intend to make improvements to all islands across Greenbrae. It takes time, money, and personal effort (not just telling others you want it done). Entrances, medians and islands with the highest visibility and traffic were improved first so the greatest number of residents and visitors could experience the improvements. And areas where Eucalyptus trees were removed years ago after the Oakland Hills fire were a priority (Eliseo, Bretano Way, Almenar, North Almenar). To advocate and participate in planning improvements to an island near your home, please organize your neighbors, select a congenial Block Captain, then contact GPOA at landscaping@greenbrae.org and info@greenbrae.org. and contact County Service Area 16 here: <https://bit.ly/2QjSEYC>

Optimizing Value with Our Limited Budget

We wish we could do more landscape improvements and do them faster, but doing this professionally and safely requires significant resources as outlined above. We pay for these improvements through our annual CSA 16 tax assessment. This assessment has not changed since 1993 in step with the increasing costs of construction, so we work within our budget and do new areas as we save up the resources.

Sustainable Landscape Design

Our community’s plant palette and landscaping philosophy include native trees and shrubs (e.g., Oaks, Red Buds, Manzanitas, Matilija Poppies) and other native and “Mediterranean” plants well adapted to our soils and environment—including our climate, deer, insects, and fungi. Plants are selected according to many seasonal factors including flower color and size, leaf form and colors, and the size and the density of the tree or shrub when mature (to provide some privacy yet retain views). And they are always selected to provide food and shelter to native wildlife including bees, butterflies, moths (night-time pollinators), hummingbirds and other birds.

A major objective is to enhance our shared landscaping with beautiful trees and plants requiring limited maintenance, irrigation and cost once established. This frees up resources (i.e., money and irrigation water) for other improvements and helps to ensure landscaping that flourishes and matures for generations. Other key objectives include fire hazard mitigation, safety of pedestrians and vehicles, protection of heritage trees and development of canopied roads.

Water Conservation

Did you know that approximately 1/3 of the water that our water district (MMWD) supplies goes to landscaping? In spite of the occasional, incredible rains (e.g., the 2016-2017 season,) drought concerns and conservation are key to responsible landscape design and management. Our landscapers and automated systems regularly adjust irrigation run times to provide just what the plants need to be healthy. We installed “smart” irrigation controllers at our 3 SFDB entrances where we have electricity. We also recently installed smart, solar-powered irrigation controllers in the 2nd island of Eliseo Drive and in our parks on Corte Morada and Corte Los Sombras. These controllers measure daily temperatures and automatically adjust how



much water is applied depending on current temperatures (more in hot months, less in cooler periods). For other specific resources and suggestions, see www.marinwater.org.

Greenbrae is a commercial leader in water management while we maintain and improve our community's medians, SFDB frontage, and parks. We will install more of the "smart" irrigation controllers as funding permits.

Landscape Maintenance Calendar

Below is a general calendar of major landscaping activities. The County and I direct a professional landscaping company to perform ongoing maintenance for our community. We have a signed agreement with very specific weekly and monthly activities identified over many years managing our complex site.

GPOA ANNUAL LANDSCAPE MAINTENANCE CALENDAR				
	Spring	Summer	Fall	Winter
Ongoing Maintenance	X	X	X	X
Heritage Tree Pruning		X		X
Oak for SOD Spraying	X		X	
Shrub Pruning	X	X	X	X
Landscaping Improvements (larger projects)	X		X	
Hand seeding of wildflowers			X	

In the winter and spring (and as needed for safety), we prune shrubs back from the roadways. Then, flower buds develop to provide all the color we love in the spring and summer. Larger landscaping improvement projects tend to be in the spring and fall, avoiding the heavy rain and erosion season, allowing for gentler rains and cooler seasons to establish our plantings. All of these efforts are complemented by the wildflowers and flowering perennials seeded occasionally onto our open hillsides. Notice the colorful displays that begin in late winter and continue through early summer. Look on our website, www.greenbrae.org, for photos of flowering medians from recent springs and summers.

Wildflower Seeds Across Greenbrae

Years past, in the fall around Halloween, a specialized truck sprayed seeds of wildflowers and flowering perennials onto open spaces in medians across Greenbrae. The seed mix included a broad variety of spring- and summer-flowering annuals and perennials. Every spring, the show of flowers is stronger as certain species take hold and sow their seeds, too. We increased the seed count of the most successful plants and added new shade-tolerant and butterfly-attracting species and others from areas with similar microclimates and conditions to Greenbrae. We do not include any grasses in our mix to minimize potential fuel for fire on our hillsides and islands.

Each median and hillside has unique characteristics of exposure, soil depth, and rock. So, from the same mix of seeds, each area uniquely germinates and establishes itself. Some areas blossom with many species. In other areas we see only a few (or no) species





germinating and growing to size. Yet, overall the number of wildflowers is increasing and many new areas are flowering as never before. Our most significant successes are along the SFDB frontage and along Almenar, Bretano, and Via la Cumbre—streets with large open hillsides. We hope to continue to seed these areas as well as Via Cheparro, Via Navarro, Via la Paz, and Via Barranca and hope to see an even better show of flowers everywhere in coming years.

If you are interested in seeding your property, some of the species most successful to date are Clovers (in various colors, good for drawing nitrogen out of the air to the soil); Calendulas; California Poppy; Coreopsis; Farewell-to-Spring; Gazania; Lupines; Pride of Madeira; Tidy tips; Baby Snapdragon; Shasta Daisy; and Yarrow. These are the common names and you can find them in the **Sunset Western Garden Book**.

Pruning our Heritage Trees and Shrubs

On a 5 to 6-year rotation, and as needed based on growth rates, following professional arborist standards we structurally and architecturally prune small to large heritage trees in the median islands, parks, SFDB frontage and curbsides to keep them healthy and to minimize limb and tree failures. Unfortunately, our CSA 16 budget does not allow for more frequent pruning. (Again, since the CSA 16 parcel tax assessment has not been increased by a 2/3's majority vote, in spite of being on our ballots, since 1993.)

Curbside trees are pruned to similar standards and we have developed several beautiful canopied roads. Stroll or drive the Eliseo entrance, Corte Morada, Via Cheparro, and the





Native Coast Live Oak professionally pruned for structural strength and beauty in one of our Greenbrae medians.

1st block of Bretano Way (between Almenar and La Cuesta). Manor Road curbside tree pruning is an exception—PG&E “directionally prunes” the Sycamores to keep growth out of the power lines and the trees don’t have the natural canopied look we have developed on the other streets. If you have a curbside heritage tree in front of your home, you own it and can do what you wish with it. If there is a hazardous condition with a tree or your block is not up in the rotation for pruning in the next round or two, we recommend you have the condition or tree professionally addressed or pruned for structural integrity, beauty, and to create a canopied road. Some

homeowners over the years have removed their curbside trees which is in your rights if you so prefer. If you are fortunate to live on a street with many heritage trees planted by the developers and have a canopied road, we encourage you to think twice before topping or removing your tree.

We also prune out diseased and dying branches on small and large shrubs throughout our medians. As with the SFD frontage, older, disfigured, hazardous, and woody shrubs are pruned to the ground to rejuvenate them. At first, this creates gaps. Healthy plants rejuvenate with fuller fountains of growth. This helps to keep our hillsides green and growing and eliminates fuel for fires.

Owl Boxes and Integrated Pest Management



Working with County Parks experts, we follow “Integrated Pest Management” (IPM) principles to control pests (rats, gophers, moles, insects) and fungi (Sudden Oak Death, “water molds” and others). Read about principles and practical methods here, <http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/>. We mulch heavily to control weeds, preclude the need for herbicides and, as the chips break down, improve our soil and consequently the health and beauty of our landscaping.

Barn owls are part of an IPM program. Owls are voracious consumers of rodents (gophers, rats, moles, voles) that promise to really help control our rodent populations without the need

for us to use pesticides. If you have rodent problems (whether it’s gophers and moles in your garden or mice and rats in or near your home), first exclude, prevent, and try to trap them; plus, protect the owls. The Hungry Owl Project will recommend pest control companies that don’t use poison and can help with any concerns. See <http://www.hungryowl.org>, call Wildcare at (415) 454-SAVE, or email WildCare via the form at link, <https://bit.ly/2QnD4LS>.

Years ago, we installed 4 owl boxes in median islands to help control the diverse rodent population living in our ivy, lawns, hillsides, and gardens. Several homeowners in the greater community also have owl boxes with resident owls. The barn and screech owls that take residence across Greenbrae are moving in from west and north Marin. These owls hunt



up to 3 miles from their homes and typically not in the immediate area of their home. With more boxes throughout the community, we all stand to benefit from fewer rats, mice, gophers, voles, and moles. You can order a box from the Hungry Owl Project, part of **Wildcare** in San Rafael, <http://www.hungryowl.org>.

NEVER poison rodents.

The owls, foxes and other carnivores, in their nighttime hunting, eat poisoned or dying rodents and die. So do other raptors and wildlife that feed on poisoned rodents.

As related by Alex Godbe, the Director of HOP, "Having Barn Owls in the community is such a joy. I have found that once the owls move into a neighborhood they soon become the celebrities and are furiously protected ... they become 'our owls.'" Building nesting boxes as a community and family project can be wonderful. Seeing a glimpse of these pale, ethereal hunters of the night never fails to inspire. If you are lucky enough to have a family move into a nesting box close by, it will be irresistible to go and watch them each night along with your neighbors. Please do respect that these magnificent little birds need to be left in peace and do not disturb the boxes in any way. Once juvenile owls fledge, anytime from May to August, you will be able to see the youngsters just after the sun goes down in the trees close to their nest box for several weeks before they disperse.



A Screech Owl in an owl box up on Corte Lodato, November, 2008.

Listen at night for the Barn Owls eerie scream, which can be heard at <http://www.owlpages.com/owls/sounds.php>. See if you recognize any owls from the barn owl and screech owl samples. We have a screech owl somewhere in our immediate neighborhood of North Almenar and have heard it at night for years. Here is a photo of a screech owl that took up residence in our community owl box on Corte Lodato:



Our Community Web Site and Email List (Sign Up!)

In 2000, the GPOA launched www.greenbrae.org to communicate about Sudden Oak Death and other information of interest and value to our community. Recently, another of our [GPOA Board volunteers, Ryan Nelson](#), developed a new GPOA website, check it out, www.greenbrae.org. [Sign up for our Greenbrae homeowner e-mail list at greenbrae.org](#). There's a box to click near the top of the home page! We use this list and NextDoor to keep in touch with homeowners on issues of importance to us all.

Please feel free to let us know what you think by emails to landscaping@greenbrae.org and info@greenbrae.org. We love to hear the **compliments** as well as the **issues** and **suggestions**. Have a happy and healthy fall and holiday season!

Scott Sherman, PhD

GPOA Landscaping Chairman



California Poppies and Crimson Clover in the Spring in Greenbrae. Drought tolerant they attract beneficial insects as well as improve soil fertility.



GREENBRAE PROPERTY OWNERS ASSOCIATION

POST OFFICE BOX 383, KENTFIELD, CA 94914

415.461.7338 • INFO@GREENBRAE.ORG