

GREENBRAE

SPRING 2023 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

In this Issue

**Rain, Hail, Lightning, Winds,
Trees, Floods, Drought, Fires...**

**Fire Prevention, Mitigation, and
What We Can Do Now**

**Landscape Maintenance &
Improvements**

**What is Our Greenbrae
Landscaping Budget?**

**Landscape Improvements: Past &
Future**

**When Will Our Median Be
Improved?**

**Optimizing Value with Our
Limited Budget**

**Sustainable, Resilient, FIRESafe
Landscape Design**

Water Conservation

Wildflower Seeds Across Greenbrae

Landscape Maintenance Calendar

**Pruning Our Heritage Trees and
Shrubs**

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

Rain, Hail, Lightning, Winds, Trees, Floods, Drought, Fires...

Seems we're dealing with more and more as the years go by. Some threats we can mitigate, others not so much. Our natural environment is a blessing most of the time. Thank goodness we have many dedicated professionals and volunteer homeowners who make Greenbrae safer and more resilient. Below is a summary of the mostly unseen planning and thoughtful efforts which make our community safer, more beautiful and increasingly valuable.



Pruning La Cuesta 'Forest Island' to Be More FIRESafe

Our Community Boards and Volunteers

Every year, homeowners pay a parcel tax of \$150 to fund 'County Service Area 16.' When you see tree and landscape crews out pruning in parks and medians, it's funded by CSA 16.



When you see heritage street trees pruned to maintain canopied roads and crews reducing ‘fire laddering’ and bushes in medians, it’s funded by CSA 16. When you see landscapers maintaining flowering plants and improving our parks, medians, entries and the frontage of Sir Francis Drake Boulevard (‘SFDB’), it’s CSA 16 funds. Who oversees all this work? Budgets and priorities are managed carefully by volunteer Greenbrae residents on the CSA 16 Advisory Board along with the Marin County Parks Department.

Maybe you heard of the Greenbrae Property Owners Association or ‘GPOA’? The GPOA Board is another group of homeowner-volunteers who keep our community informed and respond regularly to community inquiries and recommendations year-round. This Landscaping Report is an example of a GPOA communication. So is our web site, <https://www.greenbrae.org> and our GPOA mailing list (subscribe at the Home page). All these efforts are funded through



Fire-Fuel Reduction Significantly Opened Up and Beautified the La Cuesta ‘Forest Island’

voluntary dues to the GPOA (please give if you can.) You can reach the GPOA Board via info@greenbrae.org and landscaping@greenbrae.org.

Other volunteers (and some of the same folks) work closely with our Kentfield and Central Marin Fire Departments, FIRESafe Marin and County Parks to make our community landscaping safer. Volunteer Greenbrae ‘Block Captains’ and communitywide volunteers keep us safer through Neighborhood Response Groups, FireWise USA, and Alert Marin.

Previously, we had a strong network of volunteer ‘Landscaping Block Captains’ who communicated and worked with neighbors on their block to identify maintenance needs and desired improvements for their median islands and parks. Many, sadly, passed away or moved out of Greenbrae. Let us know if you are interested in being a Landscaping Block Captain.



Significant Fire-Fuel Reduction in the Los Cerros ‘Creek Island’

Our Parks, Medians and Street Trees

Do you know of Corte Los Sombras Park and Corte Morada Park? These are CSA 16-maintained parks open to all homeowners and residents accessible by residential driveways with community rights of way. Parkside Park on Parkside Way at Eliseo Drive is another community park maintained by the Town of Larkspur.



Many streets in Greenbrae were developed with median islands. Maintained and improved by CSA 16 funds, these medians provide natural benefits to residents and visitors. Over the past several years, with the need to manage fire risks, these previously lush islands were opened up, flammable trees and shrubs were removed or significantly reduced. Under the professional guidance of our local Fire and Department experts, we've mitigated fire risks and will continue to maintain the medians and parks more open, with less connections between the trees and shrubs to mitigate horizontal spreading and vertical laddering of fire.

Our SFD Entries, Frontage and the SFD medians

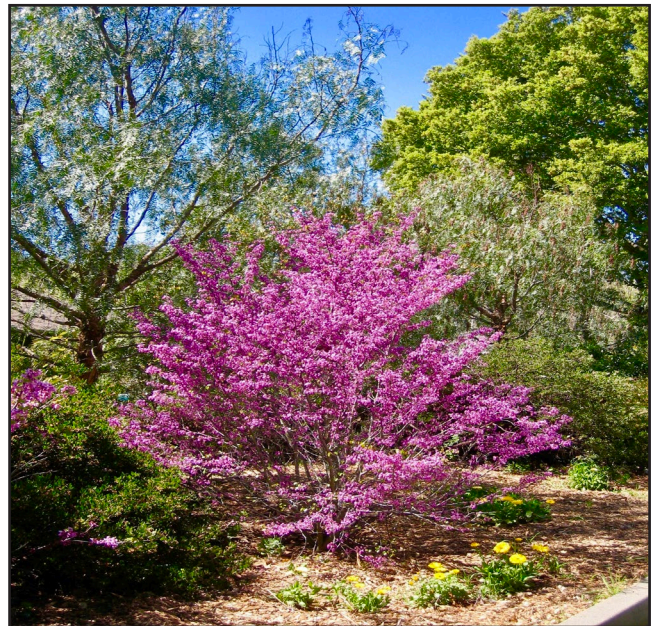
About 2 years ago, the roadway, signals and underground utilities along SFDB were upgraded by the County, <https://www.upgradethedrake.com>. To improve traffic flows on the boulevard and to/from our community, the entries at Eliseo, La Cuesta and Manor Road were adjusted. Planned and funded landscaping improvements along the boulevard and at our entries, intended to immediately follow the road work, unexpectedly were delayed due to constraints brought on by supply chain and related cost factors.

Plus, completion of the installation of new SFDB median lights from Eliseo to Bon Air Road was delayed due to light intrusion issues into homes along the boulevard. This spring we expect to see shorter and much more attractive light poles with subdued lighting in these medians. The plan is to follow this up in summer with new irrigation and trees in the SFDB medians along the boulevard from Eliseo to College Avenue plus new landscaping at our Eliseo and La Cuesta entries. As always, this is budget dependent and funding comes from the County, not CSA 16. I encourage you to check the 'Upgrade the Drake' web site for updates.

Fire Prevention, Mitigation, and What We Can Do Now

We all are 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 stepped up to help with community education and improvements to become 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 help us with education and prevention, just ask them for guidance. There's still so much to do, especially on our own private properties! (See 'Links and Resources' below.)

The GPOA Board, the CSA 16 Advisory Board, our Fire Department Inspectors and the Marin County Roads and Parks Departments have done so much to mitigate fire fuel in our public medians and SFD frontage. In the medians, we removed over 50 Eucalyptus trees, abundant junipers and all the pine trees, pruned out dead and dying shrubs and branches, and mulched to maintain the health of trees and shrubs. We cleaned up illegally dumped wood chips in the La Cuesta 'Forest Island' 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!



Beautiful Native 'Red Bud' (Cercis Occidentalis) in a Los Cerros Median Island. Late Winter, Early Spring Color.



We Are a FireWise USA Community!

Dedicated neighbors turned Greenbrae into a FireWise USA Community, <https://bit.ly/3glvSeo>. To inquire or volunteer for ongoing prevention activities, email greenbraehillsfiresafetctte@gmail.com.

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. 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>

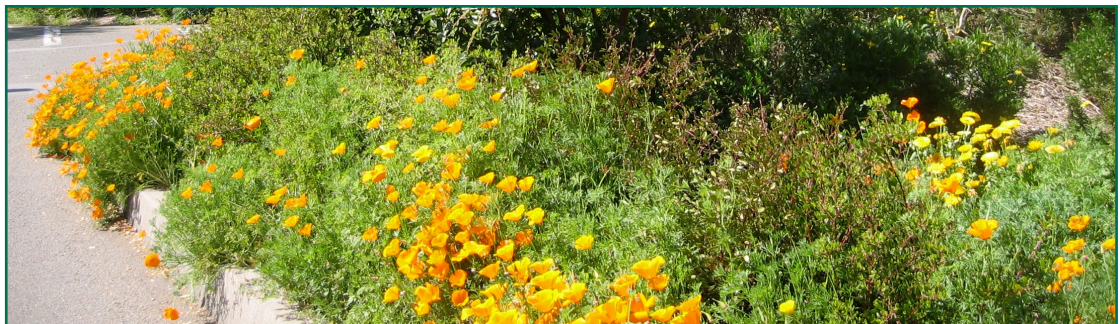
Living With Wildfires.

Firesafe Tips:

70% of fires are caused by flying embers that blew miles ahead of a wildfire and set houses ablaze because the houses were not ‘hardened.’ These houses then ignite adjacent homes. During fire season, we all can mitigate risks. Here are some firesafe housekeeping tactics to ‘harden’ your 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 semi-annual landscaping parcel tax that funds CSA 16 has remained \$150 since 1993 (30 years!). Recent ballot measures to raise this landscaping parcel tax did not pass. Of course, costs have risen significantly since 1993. Please remember this when folks ask (some demand) more to be done for fire prevention and landscaping improvements! Though costs have increased markedly for all aspects of landscaping since 1993, the CSA 16 Advisory Board necessarily makes do with limited funds to:

- o Pull and cut abundant French Broom.
- o Maintain the SFD frontage as a 'safe route to schools'.
- o Pull dead and dying plants due to the drought.
- o Reduce and prune island hedges to open up views and mitigate fire movement.
- o Extensively weed and mulch.
- o Rotate seasonal, colorful entry plantings.
- o Prune our numerous heritage trees in medians and curbside.
- o Manage irrigation carefully to conserve yet maintain plant health.
- o Maintain irrigation systems, 'retire' entry lawns, and reduce irrigation costs.
- o Professionally design and gradually install new landscaping in our numerous medians, parks, mile long SFD frontage and entrances. This includes not only fairly recent improvements on Corte Cayuga, but also planned improvements to the SFD frontage, Via Cheparro and the entry to Manor Road. Landscape improvements to the upper medians of Via Barranca, Via Navarro, Via Cheparro, and Via la Paz are on hold pending available budget.



Colorful, Pollinator-Friendly Perennials at Our Previous La Cuesta Entry Several Years Ago.



What is Our Greenbrae Landscaping Budget?

In coordination with the GPOA and CSA 16 Advisory Boards, each comprised of Greenbrae homeowner volunteers (please remember this when you make requests or demand things), County Parks administers the funds and activities for our community landscaping. The County alerted us years ago to the reality that 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 improvements, except minor ones, 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' for Greenbrae homeowners to moderately increase the assessment. **This measure did not pass, twice.**

Landscape Improvements: Past & Future

Good Current News: the County SFDB Corridor Rehabilitation Project, with extensive planning participation of several GPOA Board-volunteers the past several years will markedly improve the Greenbrae entries at Eliseo Drive and La Cuesta Drive. They improved the sidewalk along the north side of SFDB, <https://bit.ly/3028KvH>. The SFDB project also includes re-landscaping of all 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 significant funding to enable landscape design and new irrigation, trees and plants in the SFDB medians to:

- a. Provide diverse, colorful flowers and seasonal leaf changes year round.
- b. Incorporate CA native plants to support biodiversity: native insects, butterflies and birds.
- c. Minimize fire risks (all proposed plants will be approved by FIRESafe Marin).
- d. Preclude driver and pedestrian visibility risks (low heights at median noses).
- e. Minimize ongoing maintenance costs.
- f. Be long-lived and mature into a cherished boulevard.
- g. Conserve water.
- h. Avoid invasive plants.
- i. Complement pre-existing landscaping along the boulevard.





Summer Flowering Crape Myrtles in Greenbrae. Drought Tolerant and Flowering When Most Other Trees Are Not.

Past Capital Improvements Completed (Design, Irrigation, Planting)

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

- 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.



Past Capital Improvements Completed (continued)

- Bretano Way Selective Clearing and Infill Planting.
- SFDB Corte Morada Park Frontage.
- SFDB Manor Road to Corte Comoda Frontage.
- SFDB 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 Corridor Rehabilitation Project moved and rebuilt the first islands at Greenbrae's Eliseo and La Cuesta entries. They added dedicated left turn lanes to improve traffic flow and pedestrian safety. **If replanting goes as planned this summer 2023**, these new entry islands and the sides of the entries will get new trees and plants as part of the SFDB planting project. Please thank the County for including these entry and traffic improvements! And, thank the representatives of our community who volunteered abundant time over many years to guide the County on the improvements while protecting our community interests (Jack Valinoti, Greg Shaughnessy, Scott Sherman). Future projects listed below may include (2020 estimated costs and if/when CSA 16 budget accumulates):

• Los Cerros and La Cuesta Islands	\$100,000
• SFDB 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, “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 community 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. Eucalyptus trees were removed years ago after the Oakland Hills fire (Eliseo, Bretano Way, Almenar, North Almenar). Please don’t do self-help and work or plant in the medians which are County and City of Larkspur properties. To advocate and participate in planning improvements to an island near your home, please organize your neighbors, select a congenial Landscaping 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 parcel tax assessment. This assessment has not changed since 1993 in step with inflation and the increasing costs of construction and landscape maintenance, so we work within our budget and do new areas as resources accumulate.

Sustainable, Resilient, FIRESafe 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 and fire-safety factors including flower color and size, leaf form and colors plus size, flammability and the density of the tree or shrub when mature (to provide some privacy yet retain views). And plants 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 that require 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 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, abundant rains (e.g., the 2016-2017 and 2023 seasons), 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 three SFDB entrances where we have electricity. We also installed smart, solar-powered irrigation controllers in the 2nd island of Eliseo Drive and in Corte Morada and Corte Los Sombras Parks. 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.





Diverse Native and Mediterranean Wildflowers on a Bretano Way Median Years Ago.

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. Each 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 as 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** and online at **Calscape.org**.



Landscape Maintenance Calendar

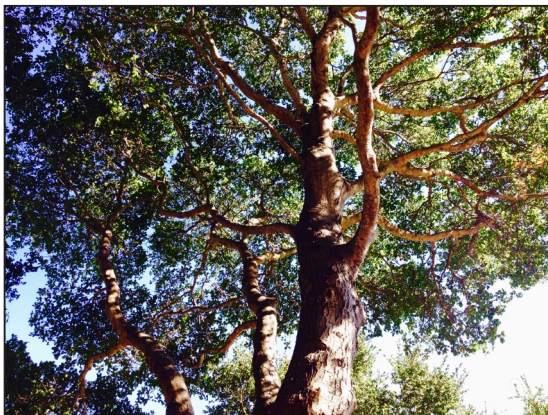
Below is a general calendar of major landscaping activities. The County and I direct a professional landscaping company to perform ongoing maintenance for our community. We have a signed agreement with very specific weekly and monthly activities identified over many years managing our complex site.

GPOA ANNUAL LANDSCAPE MAINTENANCE CALENDAR				
	Spring	Summer	Fall	Winter
Ongoing Maintenance	X	X	X	X
Heritage Tree Pruning		X		X
Oaks 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 and fire mitigation standards), 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. This avoids the heavy rain and erosion season. Gentler rains and cooler seasons help to establish our plantings. All of these efforts are complemented by the wildflowers and flowering perennials seeded occasionally in our parks, medians and along our SFDB frontage. 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.

Pruning our Heritage Trees and Shrubs

On a 5 to 6-year rotation, or as needed based on growth rates and 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 limited CSA 16 budget does not allow for more frequent pruning.



Native Coast Live Oak Professionally Pruned for Structural Strength and Beauty In One of Our Greenbrae Medians.

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 [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 within 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 SFDB frontage, older, disfigured, hazardous, and woody shrubs are pruned to the ground to rejuvenate them. At first, this creates gaps. Healthy plants rejuvenate with fountains of fresh growth. This helps to keep our hillsides green and growing and eliminates fuel for fires.

Our Community Web Site and GPOA 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, updated our GPOA website. Check it out, <https://www.greenbrae.org>. Sign up on the home page for our Greenbrae homeowner e-mail list. We use this list 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, healthy and safe new year!

Scott Sherman, PhD

GPOA Landscaping Chairman



California Poppies in the Spring in Greenbrae. Drought Tolerant, They Attract Beneficial Insects.



GREENBRAE PROPERTY OWNERS ASSOCIATION

POST OFFICE BOX 383, KENTFIELD, CA 94914

415.461.7338 • [INFO@GREENBRAE.ORG](mailto:info@greenbrae.org)