

Vegetation Management Plan



City of College
Park

Department of
Public Works



City of College Park Department of Public Works Vegetation Management Plan

Summary

This Plan describes the purpose and methods used by the City of College Park's Department of Public Works (Public Works) in maintaining landscaped and natural vegetation at parks, buildings, and right-of-ways throughout the City. Both the Public Works' staff and outside contractors perform the maintenance of these vegetated areas. Maintenance includes everything from seeding to weeding and pruning to planting; all tasks are prioritized based on serving citizens in:

- Maintaining a safe environment for citizens
- Providing recreational use and aesthetic balance
- Protecting the city's investment in landscaping through proactive maintenance

Although each site presents unique challenges for optimal landscape management, this Plan provides an overview of maintenance activities grouped according to vegetation type: turf, landscaped areas, trees, and weeds. In each section, concerns and potential improvements are discussed.

Turf maintenance

The turf-growing season usually begins about April and continues through October, depending on weather conditions; maintenance frequency depends on use. Right-of-way turf is maintained mainly by mowing every other week during the growing season. Athletic field maintenance includes weekly mowing, core aeration, fertilization, seeding, irrigation, weed control, soil testing, and repair. This section groups the maintenance work by site location or use.

Athletic Fields:

Maintenance tasks	Sites
During the turf-growing season, the landscape maintenance contractor mows fields weekly. Both fields are irrigated by underground irrigation systems, which can be operated automatically or manually. The fields are core aerated between athletic play seasons, at least two times per year, seeded in the spring/summer, and fertilized in summer and fall. The fields are closed in the winter to prevent damage.	Duval Field Calvert Road School Field

City Buildings and Property:

Maintenance tasks	Sites
The City's horticultural staff is responsible for maintaining the turf at these facilities. Mowing maintenance occurs during the same April – October timeframe as above, every other week or as conditions dictate. Weed control in adjacent hardscaped areas is accomplished by chemical means. Leaf removal occurs in the fall.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• City Hall• Old Parish House• Public Services• Public Works• Youth and Family Services• James Adams Park• Nine Playgrounds (Branchville, Calvert Hills, Crystal Springs, Davis, Duval, Hollywood, Muskogee, Old Town, The Mews)• Odessa out lot• Veterans Memorial

Right-of-Way Areas:

Maintenance tasks	Sites
<p>The homeowners maintain turf adjacent to private homes. The remaining areas are mowed every other week by the landscape maintenance contractor (April-October). City staff mow the hiker-biker trail between Berwyn House Road and Greenbelt Road. Turf along the outside perimeter of the drainage conveyances and adjacent to the street is mowed every other week by the landscaping maintenance contractor. Prince George’s County is responsible for the turf maintenance inside the wooden guardrail along Narragansett Parkway, which is mowed four times (beginning of May, mid-June, beginning of August, mid-September) a year. The City is responsible for the maintenance of the interior vegetation of Guilford Run, which is performed annually. City staff will mow right-of-way areas adjacent to unimproved properties every other month during the growing season.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Adjacent to alleys, roads and streets throughout the city• City parcels• Drainage conveyances at Guilford Run and Narragansett Parkway• Hiker/biker trail between Albion Road and Greenbelt Road• Unimproved properties

Concerns and improvements

The following changes may be explored in the future to improve athletic field turf coverage:

- More frequent seeding.
- Sodding selected high traffic areas (e.g. goal post areas) annually
- Use of pre-emergent herbicides to control grassy weeds
- Use of post-emergents herbicides to control broadleaf weeds

Goals

Short term

- Public Works will maintain the athletic fields as outlined above in the athletic field section.

Long term

- Public Works or a contractor may perform the turf maintenance improvements to the athletic fields, as listed above under concerns and improvements, to improve turf coverage.

Landscape maintenance

The level of maintenance of landscape plantings is dictated by their visibility and use. Maintenance areas include playgrounds and prioritized landscape planting areas. Staff performs all maintenance.

Specifications for work: City playgrounds

Maintenance tasks	Sites
<p>The play structures and lots are inspected twice a month. “WoodCarpet” mulch surrounding the play structures is replaced annually or as needed. Shrubs are pruned when forming an obstruction, for aesthetic purposes and for plant health reasons. Shrubs are planted or replaced in the fall. Weeds are controlled by using either horticultural vinegar and/or other materials.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Branchville • Calvert Hills • Crystal Springs • Davis • Duval • Hollywood • Muskogee • Old Town • The Mews

Specifications for work: High priority

Maintenance tasks	Sites
<p>Planting beds are mulched once a year and inspected every other week during the growing season (April - October), and monthly during the off-season (November – March). Annual floral displays are installed twice a year and manual watering occurs during extended dry periods. Weed control in planting areas is accomplished by mechanical and/or chemical means as needed. Shrubs are pruned when forming an obstruction, for aesthetic purposes and for plant health reasons. Shrubs are planted or replaced in the fall. Perennials are pruned prior to the start of the next growing season. Leaf removal occurs in the fall.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Calvert Road median and Pots • City buildings • Edgewood Road medians • Knox Road Plaza • Route One medians • St Andrews medians

Specifications for work: Middle priority

Maintenance tasks	Sites
<p>Planting beds are mulched once a year and inspected monthly during the growing season and every other month in the off-season. Annual floral displays, where planned, are installed twice a year and manual watering occurs during extended dry periods. Weed control in planting areas is accomplished by mechanical and/or chemical means as needed. Shrubs are pruned when forming an obstruction, for aesthetic purposes and for plant health reasons. Shrubs are planted or replaced in the fall. Perennials are pruned prior to the start of the next growing season. Leaf removal occurs in the fall.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blackfoot Circle • Cattail Hill • Guilford Drive Median (two most easterly medians) • Guilford /Harvard Road Island • Hartwick Road/Princeton Avenue Island • Hiker/biker trail between Albion Road and Greenbelt Road (includes Berwyn Plaza, commercial area, and end of Berwyn House Road) • Hopkins Island • James Adams Park • Osage/Mohegan Island • Lackawanna Street and 53rd Avenue islands • Rhode Island Avenue between Greenbelt Road and University Boulevard • Sunnyside sign • Wake Forest/Fordham Island • Welcome sign at Albion Road • The Veterans Memorial

Specifications for work: Low priority

Maintenance tasks	Sites
<p>Planting beds, if present, may be mulched. Inspections occur every other month during the growing season and at least once during the off-season. Some manual watering occurs during extended dry periods. Plantings occur in the fall. Weed control is accomplished by mechanical and/or chemical means.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Edmonston Road • Odessa Road • Paint Branch sound wall • Rhode Island Avenue between Beechwood Road and Clemson • 54th Avenue

Goals

Short Term

- Implement a more proactive weed control program for landscaped areas.
- Organize seasonal volunteer events to maintain specific landscaped areas.

Long Term

- Enhance plantings in high priority medians.

Tree maintenance

The City maintains trees growing on City property and in the City right-of-ways. Several Public Works staff are Maryland certified Roadside Tree Care Experts and are designated to supervise the City's tree planting and maintenance operations. Roadside tree care work in Maryland is governed by the annotated Code of Maryland subtitle 4, with the purpose of ensuring the proper care of roadside trees in the interest of promoting and maintaining healthy trees and safe, unobstructed, and aesthetically pleasing public roads and rights-of-way.

Because trees pose hazards higher in risk than most other vegetation management, right-of-way tree-related emergencies are responded to immediately. Emergency situations are assessed and corrected by staff or contractor as conditions dictate. Routine tree maintenance is performed by staff, if possible, or compiled into a list for contractor completion. The tree pruning and removal list is completed quarterly.

PEPCO, the electric utility provider, contracts tree pruning, of private and City trees that grow near overhead power lines. The City is divided into tree pruning subsections, which are scheduled, weather dependant, every other year. The PEPCO Forester for Prince George's County will notify the City Horticulturist approximately one week before the PEPCO tree contractor will begin scheduled tree pruning work in any subsection of the City.

Tree replacement

Roadside tree care standards state that when a roadside tree is removed, it shall be replaced. A replacement tree may be planted at the location where the tree was removed or the Horticulturist may select another planting site in the City. City residents who either want to replace a removed tree or want a new tree can make such request to the Horticulturist. The goal is to plant trees in the City right-of-way where they are preferred. Tree selection is based on the right tree in the right place principle. For example, only small trees will be planted underneath overhead utility lines. Trees are planted annually in the fall. Newly planted trees are routinely inspected after installation for follow-up maintenance needs, such as watering, pruning and stake removal.

Tree evaluation

The City Horticulturist is a Roadside Tree Care Expert and responds to citizen requests for tree work, as well as conducts windshield and/or walk around tree inspections throughout the City. The main focus of inspections are trees over 6" diameter at breast height (dbh). When performing a walk-around inspection, trees are checked for seven categories of defects (decayed wood, cracks, root problems, weak branch unions, cankers, poor tree architecture, dead trees/tops and branches). The inspected tree is given a hazard potential rating: low, moderate, or high risk. This rating is based on the probability of failure, size of defective parts,

probability of target impact and other risk factors. Tree work is performed according to the hazard potential rating.

Some of the specifications for contracted tree work

“Branches to be removed shall be cut back to a live lateral branch at least 1/3 the diameter of the severed branch. Cuts shall be made sufficiently close to the trunk or parent limb without cutting into the branch collar or leaving a protruding stub. Proper pruning techniques shall be followed at all times. Except in the case of tree removals, climbing hooks or spurs are prohibited. Maintenance pruning shall be performed on the trees listed in this project, and shall consist of the following pruning types:

- *Crown cleaning shall consist of the selective removal of one or more of the following items: dead, dying, diseased, weak branches and water sprouts from the tree’s crown.*
- *Crown raising shall consist of the removal of the lower branches of a tree in order to provide clearance.*
- *Crown reduction reduces the height and/or spread of a tree.*
- *Crown thinning shall consist of the selective removal of branches to increase light penetration, air movement, and reduce weight. Pruning for street tree maintenance shall include a crown cleaning, of all applicable limbs ≥ 1 ” in diameter. The crown of right-of-way trees shall be raised and/or reduced completely around the tree where applicable, to provide clearance as follows:*
 - o *9’ minimum over sidewalks and/or vegetated areas*
 - o *15’ minimum over the face of curb*
 - o *18’ minimum over the driving lanes of the street*
 - o *5’ minimum clearance from buildings, streetlights, traffic control devices, utility lines including service drops to structures, and other improvements. (Note: this does not necessarily require the removal of all limbs to the trunk to the height of needed clearance.)*
- *Tree pruning of private trees overhanging the right-of-way will be specifically identified.”*

The City Code as it pertains to private vegetation

The property owner should maintain trees, shrubs or other vegetation growing on private property. The City Code states in chapter 125-10J (Responsibilities of owners and occupants):

“The owner or occupant shall keep adjacent City streets, sidewalks and rights-of-way clear of all vegetative obstructions.”

The City Code states in chapter 141-5 B (Maintenance of public sidewalks):

“It shall be unlawful for any owner or occupant of any property to allow or let any public sidewalk in front of or beside his/her property to become unsightly from any form or substance that might be construed to be detrimental to the health, safety and welfare or that might be an impediment to the safe passage of any pedestrian.”

Property owner notification

The code enforcement department is charged with enforcing the city code, and therefore should be looking for right-of-way vegetative obstructions. In addition, the Horticulturist may observe a right-of-way vegetative obstruction and will notify Code Enforcement. The focus will be only on vegetation directly abutting the City right-of-way. A Code Enforcement officer will investigate the report of a vegetative obstruction and may issue a warning to the property owner identifying the encroachment and request removal of the encroaching vegetation within a set time period. When Code Enforcement issues a warning to the property owner, information regarding tree maintenance will be included. Resident compliance with the City Code is the preferred method of action. When a property owner is not compliant or obstructing vegetation forms a hazard, the City Forester may be called upon to help resolve the situation. If the encroaching vegetation is not removed within the established time period a municipal infraction may be issued. Private vegetation encroaching the City right-of-way creating a threat to public safety will be removed at the City's expense. When private trees, shrubs or vegetation encroaching the City's right-of-way are scheduled for maintenance, they will be cut back to the property line. If trees, shrubs, or other vegetation growing from private property obscure a traffic control device, the City's horticultural staff will prune the vegetation creating the obstruction back to the property line.

Concerns and improvements

Safety issues and property rights issues are always a concern in maintaining healthy trees along city right-of-ways. In the future more effective communications between the City and property owners will occur when private trees overgrowing into the right-of-way are identified. Public education and a sensitive but firm use of code enforcement could go a long way towards improving safety and reducing workload on Public Works. These aspects, however, involve effort and staff beyond Public Works. Please see the "Solutions and future directions" for further discussion.

Goals

Short term

- Quarterly pruning of City trees will begin focusing on pruning entire streets/blocks.
- The Tree and Landscape Board will develop educational brochures on tree maintenance for distribution to homeowners.
- A pilot tree inventory will be conducted in conjunction with the Tree and Landscape Board, the City Horticulturist, and volunteers.

Long term

- Conduct a complete, Citywide tree inventory based on the outcome of the pilot tree inventory.
- Implement a pruning cycle for all City trees.
- Based on the implementation of a tree inventory, the cost for tree replacements may increase.
- Develop specifications for tree preservation areas in conjunction with construction projects.
- Identify City areas suitable for reforestation projects related to development in the City.

Weed control

The horticultural staff and the landscaping contractor perform right-of-way weed control adjacent to City maintained areas, primarily by chemical means. Several Public Works staff are licensed Maryland pesticide applicators. The horticultural staff chemically control weed growth in hardscape areas in the downtown commercial area. The practices of Integrated Pest Management (IPM) will be considered when weed control measures become necessary. Reducing chemical use, without sacrificing effective control measures, is the preferred process.

Specifications of weed control work

Specifications included in the contract between the City and the mowing landscaping contractor state that:

“The contractor shall apply a post-emergent herbicide to all concrete curbs, gutters, sidewalks, and cement median pads adjacent to the mowing areas listed in this contract. These applications shall be made at the beginning of each mowing season, the first mowing in June, and the first mowing in September. The post-emergent herbicide must be approved by the City representative and applied in accordance with the laws of the State of Maryland by a registered applicator.”

Pesticide selection

Pesticide selection and use by City staff is based on the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) approved product label. Each pesticide has an EPA signal word: CAUTION, WARNING, or DANGER.

- CAUTION tells you that the pesticide is slightly toxic or relatively nontoxic.
- WARNING tells you that the pesticide is moderately toxic.
- DANGER tells you that the pesticide is highly toxic.

Every attempt will be made to use pesticides with the lowest possible impact and safety risk; i.e. the signal word CAUTION. By using such products health risks posed to the applicator, the general public, animals, and the environment are minimal. Other labeled products may be selected because they will provide the desired end result, which the caution labeled product may not. Pesticide sensitive individuals registered with the Maryland Department of Agriculture will be notified prior to a pesticide application adjacent to their property. When pesticides are applied a sign will be posted for 48 hours to make citizens aware of the application.

Concerns and improvements

Workload and limited resources indicate a need for effective weed control. While the city is sensitive to concerns of using chemical control, Public Works has determined that the economic benefits of using chemical control outweigh the potentially negative environmental effects cited by opponents of chemical treatment. Public Works is not staffed to accomplish weed control entirely by hand.

Solutions and future directions

This section includes both desired directions from Public Works and recommendations from the Tree and Landscape Board in support of Public Works. The Tree and Landscape Board recognizes that Public Works cannot accomplish everything listed here with their current resources, and can assist in identifying granting resources, to improve the status of City maintained landscape and public areas.

Public Works maintains safe and attractive areas of vegetation throughout the city. The following items are being considered to help control maintenance costs and improve property owners' knowledge of vegetation maintenance.

1. Restructure tasks for greater efficiency
2. Improve process for working with property owners; e.g. by notification and enforcing code in conjunction with maintenance work.
3. Engage citizens more directly; e.g. by developing educational leaflets promoting healthy tree maintenance, Public Works activities, weed control, use of chemicals, etc.
4. Publish the vegetation management plan and create a tree inventory for proactive maintenance and planning purposes.

1. Restructure tasks for greater efficiency

In several sections above we indicated possible restructuring of tasks with certain types of maintenance. They are repeated here for reference. These include: a) improving the tree pruning schedule to incorporate a more proactive maintenance plan. A cyclical pruning plan/schedule will be developed to include maintenance of all City trees. b) amending turf management practices to include increased seeding and sodding to repair bare areas, and implementing a proactive weed control program.

2. Improve process for working with property owners

Currently the issues that arise for the city with respect to property owners is maintenance of trees on private property that overhang public areas such as sidewalks or right-of-ways. This ranges from the need for simple pruning to addressing potentially dangerous situations. Negligent property owners can create not only risk to others, but also create work for the city in terms of tree maintenance.

The City has developed a policy to address the situation, which will notify property owners where a problem is identified, educate them as to why the City needs the tree limbs or vegetation pruned, provide them with educational materials related to tree maintenance, and give them a period of time to take action. If the property owner chooses not to take action, Code Enforcement will issue a warning and then cite the owner; and if necessary, take (appropriate) further action.

3. Engage citizens more directly

Public Works follows a detailed set of protocols maintaining vegetation in the city; publication of this plan will help educate citizens about this service. It will provide a reference for City

Council and others when questions arise. The following are potential ways to further inform residents of their role as well as city activities:

- A public leaflet on weed control; the pros and cons of pesticide use, and recommendations for homeowners in their own yards
- A public leaflet on tree care, including property owners rights and responsibilities, contact information, and recommendations (e.g. how to find a contractor to remove a dangerous or declining tree)
- A public leaflet on how to evaluate the health of a tree, and how to prune correctly to maintain tree health

The City already makes a number of useful leaflets and flyers available, and these would simply be additions to that list. Ideally these materials would be made available on the City's web site. Because Public Works has limited staff, these documents should be created by the Tree and Landscape Board or other interested volunteers, and Public Works can then review them.

4. Publish the vegetation management plan and create a tree inventory

As previously stated, this management plan is a key step in providing others with an understanding of how Public Works maintains vegetation on city property and right-of-ways. A City Tree Inventory, of right-of-way trees and those on City property, can be used to help plan strategically and make informed decisions about tree selection, pruning and removals as well as document and identify the City's tree population. The Tree and Landscape Board is working with the City Horticulturist to implement a pilot tree inventory with volunteers in a defined area. The City could use the information collected from a tree inventory in a variety of ways to achieve a balance in species and ages of healthy trees throughout the city as well as identify potential tree problems and associated maintenance costs.