2025-04-20 Laura Tedeschi

Final Observations for the Landscape Committee, as requested by Pete Beyer

Native Plant Bed Building 26

I'm not fertilizing, or in any way aiding these plants, except to water them in the first 2 summer seasons. That is intentional, as the "test" is to see what they can do on their own, unaided.

These plants have bounced up this Spring, early(!) and vigorous(!) They look 100% better now than they did in their pots from the nursery last year when they were planted in August, so I am interpreting this as being happy in our soil. And so far they seem OK with the hot sun on this west side of the building, although I have been watering them 1 to 2 times a week during high summer.

Last year I sent to our committee the location and name of each plant in the bed, so since the information was made available earlier, I will not repeat it here.

Our intention was to see what native plants dominate and thrive in this difficult bed. Then recommend introducing the best species into the Master Plan to take the place of fussier plants, i.e. need to be dead-headed each season or didn't thrive in our soil…etc. Or, augment the Master Plan to use these native plants in places that don't receive much water or western hot sun, in other words, in places that are proving hard to plant with our yews and boxwood.

Carport End-caps

I personally would like to see Native Plants, especially tall native shrubs on the Kansas Forest Service list, mass planted at Carport end-caps. By mass planting I mean a single tall shrub species mass planted on both ends of the carport. Each carport might have a different species - then look at the behavior - which ones do we like the best, which are thriving the best and use them as our Master Plan for Carports. Here is why:

The concrete barriers will contain anything that is invasive and the mass planting would look lush, eliminate mowing by eliminating grass, provide habitat for birds, eliminate the need to remove the root ball of the Bradford Pears and be maintenance free. Also, when we are ready to cut back using our sprinkler system (as water prices escalate) the carports will be ready with native plants that shade the soil and are drought-resistant. Win, Win, Win.

If eliminating grass up-front is too laborious, allow the native shrubs to slowly dominate and eliminate the grass with no human manual interference.

South side of complex, across the pond

(This idea came from Tina Forbes Seeley and is elaborated here.) The south side of the complex, across the pond, is an opportunity to cut the costs of our mowing vendor and our water costs by going wild and native. If examples are needed, both the Sprint campus (North side on 117th) and the Leawood Justice Center have fields of native grasses and plants growing naturally. They look rugged and varied, which will appeal to many but not all residents, so that is a consideration.

I very rarely see anyone walking in the grass on the south side of the pond; 95% of the time, we all use the sidewalks, even with our dogs. We would need to plant the trees we desire — it will be easier to plant before it goes wild, if this idea were adopted. Tina had the idea of having paths through the grasses, and that could be explored as well.

The pond's edge on the south side would go wild as well, which would anchor the soil without destroying the views of the residential buildings on the pond. The North side would remain manicured with lawns and a clean edge. Pete has wisely suggested using specific species of flowering ground cover to anchor the soil and this small profile solution would be great for the North pond edge.

Issue: Going wild will likely introduce invasive Honeysuckle, Mulberry and others, and would produce real challenges in keeping this area only for native plants. So an effective plan would need to be in place for maintenance before this idea goes forward, for example: every spring the area and pond-edge would be mowed/weed-wacked to the ground keeping invasive plants in check and providing clear areas for natives to re-populate. Something like that, and the devil will be in the details.

Actions for the Pond

A maintenance plan needs to be set for the creek and pond with no deviations.

A maintenance plan is a mitigation strategy for flooding risk, and flooding risk under global warning is a serious concern for (A) the residents on the pond, (B) for everyone should it require an increase in HOA fees (or assessments) and (C) for the community should buildings become uninhabitable and the livability of the complex comes under question with lowered real estate values. Right now realtor.com shows Building 25 as having flooded. It's a bit cumbersome to get to this information today but with AI infiltration, this information will be available easily, spontaneously following flooding events, I would expect in the near future. We need to protect the entire community from being branded as flood-prone. We need to aggressively address whatever problems arise and not think that it only happened once and will not happen again.

We very much need the plan to address the flooding of the pedestrian tunnel under Roe. What solutions belong to Leawood? And what solutions belong to us? Both need to be clearly defined, agreed to, and executed by both parties. When Tina Forbes Seeley and I left this issue with FirstService in August of 2024, Tina had Leawood Public Works Engineer Dan McMullen assigned to propose a solution under the direction of David Ley, Leawood Public Works Director, who manages the evaluation of stormwater improvements for the city. Where are we today?

The dredging of the pond needs to be done regularly by an experienced vendor, to mitigate the flooding risk. And so far, for the 10 years I have lived on the pond, this maintenance has been seen as optional at worst, and sporadic at best. I heard the idea said out loud, "it will just fill back up with soil so why dredge it?" When we put it off, soil builds up under the surface, choking off easy flow of water, and the shallow water heats up accommodating algae growth. Worse yet, islands break the surface, and plants grow which anchor the soil and create a real removal problem. It is easier and cheaper to dredge often, on a schedule. When we wait 10 years, it's a serious summer-long undertaking that is very expensive and damaging to the land around the pond. If we don't dredge, it logically follows that flood waters in the pond will be forced to go WIDE and we have many buildings close to the pond/creek.

Here is what I keep thinking: "why are we treating flooding as an after-thought?" In my mind, water collection (all over our complex including swampy areas and runoff areas), deserves our sharpest attention and inspection. Water is one of the most destructive elements we face that we have some warning of and can mount a response. When our sprinkler closets flood we pay attention and fix it. When our RUBS water meters in the buildings started flooding we forced residents to fix it. Yet Building 25 flooded and what is the plan? I think we are minimizing the external threat of flood water and adding unnecessarily to our risk. I worry about this.