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Washington Grove Legacy Meadow Management Plan

The Town of Washington Grove, Mayor's Legacy Field Committee

The Mayor's Legacy Field Committee was established in April 2011 to develop a draft management plan for the Legacy Meadow. The Mayor's full charge to the Committee's is provided in Appendix 1.

This is the Committee's draft Plan.

General Principles and Goals

- *Maintenance and long-term stability* – To help ensure the long-term viability of the meadow, particularly in times of fluctuating annual budgets, the Committee is interested in a plan that involves, where possible, naturalizing, self-sustaining vegetation, habitats, and ecological components, which require minimal ongoing maintenance.
- *Habitat heterogeneity and diversity* -- Establish, to the extent practical, heterogeneity in vegetation type, its form and structure, and the layout of areas to encourage animal habitat and diversity. Consideration should be given, for example, to creating edges of dissimilar habitats (*e.g.* between woods and meadow), young and older stages of maturation, and use of vegetation “islands” to encourage a diversity of native animal species.
- *Native species* – Use of native (or naturalized) species only.
- *Invasive plant species.* Remove all invasive species by standard protocols in use by Montgomery County Department of Parks (MCDP). Removal should take place as soon as possible (while also understanding any budgetary or other constraints). The timing should take into account, where possible, breeding, migration, and other natural cycles of the existing wildlife. A program needs to be developed for periodic and ongoing removal of invasive species.
- *Herbicides and Pesticides* – Avoid use of herbicides and pesticides, except when necessary for removal of certain invasive species or other instances in agreement with the Town
- *Surfaces and mulches* -- No hard surfaces of any kind. Paths should be water permeable and to the extent possible require little or no ongoing maintenance, *e.g.*, the replacement of wood chips. To the extent practicable natural “products” (*e.g.*, recycled mulch) should be used.

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- *Mowing* – We recommend open “meadow” areas be mowed at most once per year and at least once every two years. Mowing should be performed outside of the nesting and breeding season (April through August) to be most beneficial to wildlife. The best timing for this is in late Summer/early Fall (September) or late winter (March).

General Considerations for a Meadow Map

- The tree line boundary (closest the ICC) is to be retained and widened to maximize its effect as a visual and acoustic barrier. The tree line should not be a straight line, but instead have undulating contours, perhaps with a “peninsula” extending into the meadow. The goal here is to increase wood-edge habitat diversity and to provide visual and acoustic buffers. The tree line should contain mixed vegetation types, including conifers to provide year-round barriers, with an eye toward eventual natural maturation and to provide as much buffer as possible.
- Establish vegetation “islands” in various locations (specific locations and dimensions to be determined) to enhance animal habitat types. Ideally, these islands would comprise about 10-15% of the remaining open meadow (i.e., the open area not including tree lines, borders and hedgerows discussed throughout this plan).
- The Hedgerow (running along Ridge Road) should be maintained as “relatively open” with views by residents into the meadow. The existing healthy, native mature trees will be retained. Non-native trees and vegetation that are removed should be replaced with trees or shrubs in esthetic ways while maintaining an open view for residents. Use of “islands” (see above) should provide some fill in conjunction with the hedgerow.
- Recognizing the need for public access to the meadow, we strongly recommend providing access in only four locations, as follows and as indicated on the attached map:
 1. Ridge Road (at the south end, near Brown Street);
 2. Ridge Road (north end);
 3. Through the Toll Brothers development site; and
 4. Roughly mid-way along the tree line.

We are opposed to a suggested access point on lower Brown Street (near the intersection of the tree line).

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- The Committee is in favor of having pathways through the meadow essentially as they now exist, i.e., one crossing the meadow and one that borders one-half of the tree line, that then winds its way back along the Toll Brothers line. We see no need for a path that surrounds the entire meadow, no need for a complex set of paths within the meadow, nor ones that exist solely to enhance external access to the meadow. We suggest the path form a loop, returning along the hedgerow or simply connecting with Ridge Road.
- The Committee has heard mention of establishing an “interpretive kiosk”, and request further discussion about its location, size, and appearance. In general, we believe that it should have the smallest possible “footprint”, perhaps incorporating it into an area with a small sitting bench, a small memorial, or a wildflower garden.

Specific Considerations for a Meadow Map

Tree Line:

- Retain and widen this tree line to maximize this area as both a visual and acoustic barrier. We ask that Town residents, in consultation with MCDP and other experts, be provided an opportunity to develop a specific planting program for this area. The goals for the program, among other things, are to include a variety of vegetation types; incorporate plants that have a range of length of time to, and size at, maturity; enhance capacity to provide diverse animal habitats; and other features. We are very much in favor of, for example, transplanting (if possible) some of the existing Virginia cedar seedlings in the meadow to enhance the tree line.
- A continued maintenance schedule needs to be developed, with a goal of developing a self-sustaining and low maintenance system.

The Hedgerow:

- As above, remove all invasive species as soon as is feasible, and develop a plan for ongoing removal.
- All dead and dying trees removed if possible. We understand PEPCO will be removing trees that interfere with power lines. After this work is completed an assessment will be made about which individual trees to remove and which are to be retained. We recommend that trees with interesting shapes and desirable native species should be saved on a case by case basis.

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- Behind (i.e., “field-ward) of the power line, trees and shrubs will be planted to replace those removed. The specifics of this planting -- the types and spacing of vegetation -- will be determined, based on Town and MCDP discussions, to maintain a view into the meadow by some residents along Ridge Road.
- The Committee is concerned about unwanted parking along, and vehicle access through, the hedgerow and would like to consider ways to eliminate this, e.g., use of spaced posts, retention of appropriately spaced existing trees, fallen logs, large shrubs, or by some other means. The Committee seeks MCDP advice on this and asks to have a discussion about options.
- The remainder of the Ridge Road (nearest Brown Street maintained as is, with uninterrupted views into the meadow (see “Brown Street Border” below).
- An agreed continued maintenance schedule to be developed.

Toll Brothers Border:

- Building on the Toll Brothers re-forestation plan, enhance habitat diversity by tastefully positioning vegetation islands and individual trees near but offset from this border. Develop a path access in this area that joins the path that adjoins the tree line.

Brown Street Border:

- To be maintained as an open area, with maximum view of the meadow by residents along this border. Low ground cover or sporadically spaced low trees might be considered.

The Meadow:

- As above, remove all invasive species and maintain an ongoing removal program.
- This area should be maintained with periodic mowing. We recommend mowing be limited to once per year in late Fall or early Spring.
- Maintain natural (those currently existing) paths.
- The west end of the meadow, between the Brown Street border and the path that crosses it, to be maintained as a tree-less meadow.

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- Maintain several tree “islands” throughout the rest of the meadow for aesthetics and to encourage wildlife habitat diversity. Locations and how they are developed and maintained, and the types of vegetation they contain can be developed in consultation with MCDP with an eye to low maintenance (e.g., to facilitate mowing) and eventual naturalization.
- To the extent possible, enhance animal habitat and esthetics with both the scattering and developing of specific pockets of naturalized, regionally-appropriate and native wildflowers.
- Develop an agreed maintenance schedule.

Vegetable Gardens:

We are opposed to the idea of creating a “community garden” for growing vegetables in the meadow.

Appendix 1.

The Mayor's Legacy Field Committee--DRAFT

The Mayor's Legacy Field Committee was established in April 2011 to accomplish the following goals:

- Act as liaison between the Town of Washington Grove and the Montgomery County Parks Department (MCPD) to oversee the easement of "natural open meadow" as approved in the deed of dedication in 2007.
- Develop a plan with MCPD that will be presented to the Town in an informational meeting or Special Town Meeting.
- Complete final negotiations with MCPD to finalize a plan that is signed off by both parties after approval by the Town.

It is anticipated that the term of the Committee will be for no more than one year. It will be up to future Mayor's to determine the need for re-authorizing the Committee.

Operations

1. The Committee will have a Chair who will work with the Mayor to determine meeting dates and the agenda for the meeting.
2. Members are volunteers but will be expected to offer expertise, opinions, or ideas that serve the interest of the Town in oversight of the field.
3. The primary charge to the Committee is to work with MCPD to develop plans for management of the field. This includes all aspects of the environment, physical state, and access to the field.
4. All plans developed for the field will be presented to the Mayor and Town Council for discussion. Final decisions on items to be included in the plan to be offered at informational sessions for residents or a Special Town Meeting will be developed in cooperation between the Committee and the Town Council.
5. Presenting the plan to the Town will be an effort of both the Mayor and Committee Chair, or designees.
6. The Committee has broad leeway in bringing issues to MCPD based on discussions among Committee members and from comments by the Mayor and Town Council.
7. Any agreement between the Town and MCPD will be signed by the Mayor with approval from the Town Council.