

Little Whale Cove Common Area Maintenance Standards for Trees and Understory Vegetation

“Careful planning and development have kept the magnificent oceanfront acres of Little Whale Cove (LWC) as natural as possible, with no polished or manicured look, and with a low structure density.” While written long ago as a marketing piece, the Forest Management Committee (FMC) believes that it captures the essence of what our approach should be towards common area maintenance.

We live in a temperate rain forest, one which produces some of the highest amounts of biomass of any ecosystem. Trees and vegetation grow, and also support a diverse variety of animal species. Sunlight, water and soil conditions also play a significant role in what grows here, how fast it grows, and how often or not tree and vegetation natural growth patterns should be “managed”. In addition to maintaining natural aesthetics, LWC should aim to minimize impact on the ecosystem, and reduce risk with an understory of native, fire-resistant vegetation. The FMC firmly believes that a “one size fits all” policy does not belong in LWC. Rather, qualitative standards should be implemented along with quantitative standards as part of our long-term maintenance plan.

LWC maintenance standards must be suitable to achieve sometimes conflicting objectives. Vegetation is often used for privacy around residences, but is also used to make our traffic islands more visually attractive. Height/size standards are clearly different for these two instances, and must be considered in our maintenance planning. Visual safety is an important consideration at street corners and around islands, so trimming standards are likely to be the most restrictive and should occur regularly. But away from traffic-sensitive areas, trimming should be less frequent in scope and frequency in order to preserve the more natural look of our common areas, and contributing to visual and noise barriers for homeowner privacy.

The FMC proposes the following guidelines for the LWC Common Area Maintenance Standards, including Innisfree General Common Areas:

Trees (Cedar, Spruce, Hemlock, Pines, and others) – For Traffic Corridors, trees should be limbed to a height of fifteen (15) feet overhanging the roadway and eight to ten (8-10) feet over pathways. For all other areas, tree limbs should only be trimmed for safety reasons, or selectively for certified view lots, and then only as high as required for safety or view band designation. No trees will be cut down unless clearly dead, or are crowding and impacting the health of neighboring trees, or certified a hazard by a professional arborist. In terms of new plantings, trees should be located a minimum of ten feet from streets and a minimum of five feet from paved paths.

Salal –When Salal gets too large with an abundance of woody mass at the bottom, a renovation pruning to a minimum of 24 – 36 inches may be necessary. Otherwise, seasonal pruning should be scheduled for late first quarter, as it is not among the first plants to show growth in the spring.

Salal growth is dependent on the amount of light received. Height standards are variable based upon location and usage—taller for privacy, shorter elsewhere, e.g., traffic islands.

Rhododendron – Size will vary widely across LWC depending upon location and use. For most varieties, pruning should be done immediately after the rhododendron has flowered, ensuring blooms for the following season. There is no size restriction when used for a privacy screen.

Wax Myrtle – Trimming should be done late first quarter if renovation is major. Height and thickness will vary with location and use. Remove bottom (sucker) growth if needed.

Twinberry & Huckleberry – Renovation pruning, if needed in Fall/Winter. Trimming to a maximum height of 60”, based on location.

Ferns – Ferns only need to be cut to the ground to limit their size. In most areas this is not necessary, as they will self-prune. Trimming frequency is also based on temperatures, so leave them alone unless causing a sight issue for traffic or to remove dead branches.

Escallonia- A long term program of replacing Escallonia with other appropriate native species shall be instituted. In the interim, pruning shall be scheduled regularly.

Invasive Species – Per the Forest Management Plan, invasive species must be eradicated from LWC. English Ivy, Blackberry and Scotch Broom top the list, and must be eliminated by all homeowners on private property and the Association on common areas. When removing invasives, try not to disturb soil and other adjacent plants when practicable to avoid drying out the soil in summer. When this is not possible, try to have some new plantings available to cover bare soil.

Weeds & Moss – Efforts to eradicate invasive weeds and moss should first consider environmental impact. Weeds may be treated with herbicides in larger areas, but caution should be exercised to avoid drying out the ground, or adding toxins to the ground water that runs to the ocean and kills marine life. Options may be to utilize non-toxic solutions (e.g., vinegar for moss) or to invest in ground covers to crowd out the weeds.

Designated Lawn Areas (Rec Center, Gate House, Sign, Meadows) – Cut seasonally every two weeks, as needed. Long-term, planning should occur to reduce the size of lawn areas and replace with native plants and shrubs.

Islands – Shrubs and understory plants will be trimmed to a maximum height of 36 inches, as sight requirements dictate. Salal will be kept to a maximum of 24 inches. Trees will be maintained in accordance with above standards. Wood chips will be applied as available.

Street Corners – Shrubs and other vegetation will be trimmed to a maximum height of 30 inches within 5 feet of the curb/street. Trees will be maintained per above standards.

Community Signage – Shrubs and vegetation will be trimmed within 24 inches of sign perimeter, if needed.

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With the near-term establishment of our “Growing- On” Nursery, the FMC will be able to provide new trees and plants to supplement those we must purchase for the common areas in the future. We believe the above standards will lead to better planning and keeping LWC as natural as possible.