



ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP MATTERS

RACE TRACK NATURE PRESERVE

Update at June 2017

As summer approaches, the Tree Advisory Board continues to monitor, plant and plan for the future.

After the Arbor Day festivities on April 29 (visit www.tptreeboard.org for photos and details), Village Engineer Pat Hines inspected the Race Track Nature Preserve with Jeff Voss, Head of DPW, Ethan Dropkin, Designer from Larry Weaner Landscape Associates (LWLA), Mayor Mary Jo Guinchard and Chiu Yin Hempel, Chair of the Tree Advisory Board (TPTAB). Village Grant Writer Fred Rella was also present to assess any potential grant opportunities.

At the Tuxedo Road and Clubhouse Road embankments, we reviewed potential erosion and storm water run-off issues. Other than adding native rock (harvested on site) rip rap under the culverts and drain openings, no further green infrastructure was deemed necessary.

Towards the southern end of the Preserve, the inspection team made the decision to leave open a DPW excavation site near municipal water lines (the area is continuously filled with water) to allow easy access for future repairs, and to provide a watering hole for wildlife, especially birds and amphibians. The bank area has since been graded and seeded with wild native flowers for a more appealing, natural look.

At the northern portion of the circular mowed path, we uncovered a section of the historic underground drainage system that extends in a grid pattern throughout the basin. We also found the foundations of the Grand Stand and a

watch tower. These sites will be preserved and landscaped as archaeological features of the Preserve.

The DPW and TPTAB planted six grey dogwoods, an excellent native substitute for extremely invasive barberry and burning bushes, having maple like leaves, white flowers and salmon-to-burgundy color in the Fall. Grey dogwoods are a woody, colonizing (it spreads) shrub that grows to 2-6'. It can be planted in dry shade. We also planted two flowering dogwoods, a small, beautiful white flowering native tree that produces a berry essential to migrating birds. Lastly, we planted a tulip tree, chosen by John Yrizarry, 2017 Arbor Day honoree, near the planned new entrance at the Fox Hill/northeast end of the Preserve. (We have flagged the paths, to be constructed, that will lead to the new entrance.) Located on a slight rise, the planting site provides a scenic vantage point to view the entire basin. The tulip tree is a stunning, fast-growing (two feet a year) shade tree with tulip-shaped yellow-orange blossoms that attract hummingbirds high in the canopy. The seeds attract finches and cardinals. The tree is also a host to the Eastern Swallowtail butterfly.

The beneficial effects of the late-winter forestry mulching continue to be seen. Natives such as penstemon, spiderwort, bellwort, bee balm, zig-zag goldenrod (a rare plant), trillium, bloodroot, fern, and spirea are coming back. The natural flow of underground and surface water into the basin before draining out via Augusta Brook has become more apparent, especially at the northeast end of the Preserve. The woody invasives such as Japanese barberry, multiflora rose and burning bush show little sign of regenerating.

Unfortunately, however, some invasives such as miscanthus, mugwort, stinging nettles, phragmites, and crown vetch still have a stronghold despite last year's effort by the TPTAB to hand pull the plants and cover the infestation sites with geotextile fabric. LWLA estimates approximately 15 to 30% of the Race Track is still dominated by invasives.

We decided against using mechanical removal in the summer, because it would disturb the soil and threaten wildlife already resident at the Preserve. We also wanted to reduce the time frame to create the desired landscape, and to be cost-effective. Accordingly, LWLA recommended limited application of proprietary-blend herbicides that do not persist in the environment. They assure us, based on their thirty-year experience in creating native meadows and being

a recognized leader in ecologically sensitive native landscaping, that “none of the chemicals ...(would) do any damage to wildlife (vertebrate or invertebrate)”. To further restrict any negative impact of using chemicals, LWLA’s professional staff will spot spray individual invasive plants and, in areas of dense invasive coverage, a broom sprayer attached to an ATV will be employed. Because of the quick breakdown of the herbicide, dead vegetation will be left *in situ* to replenish soil nutrients. This treatment, planned for mid-June, will avoid the breeding season of birds, amphibians and other wildlife and allow us to take advantage of the Fall planting season (when there is less need to water new plants and seeded areas). LWLA will supervise all aspects of the targeted herbicide application. Signage will be posted, and the Race track closed for twenty-four hours.

Looking ahead, the landscape design and phased installation plan, guided by both the needs of the site and available budget, is being finalized. Assuming success in controlling the remaining invasive species, we hope to perform a dormant seeding of the meadow and install more native plants this Fall.

For more information on the Race Track Nature Preserve, visit www.tptreeboard.org