

HAZEL LANES 2023/4 LANDSCAPE COMMITTEE REPORT

Firstly, I like to thank Beth Girvan, my fellow committee member. She has been most generous with her time, offering sage advice and plant knowledge. I would also like to thank the eight residents who act as “landscape spotters”, identifying problems in the landscape that need attention.

I also want to acknowledge the work and customer service we received from TLC; they continue to use our complex as an example of their maintenance quality and innovative activities. For example, in 2021 Hazel Lanes was their first client to use robotic mowers to cut the grass in major backyard areas. These mowers were generally well received by residents and certainly sparked a lot of interest. I want to thank Lois Leatham / Bala Balakrishnan and the Creery family for hosting the mower docking stations needed for Robbie the Robot (south lawns) and for George and Mario (Andretti) (Hazel Avenue mower). The mower in the north end docked at unit 51 and was known as Creeping Charlie. Unfortunately, the robotic mowers did not fully provide the benefits hoped for and have now been removed.

I am grateful to John Bisset and Phil Nagle as they manage irrigation and snow removal issues. John Bisset oversees Scott MacKenzie Irrigation on irrigation issues. Phil Nagle at Huntington Properties oversees snow removal, pavers and major drainage issues. Irrigation expense is a separate budget line item and major drainage repairs are now treated as a reserve fund item.

Hazel Lanes is a huge complex with a total of 6.7 hectares or 16.4 acres. In terms of grass area, it is probably 3.42 hectares or 8.45 acres of grass, i.e. 51.5% grass, net of houses and roads. Overall, the gross area of Hazel Lanes exceeds 8 Canadian football fields.

Maintenance of the landscape and snow removal represents about 62% of the budget for Hazel Lanes (\$233,000). Of that amount, 80% or \$173,000 covers the basic landscape and snow removal contract; \$16,000 is dedicated to replacing diseased Colorado spruce; the balance (\$44,000) is for elective landscape improvements / maintenance, such as removing diseased trees and replacing them with new trees. Of this, all but \$10,000 is for complex wide needs such as dandelion pulling, dormant oil application, tree pruning, snow fencing, etc.; that leaves about \$150 per unit for landscaping the front of 69 units.

COVID isolation drove many Canadians to invest in landscaping. As a result, 2021, 2022 and even 2023 were years of shortages in good quality plant material and also saw huge increases in the price of plants and related materials. Tree pruning / removal rates have virtually doubled in the last three years, probably as a result of insurance and liability issues.

Each year we encounter new diseases in trees and shrubs. As a result, we have

- removed all but one of our Austrian Pines (Diplodia tip blight - *Sphaeropsis sapinea*) and all of our Purpleleaf Sandcherry (peach tree borer - (*Synanthedon exitiosa*)
- pruned or removed about 10 Norway Maples which suffered major branch dieback in 2019. All the tree experts are uncertain as to the cause. Fortunately, this dieback was minor in the springs of 2020 and 2021, although one can still see remnants of the dieback in the crowns of some trees). We did a little cosmetic pruning in 2023 to some Norway maples.
- replaced 34 diseased Colorado spruce at the top of the complex (along Riverside Drive) with Canadian Hemlock in 2022 and Norway spruce in 2023. The long term plan is to replace all of the Colorado spruce over a six year period. Blue Colorado spruce is prone to needle cast (*rhizosphaera* needle cast) which renders the plant unsightly.
- A new fungus (*Bretziella fagacearum*), the pathogen for oak wilt, has been found in Michigan and is likely also in Ontario. The fungus enters the tree through pruning wounds (one of the reasons, Hazel Lanes does not do cosmetic tree pruning). The fungus has so far stayed out of this part of Ontario.

- And in 2024, boxwood problems (boxwood psyllid (insect (psylla buxi), boxwood blight (fungal disease caused by calonectria pseudonaviculata), boxwood leaf miner (monarthropalpus flavus) and box tree moth (cydalima perspectalis) have together proved that boxwood pests are almost impossible to control from a practical point of view. Hence, we no longer plant boxwood and cannot control boxwood pests.

The cedar hedges along Hazel Avenue were protected again this winter by green snow fencing on all sides of the plants in the hopes that keeping the deer away will allow the lower foliage to fill in the hedge (cost \$2,500 per year). We also pruned and fertilizing these plants to promote growth of foliage on the lower branches. Every few years we also thin out the shrubs and trees growing along Hazel Avenue which are located on our property (i.e. not on City property).

Maintaining the grass has become more and more difficult as we no longer have access to the pesticide and herbicides needed to control crab grass, creeping Charlie, clover, ajuga and other undesirable lawn weeds. We try to control weeds with Fiesta, one of the few herbicides available for selected weed control. Our best tools, however, are irrigation, fertilization, aeration, dense grass cover and slit seeding to encourage the grass to “outgrow” the weeds. One additional challenge has been that topsoil cannot be treated for weed seeds (except if it is subject to high heat treatment). The Landscape Committee added an extra fertilizer application to our schedule to encourage healthy turf and thereby choke out weeds.

Disease prone plants in the complex (such as broadleaf winter creeper, also known as evergreen euonymus) are being replaced with other plants as budget permits. Where feasible, we remove undesirable plants, such as European buckthorn. The Landscape Committee also continues to rejuvenate some of the older plants (junipers, lilacs, etc.) which are getting to be too large. Over time, the Landscape Committee will remove plants that are prone to becoming unsightly because of their attractiveness to destructive insects (such as Japanese beetle).

Our aging population of trees and shrubs creates pressure to rejuvenate gardens throughout the complex. The cost to address rhizosphaera needle cast in the complex is substantial given the need to remove diseased trees and plant replacements. With these issues and the sharply higher costs of plants and landscape labour, 2024 saw a large increase in the landscape budget and a reduction in the work that can be done for individual homes.

The gardens at the Riverside Drive and Hazel Avenue entrances and a number of perennial gardens are maintained by Hazel Lanes. As we rejuvenate areas and add gardens, we are striving to add both colour and flowering effects throughout the complex (such as the Kwanzan Cherry behind unit 66). We planted forsythia on the east side of the Riverside entrance to screen the London Hydro transformer and we planted Double Kerria as a screen for the golf course washroom.

I also want to acknowledge the wonderful gardens that a number of residents have added to their back yards. In many cases, these gardens can also be enjoyed by neighbours. In 2023, your Landscape Committee arranged a walk around in some backyards to showcase what others have done and to provide a forum for asking questions of local landscape experts. We will have a fourth walk around in a few years.

Over the past 15 years, the Landscape Committee has surveyed residents as to their satisfaction with landscaping, irrigation and snow removal. The results continue to be most gratifying with a 70% response rate with the satisfaction rates listed below:

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Landscape	64%	68%	64%	71%	70%	72%	76%	76%	77%	75%	75%	75%	70%	74%	73%
Irrigation	64%	61%	64%	61%	61%	61%	69%	74%	65%	68%	65%	61%	65%	62%	59%
Snow	60%	72%	66%	73%	67%	72%	73%	75%	70%	76%	5%	81%	78%	80%	80%

The landscape scores would have been higher if the weed control question had been omitted (the city and then the province banned pesticide use in 2008 making weed and insect control difficult in turf). The Committee thanks you for your input and will survey residents again next year; this is the best way to get an overall sense of resident's satisfaction and helps in discussing issues with our contractors. Individual comments have been forwarded to John Bisset (irrigation), Phil Nagle (snow removal) and the Landscape Committee.

We have a number of new residents, so let me mention that Hazel Lanes takes care of the grass, most trees, the woody ornamental plantings at the front of each unit, the plantings on the side of highly visible units and the common areas (the pool area and the berm along Riverside Drive primarily). Residents are at liberty to plant perennials and annuals in existing gardens as they wish; vegetables and fruit trees are only permitted in pots. If you intend to create or expand a garden, plant a tree, vine or shrub, contact me before proceeding as permission to plant is required.

I might mention for new residents the difference between landscape maintenance and gardening. Our contractor, Tender Lawn Care (TLC), takes care of landscaping (and the landscape survey shows that they do a good job). Their contract does not include being your gardener. For example, each of us might take several hours to weed and prune the plants in our gardens; TLC cannot realistically take the time to do that for all 69 homes and the common areas. So, especially for newer residents, I want to set your expectations realistically. In some cases, residents employ a private gardener to handle private gardens in the rear of their units.

Hazel Lanes prunes Japanese maple trees and cedar hedges in alternate years (this year it is cedar hedges). We root feed all major trees and the Hazel Avenue hedge every year. We also slit seed and aerate the turf every year, as well as fertilizing five times a year, all with a goal of choking out weeds. We use one of the only permitted "herbicide" to control some lawn weeds. Again, this year, we dug up all visible dandelions, an activity that reduced our dandelion population dramatically (and was highly popular in the last six years). Each year we prune major trees to remove diseased and dead major branches and to prune trees away from the roofs; we do not prune trees for cosmetic reasons as any pruning opens up a vector for disease and insects. From time to time, I am asked to sod or top dress and seed turf areas that are somewhat bare – while I am happy to review any concerns in this area, the grass issues are typically associated with shading from nearby trees, or the toxin found in walnut roots.

There is a wealth of information on the Hazel Lanes website <http://www.hazellanes.ca>, everything from plant descriptions to the rules for landscape changes. If you are planning to modify your gardens, please give me a call; changes require approval.

Frank Kearney
Chair, Hazel Lanes Landscape Committee
August 15, 2024