



Grounds Committee 5-Year Plan, 2024 to 2028



"The Gathering Place," by Susie Quick, contestant, 2022 Montebello Nature Photo Contest

Montebello Grounds Committee
April 2023

Grounds Committee 5-Year Plan, 2024 to 2028

BACKGROUND

The Grounds Committee was formed in the fall of 2017 by the Montebello Board of Directors “to advise the Board of Directors of the Association by researching, proposing and recommending actions to continuously preserve, maintain and enhance Montebello's lawns, interior landscaped areas, transitional landscaped areas, and the natural beauty of its woodland landscape for our property owners' enjoyment and preservation of owner's equity.” ([Terms of Reference](#) (TOR), September 2017, revised October 2020, AR-170)

One of the Committee’s responsibilities under its TOR is to “[d]evelop and update annually a rolling 5-year plan with prioritized yearly goals, projects, and tasks for recommendation to the Board.” The Committee previously published 5-year plans in 2020 and 2022.

The planning process is dynamic: new insights are gained as our community accumulates more information and experience and more precise cost estimates become available. Future updates, projecting additional years, will be timed to meet the needs for the Association’s budget planning process.

In 2017, Natural Resources Design (NRD), an ecological and landscape design company, reassessed its 2006 Landscape Management Plan and made further recommendations for the current and future care of and improvement to the overall landscape of our structures, grounds, and community. That reassessment resulted in the [Five-Year Grounds Restoration Plan 2018-2022](#), which was approved in principle by the Board of Directors. It provided recommendations for restoring and improving the Developed Landscape and Woodlands. Since 2017, Montebello has dedicated significant resources to the grounds and completed a number of major projects. Continuing to maintain the work that has been done will be cost effective in the long term. Montebello continues to rely on the 2017 Restoration Plan for crucial information to inform decisions and measure progress.

As elsewhere, the Montebello community faces environmental challenges related to climate change that will affect our decisions for our grounds: changes in weather patterns, species die-off, and dwindling species diversity. The Grounds Committee will continue to work with management and the Board of Directors to ensure that Montebello’s grounds projects are executed to gain the maximum benefit not only for our community, but also for our environment.

GROUND'S COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS 2024 TO 2028

Grounds Committee members have agreed upon four objectives that would guide their work:

1. To preserve and restore Montebello's unique and valuable woodlands
2. To enhance the visual appeal of the developed areas of Montebello's landscape
3. To improve the recreational and social value of the property
4. To raise resident awareness and appreciation of Montebello's outdoor environment

Montebello has made great progress toward meeting the above objectives over the past years, with substantial levels of funding and management attention. With the completion of Transition Areas 3 and 4, Montebello will have completed most of the major projects needed to restore our grounds. Most of the efforts in the future involve maintaining and continuing restoration projects to protect and enhance the considerable investments made over the past five years. Below are the Grounds Committee's recommendations for 2024 to 2028 followed by a list with year-by-year cost estimates.

Ongoing Annual Expenditures

Recurring, routine undertakings are now included in the annual operating budget. The Grounds Committee recommends continued funding of these line items at a level that continues to maintain and improve the health of our vibrant ecosystem. Examples include but are not limited to:

- Tree care, including monitoring for disease, pruning, and removing dead or hazardous trees in both the woodlands and developed landscapes
- Controlling invasive plants
- Trail maintenance
- Managing deadwood for safety and ecological benefit
- Monitoring and mitigating deer damage
- General landscaping and grounds maintenance, including the Butterfly Gardens
- Obtaining integrated and strategic direction and landscape design from professionals with experience in ecology, botany, landscape architecture, and related fields

Grounds Committee Recommended Projects from Reserve Funds (2024-2028)

- 1. To preserve and restore Montebello's unique and valuable woodlands**
 - Add supplementary plantings of native plants to encourage more understory vegetation where natural regeneration has not occurred (2024-2028)
 - Continue to implement the pocket forest regeneration plans, while studying outcomes in the proof-of-concept site (2024-2028)
 - Update the tree inventory to assess the health of the woodlands (2024-2025)

- 2. To enhance the visual appeal of the developed areas of Montebello's landscape**
 - Improve the experience of people entering Montebello with new plantings along Long and Short Mount Eagle Drives and the three circles (2024)
 - Augment the Butterfly Gardens with additional species and remove or transplant excess plants (2024-2025)

- Continue to improve the appearance and utility of the transition areas between the rear entrances of Buildings 3 and 4 and the woodlands (2024)
- Enhance signage at Montebello's front entrance to identify Montebello from the street, with a planter around the flag pole (2025)
- Develop a plan for replacing aging trees confined to circular tree boxes along the front of each tower and within parking lots with more appropriate native trees (2024-2028)
- Use relandscaping projects as opportunities to replace non-native species with native ones wherever practicable (2024-2028)
- Replace with native species the English ivy (*Hedera helix*), Japanese pachysandra (*Pachysandra terminalis*), and other invasive plants that dominate the vegetation around Building 5 (2024-2026)
- Consider enhancing the attractiveness of parking lots by increasing the number of trees, which will also increase areas of shade (2027)
- Consider designing larger planting beds in front of the buildings to soften the arrival, make Montebello's aesthetics more contemporary, and enhance the outdoor experience. (2027)

3. To improve the recreational and social value of the property

- Redesign Picnic Hill to enhance its utility to the community, protect existing trees, and add environmentally appropriate native plants (2025-2026)
- Enhance pedestrian safety and convenience by incorporating hard-surface walkways in heavily trafficked areas to reduce conflict with motorists (2024-2026)
- Continue to add benches and other accessible seating arrangements to enhance residents' opportunities to socialize, enjoy the outdoors, and build a sense of community (2024-2028)
- Consider installing an outdoor exercise station or parcourse near the trail. (2025)
- Develop and install "forest encounter" educational signage to enhance the grounds experience and promote awareness of ecological relationships (2024-2028)

Grounds Committee Resident Engagement Initiatives, Not Requiring Significant Funds

4. To raise resident awareness and appreciation of Montebello's outdoor environment

- Continue to provide information to Montebello residents through articles in the Montebello *Times* and *Voice*, brochures, posters, flyers, maps, information sheets, and the committee's web site, MontebelloGrounds.com (2024-2028)
- Continue to build resident involvement in and commitment to the health of the woodlands by leading efforts like the Arbor Day donation program (2024-2028)
- Continue to host in-person events and webinars that tap professional expertise (2024-2028)
- Continue to involve residents in active exploration of Montebello's natural environment through interactive experiences including, but not limited to bird, wildflower, and butterfly observations (2024-2028)

- Continue to involve residents in volunteer activities to protect and enhance Montebello's natural environment, such as Weed Wrangles® and citizen science projects (2024-2028)
- Continue to host the Montebello Photo Contest to encourage nature observation and creativity (2024-2028)
- Conduct periodic surveys to determine residents' attitudes, support, and desires for Montebello's outdoors environment (2024-2028)

APPENDIX A – ESTIMATED COSTS

<u>PROJECTS SCHEDULED FOR 2023</u>	Included in Reserve Study¹	Bid
Relandscaping of West Entrance of the CC		\$45,800
Metro Gate planting		6,800
Phased 1 of replacing Pagoda trees in front of buildings		
Woodlands	42,000	
Transition Areas 3	126,000	
Sidewalks around pool and to building 3 parking lot		
Sidewalk along Building 1 butterfly gardens		
Completing Pocket Forest 1 planting		5,500 ²

<u>GROUNDS RESERVE PROJECTIONS 2024-2028</u>	Included in Reserve Study	Not in Reserve Study
202 Woodlands Program	\$44,100	
4 Developed Areas Program Transition Area 4	133,403	
Landscaping along LMED/SMED and redesign of the three circles	33,075	
Community walkway installation ³	27,563	
Design for replacement of tower front Japanese Pagoda trees aging out		\$20,000
Add species to the Butterfly Gardens and transplant overcrowded plants		4,000
Replace invasive species ground cover around Building 5 with appropriate native species		5,000
Add benches & seating areas		2,000
Total	\$238,141	\$31,000
202 Woodlands Program	\$46,305	
5 Transition Areas 1 & 2, refresh plantings	11,576	
Community walkway installation ³	23,153	
Replacement of tower front Japanese Pagoda trees aging out		\$20,000
Add species to the Butterfly Gardens		3,000
Update tree inventory with health assessments, new measurements		15,000
Enhance signage at Front Entrance and around flagpole		5,000
Install exercise station or parcourse		10,000
Add benches & seating areas		2,000

¹ Figures in this column are taken from the July 2022 “Condition Assessment and Reserve Study,” Table 2 - Expenditure Forecast By Year.

² Funds are donated from Montebello residents

³ Top priority for community walkways (2024) is to address pedestrian safety for people walking to Metro with a paved walkway along the Building 1 Butterfly Garden. Additional proposals, such as for a connector around the pool to the Picnic Hill entrance, would be implemented in subsequent years.

	Replace invasive species ground cover around Building 5 with appropriate native species		5,000
	Developed Areas turf augmentation	28,941	
	Begin the Picnic Hill redesign		2,000
	Total	\$109,975	\$62,000
2026	Woodlands Program	\$48,260	
	Picnic Hill renovation	243,101	
	Building 5 Revegetation	30,388	
	Community walkway installation (connector along SMED) ³	24,310	
	Replacement of tower front Japanese Pagoda trees aging out		\$20,000
	Planters at Front Entrance Improvement	18,233	
	Replace invasive species ground cover around Building 5 with appropriate native species		
	Total	\$285,000	\$20,000
2027	Woodlands Program	51,051	
	Landscaping Remediation	63,814	
	Replacement of tower front Japanese Pagoda trees aging out		\$20,000
	Enlarge planting beds in front of towers		TBD
	Add trees in parking areas		TBD
	Replacement of tower front Japanese Pagoda trees aging out		20,000
	Total	\$40,959	
2028	Woodlands program		53,603
	Developed Landscape remediation		10,000

Appendix B – Map of Grounds Improvements



APPENDIX C

MONTABELLO GROUNDS ACHIEVEMENTS FROM MID-2017 THROUGH 2022

Acting in concert, the Grounds Committee, management, and the Board of Directors have achieved much progress in restoring, preserving, and maintaining our grounds. Major achievements, grouped under four major objectives, include:

1. To preserve and restore our unique and valuable woodlands:

- Developed the Woodlands Management Plan, a comprehensive primer on the challenges facing Montebello's woodlands
- Reduced invasive plants throughout the campus through annual herbicide treatment by a contractor. Additionally, 6 Weed Wrangles® and other informal efforts involving volunteers across three seasons greatly reduced invasives.
- Tagged and inventoried more than 2200 trees in the woodlands and the developed areas, enabling the publication of maps, analysis of patterns and trends, and documentation of actions to maintain the health of individual trees
- Conducted a resurvey of large trees that identified the loss of 32 of 564 big woodland trees (5.7%) over a 2-year period, mostly due to natural cause
- Planted 342 trees to celebrate Arbor Day in 2018, 2020, and 2021, funded largely through resident donations
- Developed a proof-of-concept pocket forest regeneration project to celebrate Arbor Day in 2022
- Added netting to protect saplings from damage by the 17-year cicadas that emerged in 2021
- Planted 85 tiny oak saplings in the western and northern corners of the property
- Drafted a deer management plan that includes protection for the Arbor Day trees
- Planned and completed a major erosion control project
- Planted ground cover to stabilize the banks of the new erosion-control drainageways

2. To enhance the visual appeal of the developed areas of Montebello's landscape:

- Relandscaped the plantings outside the front gate, with irrigation, for which the community received the 2020 Mary Thonen Beautification Award by the Southeast Fairfax Development Corporation
- Redesigned and relandscaped the remainder of the front gate area, inside and outside the gate
- Planted three Butterfly Gardens with native perennial plants to attract pollinators and beautify the developed areas
- Redesigned and relandscaped the transition areas behind Buildings 1 and 2
- Planted and cared for daffodils, roses, and other ornamentals in the three circle planters, coordinating work by volunteers

3. **To Improve the recreational and social value of the property:**
 - Working with the QI Committee, developed and conducted a resident survey on pedestrian safety and convenience that identified a number of challenges to the walkability of the property
 - Improved the safety and accessibility of the woodland trails with new surfacing, steps, railings and bridges while also reducing erosion
 - Added sidewalks in the transition areas behind Buildings 1 and 2, encouraging residents away from walking in roadways
 - Added benches to the transition areas behind Buildings 1 and 2
 - Created and installed a historical marker commemorating the 1790 Mount Eagle Mansion and our links to George Washington
 - Worked with the Pet Club to design an off-leash dog run in a corner of the woodland

4. **To raise resident awareness and appreciation of Montebello's outdoor environment**
 - Authored 2 to 3 articles each month for the *Times of Montebello* on grounds-related information and projects
 - Created a website, MontebelloGrounds.com, with information about Montebello's natural assets and Grounds Committee programs
 - Conducted annual nature photo contests (starting in 2019), participated in by dozens of Montebello photographers, with prizes and displaying the photos in the Community Center
 - Created a brochure about Montebello's grounds and distributed it to all residents
 - Created flyers, posters, signs, and other communications vehicles.
 - Worked with outside experts to conduct a wildflower walk, an outdoor cicada presentation, and eight birding activities (spring and Christmas counts)
 - Conducted informational walks about the erosion control and transition area projects
 - Presented a speaker series with nine presentations to Montebello residents (before 2020) and seven webinars (starting 2020)
 - Raised resident awareness of the value and needs of our woodlands through Arbor Day publicity