**GHI Yard Solutions for a 21st Century Garden City Task Force**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF MEMBER SURVEY**

To help accomplish the Task Force’s mission[[1]](#endnote-1), the Task Force conducted a voluntary member survey of members’ needs, wants, and concerns regarding their own yards and GHI common areas during the period January 17 – April 7, 2017. The anonymous survey was available online and on paper, and had both closed- and open-ended questions.[[2]](#endnote-2) The sample was self-selected and does not necessarily represent the population of GHI members.

A total of 175 (172 online, 3 on paper) members responded; 108 respondents provided their court name and number; 71 courts were represented; and 95 respondents entered the raffle for one of three free garden consultations. Four Task Force members provided the consults on April 30 to three randomly selected respondents.

**FINDINGS**

The Task Force reviewed the survey findings[[3]](#endnote-3) and identified the following trends in needs, wants, and concerns among respondents. For the sake of brevity, this summary does not present findings on topics that illustrate respondents’ satisfaction with and/or appreciation of their own yards and GHI common areas.

**Drainage**: 72 respondents not satisfied with drainage/swales situation, with many complaints.

**Junk/trash** **in neighbor's yards**: 145 reported they were bothered by trash/debris in yards, e.g., junky-looking compost bins, lots of trashy or unkempt yards. GHI enforcement insufficient and inconsistent.

**Privacy**: 63 report not happy with privacy between their yard and neighbors. Not enough privacy to enjoy time in yards. When plants are used for privacy, they can take up much of the yard. Want to know what plants to use. 120 said increasing privacy through plantings is important.

**Hedges:** 104 responders are bothered by poor hedge maintenance. Complaints that some are too tall.

**Sidewalks**: Not cleared of plant debris, overgrown plants. Tripping hazards from poor maintenance of the sidewalk. More lighting needed.

**Gardening help needed:** 155 respondents said improving their garden was important and 147 said reducing yard maintenance was. Many responders want help for provision for wildlife (e.g. mentioning natives, pollinators). Preferred sources of help/information included: GHI website, Communicator, and E-News; instructional open gardens, workshops (pruning, etc); and social media. Many want consultations for individual yards.

**Shade:** Help needed with lawn alternatives, how to grow lawn better in shade. Complaints of too many trees causing shade. Want to know what edibles, shrubs, plants will grow in shade. Some mentions of poor soil quality.

**Sheds:** More flexibility wanted as to location.

**“Critter problems”**: 109 reported being bothered by aggressive or noisy dogs. Additional complaints of free-roaming cats, dog and cat waste. Respondents also need help with preventing/controlling deer, mosquitoes, chiggers, moles.

 **Laundry lines:** Want more flexibility as to service/garden side.

**GHI processes**: 44 reported dissatisfaction with GHI procedures for making changes to yard. Rules unclear as to what's allowed and what not, e.g., lattice. Approval process for changes is sometimes unreasonable. Criteria for citations in Beautification program not clear/unknown.

**Fences**: 59 responders say they want to change type of fence (unclear as to their own fence or neighbors'). Some complaints about chain link, about fences (of various types) in poor repair. “Neighbor can stop you from removing yours, yet you have to maintain this fence you don't want.”

**Common Area**: More seats and benches requested. Some want to turn common areas into community gardens or demonstration eco-friendly gardens. One member offered to take over maintenance of common area perceived as not well maintained.

**NEXT STEPS**

The Task Force will continue to research solutions to the topics above (or refer issues such as storm water problems and cat and dog problems to their respective GHI entities). Guidance/information/input will be sought from GHI and City of Greenbelt staff; GHI Committees; Prince George’s County personnel; evidence-based sources on sustainable gardening/yards, historic preservation of “garden cities,” landscape design, and other topics.

1. The Task Force mission is:

	* To help members enjoy their yards more and in new ways – for seating, play areas, pollinator gardens – you tell us!
	* To explore ways of becoming a greener community.
	* To propose changes to GHI rules that provide for more options in screening and other yard improvements that complement our architecture while maintaining Greenbelt's historic openness.
	* To ensure that GHI rules pertaining to members’ yards are easy to understand and procedures for GHI approval, where necessary, are easy to follow.
	* To compile examples of garden styles, features and plants that work in GHI yards and provide other forms of guidance. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Copies of the survey are available upon request. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Full draft report of findings available upon request. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)