Executive Summary of the Yard Solutions Task Force Report
to the GHI Board of Directors
Submitted June 26, 2018

Based on the responses to a member survey of issues and problems experienced with yards, the GHI’s Task Force on Yard Solutions for a 21st Century Garden City makes the following recommendations for solving key issues identified by members.

**CONSTRUCTED PRIVACY SCREENS**

The severely limited amount of screening currently allowed restricts members’ use of their yards for socializing, quiet relaxation, gardening and other uses. GHI yards are far too different from each other for a one-size-fits-all screening solution.

**Recommended Solution: Gardening Team to Provide Garden Design Help for Members**

-We recommend a Gardening Team reporting to the Architectural Review Committee be established to propose solutions to individual members’ needs for screening that minimize their impingement on Greenbelt’s historic and unique openness. Examples may include: small screens or trellises around patios rather than along sidewalks; 6′ tall screens that extend the length of patios or decks but not beyond; where space is adequate, fast-growing plants located close to seating areas and away from sidewalks; mounting of blinds (currently prohibited) that can be lowered for screening in the summer and stored for the winter.

-Applications for screens that use a design recommended by the Gardening Team would be fast-tracked to approval.

**LATTICE**

Lattice is generally assumed to be permitted without restriction in GHI and can be seen used in abundance in an assortment of styles. However, staff interprets GHI rules as requiring permits for lattice that is used as screening.

**Recommended Solutions: Clear Rules and Consistent Style**

-The requirement that lattices used as screening must be approved by Technical Services should be made clear in the Member Handbook.
- Lattice mounted against surfaces (and therefore not used for screening) should be explicitly allowed without permission.
- All new lattice should be constructed of vertical and horizontal, rather than diagonal, slats to complement, rather than clash with GHI’s architecture.

**HEDGES**

Hedges are a high-maintenance, unsustainable landscape feature that also negatively impacts the safety and usability of GHI’s internal sidewalks, yet they are recommended in the Member Handbook. Further, since the historic hedge-height restriction was removed and GHI continues to severely limit man-made screens, members with privacy needs are forced to try tall hedges as their only solution. This results increasingly in virtual walls of evergreen that reduce walkers’ feeling of safety and conflict with Greenbelt’s historic and unique open plan.

**Recommended Solutions:**

-Replace GHI Member Handbook recommendation to install hedges with information about the care of hedges and alternatives to them.
-Establish a 6’ height limit on euonymus and privet hedges, required at the time of the yearly inspection. Existing tall hedges of conifers, hollies and Photinia should be grandfathered because their forms would be destroyed if cut back to 6′.
-Allow new hedges of conifers, hollies or Photinia by exception only.

**FENCES**

Fencing of member yards has never been coordinated as to style or and materials, resulting in many members’ request for more attractive and architecturally appropriate fencing in the community.

**Recommended Solutions:**

- Require that new fencing be in one of the styles and materials chosen by the Architectural Review Committee, a list that must include options at all price points. Members seeking new fencing in nonconforming styles or materials may apply for an exception to this rule.
-Architecturally appropriate fencing styles would emphasize horizontal and vertical lines, rather than diagonals, curves or other embellishments.
-We encourage the ARC choose fencing materials that are natural or natural-looking.
-GHI should continue removing fences at no cost to the member with the guarantee that the member won’t replace it within 2 years.

**HELP FOR GHI GARDENERS AND GARDENERS-TO-BE**

155 survey respondents said improving their garden was important and 147 said reducing yard maintenance was, too. Many asked for help in providing more for wildlife and native plantings. An increase in gardens in our community benefits all members by increasing curb appeal.

**Recommended Solutions:**

-Implement changes recommended here to allow members the screening they need to create gardens.
- Proposed GHI Gardening Team will offer in-person instruction in pruning, personalized garden design and plant coaching for members who desire it, and Open Garden events in gardens of team members and other GHI gardens throughout the season - for social and learning purposes.
- GHI Gardening Team will review gardening and plant information on the GHI website and recommend corrections and additions, plus trusted sources like the University of Maryland for more information.