

Pacific Shores at Rancho San Clemente Landscaping Maintenance May 2018

Introduction

Beginning in 2017 the Pacific Shores at Rancho San Clemente homeowners association (Pacific Shores) began an effort to bring its landscaping fully into compliance with Orange County Fire Authority (OCFA) vegetation fuel management requirements and the City of San Clemente Landscape Standards provided for in Chapter 17.68 of the City Code. At the request of the City of San Clemente Planning Department, this document formally communicates this effort.

Regulatory Background

CITY: The Pacific Shores neighborhood is an existing development as defined in City Code 17.68.020.A.2 because it existed prior to March 21, 1996. The maintenance requirements for the neighborhood is established in City Code 17.68.060:

The following standards shall be required of all development, new and existing:

- A. **Maintenance of Landscape.** All landscaped areas shall be maintained in an orderly, attractive and healthy condition. This shall include proper pruning, mowing of turf areas, weeding, removal of litter, fertilization, replacement of plants when necessary, and the regular application of appropriate quantities of water to all landscaped areas.
- B. **Irrigation Systems Maintenance.** All irrigation systems shall be maintained in proper operating condition. Waterline breaks, head/emitter ruptures, overspray or runoff conditions and other irrigation system failures shall be repaired immediately.

OCFA: California state law requires that land owners in areas at risk from wildfires implement and maintain a Defensible Space landscape area between buildings and potential approaching wildfires. For the Pacific Shores neighborhood, the Defensible Space is called a Fuel Modification Zone, which is achieved through proper Vegetation Management. The following are the key requirements for proper vegetation management within 100 feet of any home:

- Remove all dead vegetation
- Remove plants on the “undesired plant list”
- Maintain groundcover at a maximum height of 2 feet
- Shrubs within 100 feet of a home can be over 2 feet high, provided that:
 - They are planted in groups of no more than 3
 - There is minimum spacing between the groups of plants that is the greater of either:
 - 15 feet, or
 - 3 times the highest plant
- Trees that are greater than 10 feet high must have at least 4 feet of vertical clearance from any plant greater than 2 feet high

Condition of Pacific Shores Landscaping

Aside from turf areas (which are not addressed in this document), the Pacific Shores Landscaping falls into 4 categories.

Category 1: Interior slopes that have been maintained in compliance with both the City Code and the OCFA requirements. The following is an example of a Category 1 area:



Note that the slope is maintained in a neat and orderly manner, and that the groundcover has been maintained at a height of 2 feet or less.

Category 2: Interior slopes that have been maintained in compliance with the City Code, but not with the OCFA requirements. The following is an example of a Category 2 area:



Note that this slope has been neatly maintained so that it meets the City Code. However, it does not meet the OCFA requirements because it contains an unapproved plant (Acacia), and it doesn't meet the height requirement of 2 foot maximum, nor the separation requirement of no more than 3 plants in a group.

Category 3: Interior slopes that have not been maintained in compliance with either the City Code, nor the OCFA requirements. The following is an example of a Category 3 area:



Note that the slope has not been maintained in a neat and orderly way, and that the height of the vegetation (which includes Acacia) exceeds 2 feet.

Category 4: Exterior slopes that have not been maintained in compliance with either the City Code, nor the OCFA requirements. Note that all of these slopes are bounded by property owned by Rancho San Clemente Master Association. The following is an example of a Category 4 area:



Note that the slope has not been maintained in a neat and orderly way, and does not meet the OCFA vertical and horizontal separation requirements. Note also that a major portion of the slope pictured here does not belong to Pacific Shores.

Pacific Shores Landscaping Remediation Effort

As mentioned previously, Pacific Shores initiated work on bringing the neighborhood into full compliance with the dual regulations noted above by completing thorough cut-backs of several Category 3 areas. Generally, these areas have contained Acacia and Tecomaria at great heights (well over 10 feet in several areas). As the City now knows, Acacia is on the OCFA “undesired plant list”, and therefore must be flush cut. Doing so prevents the Acacia from growing back; however, its undamaged root

structure provides sufficient soil stability to prevent erosion. Since Acacia will not recover from cut-backs of this nature, the Pacific Shores approach is to plant OCFA-approved vegetation to replace the Acacia where needed.

The excessively tall Tecomaria has also been initially cut-back – generally to a maximum height of about 4-6 inches – but in some cases it was also flush cut. Tecomaria is OCFA-approved, quickly recovering within a matter of weeks, sprouting new green growth where it has been cut. In these areas, no further planting has been undertaken and the Tecomaria has returned as a lush groundcover which is easily maintainable to both City and OCFA requirements. The option of initially cutting the Tecomaria to a greater height (e.g., 12-18 inches) was not pursued because its resulting appearance after recovery would be an unattractive collection of 12-18 inch high sticks with a green top.

Approach for Moving Forward: Area Across from 34 Santa Clara

In the two months since the City expressed concern about its “unattractiveness”, the area across from 34 Santa Clara has already begun growing back and is filling in this area nicely.

The following is a picture taken 3/6/18 almost immediately after the area was cut-back:



The following is from the same general area, taken on 5/6/18:



As we communicated to every homeowner in Pacific Shores (see attached copy of homeowner notification dated February 14, 2017), we acknowledged that cut-back areas do indeed look unattractive initially. **However, this unattractive state is only temporary.** Note how the Tecomaria in only 2 months has vigorously returned and begun spreading in the area. Additionally, the bare patches in the photo were previously planted with Acacia. For the reasons outlined above, the Pacific Shores Board of Directors had authorized an expenditure to re-plant the areas previously containing Acacia with Cistus and Ceanothus, which are both OCFA-approved plants. However, this area is still bare because that work has been deferred due to the City's expressed concern regarding our landscaping approach.

Moving forward, in this area Pacific Shores will plant a 3' minimum transition zone adjacent to the street of myoporum pavifolium. In the former Acacia areas, Pacific Shores will plant the OCFA-approved Yankee Point Ceanothus as it is easier to maintain to OCFA height requirements than Tecomaria.

Approach for Moving Forward: Category 3 Areas

In the Category 3 areas, Pacific Shores will first utilize a landscape professional to tag all vegetation that is to remain. All dead vegetation will be removed and all Acacia will be flush cut, as required by the OCFA. Tecomaria will initially be cut to a height of about 4-6 inches; as explained previously in this document, this will allow it to re-establish itself at a height that can be maintained at a height not to exceed 24". Areas that contain only Acacia will be re-planted with OCFA-approved plants. Examples include, but are not limited to, Yankee Point Ceanothus, Cistus, Green Carpet Natal Plum, Marocarpa, Myoporum, Vinca Minor, and Tecomaria. The remaining vegetation that hasn't been tagged will either be edited to allow for proper plant separation, or trimmed to a height that can be maintained to OCFA height and spacing requirements.

The overall goal for these areas will be to transform them into attractive slopes with "water-wise" OCFA-approved plants that can be easily maintained to the maximum height requirement of 24 inches. Should sizeable areas of vegetation not re-grow, Pacific Shores will plant these areas with OCFA-approved plants.

The City's email of 3/28/18 highlighted the need to comply with the Migratory Bird Act of 1918 and the California Fish and Game Code 3503. Per your direction, we will comply with these laws by only performing the above-detailed landscaping activities during the non-migratory period between

September 1 and January 31. Should we elect to perform this work during the migratory period between February 1 and August 31, we will identify a biologist to oversee work in these areas to achieve compliance.

Approach for Moving Forward: Category 4 Areas

In the Category 4 areas, Pacific Shores will first utilize a landscape professional to tag all vegetation that is to remain. All dead vegetation will be removed and vertical and horizontal separation will be performed, as required by the OCFA. No replanting is anticipated due to the preponderance of native vegetation in these areas. Remaining vegetation will be edited and trimmed in a manner that will be neat and orderly and meet the OCFA vertical and horizontal spacing requirements noted previously in the document. As the work in this area consists only of cutting – with no root removal – soil stability in these areas will not be impacted. Therefore, Pacific Shores will not retain the services of a soils engineer in these areas.

As with the Category 3 Areas, Pacific Shores will comply with the Migratory Bird Act of 1918 and the California Fish and Game Code 3503 by only performing the above-detailed landscaping activities during the non-migratory period between September 1 and January 31. Should we elect to perform this work during the migratory period between February 1 and August 31, we will identify a biologist to oversee work in these areas to achieve compliance.

The work in these areas will be limited to only the land owned by Pacific Shores.

Approach for Moving Forward: Category 2 Areas

In the Category 2 areas, Pacific Shores will first utilize a landscape professional to tag all vegetation that is to remain. All dead vegetation will be removed and all Acacia will be flush cut, as required by the OCFA. The Acacia areas will be re-planted with OCFA-approved plants. Examples include, but are not limited to, Yankee Point Ceanothus, Cistus, Green Carpet Natal Plum, Marocarpa, Myoporum, Vinca Minor, and Tecomaria. The Tecomaria will be cut to a height of about 4-6 inches; as explained previously in this document, this will allow it to re-establish itself at a height that can be maintained at about 24". The remaining vegetation that hasn't been tagged will either be edited to allow for proper plant separation, or trimmed to a height that can be maintained to OCFA height and spacing requirements. The overall goal for these areas will be to maintain their attractive nature, but at a maximum height of 24 inches. Should sizeable areas of vegetation not re-grow, Pacific Shores will plant these areas with OCFA-approved plants. Pacific Shores anticipates conducting this work in any month of the year as schedules permit.

Approach for Moving Forward: Category 1 Areas

In the Category 1 areas, Pacific Shores will continue with routine trimming, removal of dead vegetation, and limited replanting where needed with OCFA-approved plants.

Long Term Maintenance Plan

The goal of Pacific Shores is for all of its slopes to be Category 1; i.e., complying with the City requirements for neat and orderly vegetation and with the OCFA vertical height and separation requirements. Although competitive bids have not been received to complete this transformation, Pacific Shores anticipates that the work can be completed in no more than 3 years. Once achieved, Pacific Shores anticipates keeping the landscape in this condition by continuing to perform the necessary landscaping maintenance on an approximate 10 week cycle.

Attachment: Copy of Letter sent to Homeowners in 2017

February 14, 2017

Fellow homeowners,

We are sending you this letter to tell you of an important change in our neighborhood. In the January 2017 board meeting, the Pacific Shores Board of Directors decided to change the neighborhood's landscaping contractor from South Coast Gardening to Medlin Landscape Services. This change will not result in a change to homeowner assessments.

We are making this change for a number of reasons. First and foremost, our slope vegetation needs extensive work to bring it into full compliance with the Orange County Fire Authority (OCFA) fuel abatement requirements. The most relevant of these requirements is that shrubs/plants such as ours that have grown together must be limited to a height of two feet. As you know, we have begun this effort on several slopes throughout the community and changing our contractor will allow us to cost effectively accelerate this effort.

Our new contractor will also devote more attention to the neighborhood's irrigation system to ensure that it is providing sufficient water to our vegetation, without wasting it via over-spray, broken sprinklers, or broken pipes. This will not only improve the health and appearance of our plants, but also minimize the association's water expenses.

You will likely notice a greater presence of landscape workers in the neighborhood. Medlin will provide two employees on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday of each week. Their work will include not only general maintenance throughout the neighborhood, but also enhanced vegetation trimming/clearing on our slopes (focused on one slope at a time) to steadily bring our entire neighborhood into OCFA compliance.

After a particular slope is cleared, we understand that it may appear barren. However, this is a necessary step to ensure the safety of our neighborhood. Additionally, much of the trimmed vegetation will recover fully, and the vegetation that doesn't recover will be replaced with OCFA-approved plants that are more drought tolerant and fire resistant.

Given the critical nature of this work, we respectfully request that neighborhood residents refrain from attempting to stop the gardeners from doing their work. To aid in this effort, Seabreeze will provide notice to affected residents when each slope effort is initiated, and any questions or concerns regarding landscaping should be brought to their attention.

The landscaping of the Pacific Shores slopes and other common areas is a tremendous asset that enhances the beauty and value of the neighborhood. The Board of Directors and landscape committee is confident that the selection of Medlin Landscape services will not only preserve this asset, but also improve it. Thank you for your continued support.

Sincerely,

The Pacific Shores Board of Directors

cc: Brett Medlin