

The Residences at Essex Pastures

Landscaping Narrative

The Residences at Essex Pastures will be a community of new townhomes and apartment flats at 28-44 Essex Rd.

Homes with attractive grounds and tree-lined streets surround a delightful oval common, reminiscent of the oval commons such as that at Woodstock, VT that were once the ideal of every New England town. The common is a community gathering space that would serve many of the same functions as a Town Common - pleasant focal point of the village, a destination for a short walk, meeting space where people might enjoy nature and chat with their neighbors. The distinctive trees on the common (*Ulmus Americana* 'Valley Forge' or 'Princeton' if we can get them, *Zelkova serrata* if we can't) cast shade and provide an elegant silhouette in every season. The grassy floor of the common is a pleasant place to walk and relax. A few benches and a low white picket style fence with openings on 4 sides completes the common's landscape. It is easily accessible from all the units on the site and can be seen from quite a few of them. Its location at the heart of the community makes it a natural gathering place.

The Apartment units and Town homes have parking nearby but also access to ample green spaces in the heart of the community. The landscape is planned to be attractive in all seasons, support wildlife and pollinators, and will include a wide variety of native (as well as some non-native) shrubs, trees, and perennials. Stone walls recall New England's past and provide some needed division of spaces. Evergreen shrubs also delineate spaces and provide year-round interest, but are placed in areas that are separated from the street and would not impeded snow storage and snow plowing. Near the apartments, a combination of evergreen and flowering plants provide interest throughout the growing season.

Across from the common is another open area (storm water basin), which will be less formal in its landscape. It is planned as a low meadow, with a few mowed paths, which will be planted with native wildflowers and grasses to support birds and pollinators. This is a sunny open area which will be free for strolling by all the residents, and a contrast in style to the more formal oval green. A few birdhouses offer vertical elements and help to support the use of this area by wildlife. The open area will include Little Bluestem grass (*Schizachyrium scoparius*), New England Aster, (*Symphyotrichum novae-angliae*), Butterfly Weed (*Aeschlepias tuberosa*), Blazing Star (*Liatris spicata*), and other North American natives that will provide a long season of bloom and provide butterfly habitat. This will also encourage residents to enjoy the outside space as the landscape will provide variety and they can anticipate seeing birds and butterflies in their neighborhood. The two contrasting spaces, oval grassy common and wild meadow, provide choices for residents to take walks, interact with nature, and enjoy the landscape as a solitary activity, or to meet their neighbors in a casual social setting.

Native shrubs at the edges of the meadow area will distance the pavement and cars from this space. These will include Summersweet (*Clethra alnifolia* 'Ruby Spice'), Sweetspire (*Itea virginica* 'Henry's Garnet'), Red Twig Dogwood (*Cornus sericea*), Highbush Blueberry (*Vaccinium corymbosum*) and Common Witch Hazel (*Hamamelis virginiana*). Each of these offer wildlife shelter but have ornamental attributes as well. The blueberry has small flowers in spring, small berries in summer, red fall foliage, and pinkish stems noticeable in winter. The Red Twig Dogwood's vibrant red stems stand out in winter but they also have attractive white flowers in June and red fall foliage color.

Sweetspire is known for its very fragrant spikes of white flowers in June, and its fall foliage is a very striking red. Summersweet also has very fragrant flowers, and this cultivar has a deep pink blossom color with yellow fall foliage - it blooms in July and August. The Witch Hazel is the last plant of the season to start flowering - the small yellow blossoms open in September and October and continue through late November. It also has yellow fall foliage.

While native plants predominate in all areas of the landscape, adjacent to the Townhouses and apartments there will be some introduced species to ensure variety and interest in all seasons. These are non-invasive plants and they will prolong the bloom time in the areas around the living spaces.

Street trees along the entrance road will provide interest in all seasons and shade in summer, and contribute to the sense of a peaceful and pleasant community. Red Maple (*Acer rubrum*) is a native tree with small red flowers in early spring before the leaves emerge, green foliage in summer which casts shade but will not be extremely somber, and vivid red to yellow foliage color in October.

In addition, there will be plantings adjacent to individual buildings that help them fit into the landscape and provide interest in all seasons. Near the Townhouses on the west side of the community there will be small trees in scale with the size of the homes including Redbud (*Cercis Canadensis*), Kousa Dogwood (*Cornus kousa*), Yellowwood (*Cladrastis kentuckea*) and Sorrel Tree (*Oxydendron arboretum*). Redbud and Yellowwood bloom in spring, the first with pink flowers before the leaves come out and the second with fragrant drooping clusters of white blossoms as the leaves unfold. Kousa Dogwood and Sorrel Tree each have very different white flowers for a long period in the summer. These trees have been chosen for their shape as well, with Dogwood, Yellowwood and Redbud having pleasant rounded crowns while the Sorrel Tree is more upright in habit. When fall comes, the yellow leaves of Yellowwood and Redbud will contrast with the red fall color of Dogwood and Sorrel Tree.

Shrubs adjacent to the townhouses are primarily broadleaf evergreens which will retain their foliage in winter but add interest in the growing season. These include Cavatine Andromeda (*Pieris japonica* 'Cavatine'), Cunningham's White Rhododendron (*Rhododendron* 'Cunningham's White'), Elf Mountain Laurel (*Kalmia latifolia* 'Elf'), Hiryu Azaleas (*Azalea* 'Hinocrimson' and *Azalea* 'Delaware Valley White') and Encore Azaleas (*Azalea* 'Encore Autumn Amethyst' and *Azalea* 'Encore Autumn Sangria'). Additional plants that lose their leaves but offer a long bloom period will round out the plantings here such as Bloomstruck Hydrangea (*Hydrangea macrophylla* 'Bloomstruck'), Peegee Hydrangea (*Hydrangea paniculata grandiflora*), and Knockout Roses (*Rosa* 'Pink Double Knockout').

Trees near the apartments will be taller, in scale with the buildings and will include River Birch (*Betula nigra*), Ginkgo (*Ginkgo biloba*), and Sweetgum (*Liquidambar styraciflua*). Evergreen trees include Colorado Spruce (*Picea pungens*) and Fraser Fir (*Abies fraseri*).

Shrubs around the apartments include some of the same species as near the town houses but also some taller ones including Pink Rosebay Rhododendron (*Rhododendron maximum roseum*), and a few deciduous species Purple Leaved Ninebark (*Physocarpus opulifolius* 'Diabolo'), American Smokebush (*Cotinus obovatus*), and Korean Lilac (*Syringa koreana meyeri*).

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