

Grounds Manual

What responsibilities does the LAIA Grounds Committee have?

Generally speaking, the Grounds Committee is responsible for maintaining any infrastructure in Loch Alpine that isn't directly related to the roads, or lakes, or LASA. In other words, the committee has a lot on its plate. Here's a brief rundown.

Grounds

- solicits bids for the annual mowing contract, and then supervises the contractor throughout the year. This contract covers our parks, the entrances to the neighborhood, the islands in Greenook Blvd, and a variety of other roadside areas.
- maintains our path system. This includes limestone and woodchip paths along with the associated signage, bridges, railings, and stairs, along with spraying for weeds, and adding new limestone or woodchips to paths as needed.
- develops and maintains the infrastructure in our parks including: playground equipment, grills, benches, picnic tables, fountains and water pipes, the backstop, and soccer goals. The Grounds Committee is also responsible for the trees, shrubs, and plantings in the parks, as well as trash removal at both parks and the PortaPotty.
- maintains Loch Alpine's entrance areas including plantings.
- maintains the docks and fishing platforms in conjunction with the Lakes Committee.
- maintains the "island" to some extent, removing dead trees and invasives. Responsibilities on the island are shared with the Lakes Committee.
- maintains the basketball and tennis courts in conjunction with the AACC.
- maintains lots deeded to LAIA, such as the lot on the corner of Sylvan and ELA.

Mowing

Grounds is responsible for bidding out the annual mowing contract and then supervising the contractor. While the contract is not bid out every year, it is a good idea to solicit bids occasionally to ensure that we are receiving the best value for our money. It should also be noted that there is a balance to be maintained between price and quality. A low bidder that tears up the landscape and provides poor service is not a good deal.

Currently the contractor is A-1. The general consensus is that A-1 strives to, and is doing, a good job. That said, any contractor requires feedback. Our mowing is more complicated than most and contractors will sometimes miss locations. Also, wet weather can lead to problems. The area around the Butterfly Garden is a perennial issue due to the very wet ground, and riding mowers often cannot mow this area without tearing it up.

LNJ had the mowing contract in Loch Alpine prior to A-1. They know the subdivision very well, but were clearly underbid by A-1 the last time we solicited bids. LNJ would like to win the contract back and their crews do provide some services A-1 does not appear to do at the moment such as clearing fallen branches etc.

Past mowing contracts are included for reference.

Path Maintenance

The path system that Loch Alpine now enjoys allows its residents to fully access the neighborhood's parks and natural areas, something that wasn't possible prior to its installation. The path system also protects lakefront lot owners' property by clearly delineating where residents may walk. Therefore, it should be a priority to keep these paths in good shape. Generally speaking, that means applying new limestone and wood chips as needed, and spraying to prevent the encroachment of weeds. It also means posting and maintaining signage that spells out the hours of usage and the prohibition on motorized use of the paths. This includes golf carts.

The operating budget has sufficient funds in the "Path Maintenance" line item to apply new limestone and woodchips to about 1/3 of our path system each year. Since some sections of path degrade more slowly than others, we do not resurface the paths on an absolutely rigid schedule. Sections are evaluated individually and resurfaced as warranted.

The "Path Maintenance" line item also has enough funds budgeted to spray the entire path system about twice each year, provided we only have to cover materials and can make use of volunteer labor. The paths should probably be sprayed around the end of May and again in early August. In an ideal world, we'd actually spray 3 times. Though some residents are resistant to the idea of spraying, there doesn't appear to be a good alternative to the use of glyphosate. Volunteers do not need an applicator's license to spray our paths, but they should understand proper application technique and timing. LAIA owns a backpack sprayer that is appropriate for this type of work. Sections of path that have been sprayed should have signs posted at the time of spraying. These signs should remain in place for 48 hours.

Maintaining the paths also means maintaining the bridges and railings and stairs. The Capital Budget allocates funds for maintaining and replacing these assets. The stairs between the lakes are probably in the most urgent need of replacement at this point.

Rock Park Maintenance

Rock Park requires less maintenance than the main park. It primarily needs to be mowed as part of the annual mowing contract. However, several things should be kept in mind. The Lakes Committee would like to see some vegetative buffers left along the retention pond, the lake shore, and the stream channel. The extent of these buffers should be agreed upon each spring by the two committees. The buffers should then be staked to provide guidance for the mowing contractor.

Several trees have been planted in Rock Park over the years. These should receive mulch rings large enough to prevent mowers and weed whips from damaging these trees. Regular flooding in this area also means that flood debris needs to be cleared occasionally from along Boyden Creek as it enters Rock Park. The boat storage area adjacent to the beach at Rock Park also needs to be weeded/mulched/maintained a couple of times each year. Finally the beach itself at Rock Park needs to be maintained with regular weeding and new sand above the water line and plant barriers below. However, LAIA Bylaws assign beach maintenance responsibilities to the Lakes Committee.

Entrance Maintenance

Loch Alpine has 3 entrances that require Grounds Committee attention each year: South Loch Alpine, Greenook, and Aberdeen. Some work on these entrances has been done by volunteers and some by LNJ. The entrances at Northgate and Eastgate have not received any formal landscaping treatment, so their maintenance, such as it is, is taken care of by the Roads Committee.

Shrubs in the planting beds at SLA have gotten too large in some cases. Renovation of these shrubs and trees is needed along with annual maintenance thereafter. Karl Steavenson may have designed the entrance beds and could be consulted. The planting beds on both sides of the entrance also need to be weeded at least once a year and mulched. The daffodils that were planted are working well. They are deer-proof true perennials and only need to have their dead leaves removed once a year. Other deer resistant perennials could be added, however, especially on the west side. The apple trees along SLA should also be trimmed again, with watershoots and suckers being removed annually. LASA should be approached to see if they will remove some of the rather unsightly dead vegetation on their property.

Aberdeen has smaller formal planting beds that should be weeded and mulched annually. Daffodils and other deer resistant perennials could be added to this entrance at low cost. Some of the shrubs are getting quite large, but it is hard to figure out how to trim them back without destroying their form. Again, perhaps Karl could be consulted. The beds here are small enough that volunteer labor could probably handle the job easily enough.

Greenook Blvd. has "hidden" entrance beds that could be spruced up a bit. More daffodils could be added around some of the new trees that have been planted in the boulevard, and plans should be made to replace several trees along the boulevard that are on their last legs. One maple near the southern end of the boulevard has lost about half of its branches, largely due to early damage from mowers and weed whips. Three other maples north of WLA are also diseased and should be diagnosed and treated or removed. The trees planted over the last few years are doing quite well, due in no small part to the efforts of volunteers to keep them watered and mulched. Maintaining mulch rings is critical to protecting these trees from lawnmowers and weed whips.

Main Park Maintenance

Playground equipment

The playground equipment itself is holding up well. The Capital Budget allocates funds to repair and replace the play structures, though very few repairs have been needed so far. The most common repair is to the flexible ladder. The manual should be located so that we can order parts as needed for this repair. Currently it looks as though the play structures may outlast the lifespan predicted in the Reserve Report.

Playground envelope

The envelope surrounding the play structures needs minor, but regular, maintenance. The envelope needs to be weeded several times a year and the timber framing should be checked to ensure that the rebar is flush with the surface and not sticking up. A quick tap with a hammer is sufficient to drive the rebar back down. The woodchips need to be raked and redistributed several times per year, especially under the swing set. Because these woodchips are specifically engineered for playground use, we should not supplement with other woodchips. All of this work can be done by volunteers. The Capital Budget provides funds to replace the woodchips every 3 years.

Soccer and Softball

The soccer goal goals and softball backstop require little maintenance each year. In early November, the soccer nets, backstop netting and rigging, and the sign should be removed and put into storage for the winter. In early April these items should be reinstalled. Each year the soccer goals need some new Velcro straps and little bungee ball cords to replace those that broke the previous year. These can be purchased from Wolverine Sports in town or a variety of places online. The nets need to be replaced about every 3 years. Our goals use a net that is 6.5'h x 18.5'w net with a 7' bottom depth and a 3' top depth. The netting is 3mm thick. Nets and bungee balls can be ordered from Goals4Sports online.

Water Fountain and standpipe

Water needs to be shut off to the park in late October to prevent damage to the fountain and standpipe. After the water has been shut off, a portable compressor should still be used to blow water out of the standpipe, the valves of which should then be left open to prevent fracturing. The fountain is old and has undergone numerous repairs. When it is replaced, it should be with a better mounted model with an adequate drainage field around it and a better mechanism for winterizing both it and the standpipe. Water should be turned on again in April and the fountain and standpipe checked for damage.

Picnic tables

Grounds is responsible for maintaining or replacing the picnic tables.

Grills

Though the grills haven't needed any maintenance since they were installed, the Capital Budget does provide funds for maintenance and replacement. Those funds may or may not be adequate.

Trees and shrubs

A variety of newer trees and shrubs have been planted at the park over the past few years. Currently there are ginkgos, Japanese tree lilacs, yellowwoods, redbuds, swamp white oaks, black gums, serviceberries, vernal witchhazel, arrowwood viburnums, and American cranberry bush viburnums. It is important that these be protected from mowers and weed whips with adequate mulch rings. In addition, there are much older stands of cottonwoods, pines and firs that should first have burdock and other weeds removed from their bases and then be mulched or otherwise protected. Poison ivy likes to scale some of the older trees in the park. These vines should be cut in several places and be painted with Roundup to prevent it from seeding more broadly.

The butterfly garden

This garden is a Loch Alpine Garden Club project, and as such was installed and is maintained by Garden Club members. They also contributed funds to the limestone path leading to this garden. Although Grounds does not maintain this garden, it would be useful if we could help round up volunteers such as scout troops to help mulch and weed this garden.

Trash cans

Waste Management currently picks up trash from cans at both the main park and Rock Park. However, someone has to roll the cans up to the road and then move them back each Wednesday. Hugh and Nona have been doing this faithfully, but should they elect to stop a new volunteer will have to be found.

Bird houses

Several old bird houses are in place along the woodchip trail at the park and in various trees. All of them need to be replaced. This would be a good project for a scout group. They could research the types of boxes appropriate for the species they'd like to attract, build new boxes, install them and then maintain them, chasing out undesirable species and reporting back to the community. Loch Alpine could provide materials. Bat houses could also be installed.

PortaPotty

Grounds is also technically responsible for the PortaPotty, which basically means ensuring that the contractor keeps it clean and stocked. However, this duty has been assumed by LAIA's Administrative Assistant.

The main park beach

Technically, this beach doesn't fall within Grounds purview. Given its penchant for growing weeds and reeds, and the lack of a sand bottom off shore, it might be easier to convert this

beach to additional lawn. It would still provide shoreline access and might be easier to maintain. This could be discussed with Lakes and the Board.

Benches

The Capital Budget provides funds to maintain and replace the benches located at the main park and Rock Park. Little maintenance is needed except when vandalism occurs. In cases where the graffiti pops up, mineral spirits and a soft cloth do a good job removing the paint as long as it is treated promptly. If the paint is allowed to set for several days, Goof Off tends to work better.

Greenook Lake boat storage area

Responsibility for this area could lie with Lakes. However, since Grounds or Roads typically arranges for a lot of other mowing to be done, one of those committees usually has the area west of the boat ramp mowed and whipped to provide a clear area for boat storage and shoreline fishing.

Basketball Court and Tennis Courts

This court was refurbished by LAIA under an agreement with the Ann Arbor Country Club. That agreement is no longer valid as a result of the change in ownership. However, residents are still permitted to use it. Loch Alpine replaces the basketball nets as needed.

Timeline

January

Finalize Grounds Committee budget request

February

Bid out mowing contract if needed for the year

March

April

- Install backstop netting and sign
- Install soccer nets
- Check nets at basketball court and replace as needed
- Stake vegetation buffers at Rock Park

May

- Pull garlic mustard at park and on island
- Turn on water to park
- Check to make sure the water fountain and standpipe are working
- Rake woodchips around playground equipment
- Spray paths with Roundup in late May
- Sweep/clear leaves and trash from basketball court
- Cleanup entrance beds

June

- Remulch trees and shrubs as needed at parks and along Greenook

July

- Spray paths again with Roundup
- Rake woodchips around playground equipment

August

September

- Send out leaf disposal “Do’s and Don’ts” flyer
- Rake woodchips around playground equipment
- Spray paths again with Roundup

October

- Have LASA shut off water in late October or early November
- Remove invasive buckthorn and honeysuckle from island in late October or early November

November

- Remove backstop netting and sign
- Remove soccer nets and straps
- Buy new straps and attachment hardware as needed for next year
- Prepare budget for next year

December