

Natural Turf Management Pilot Project Proposal

Updated: September 14, 2006

Prepared by Healthy Communities Project in conjunction with the Village of Whitefish Bay Pesticide Reduction Committee (members: Jim Grassman, David Fee, Amy Joyce, Melanie Ariens and Sandy Hellman).

For the purposes of this proposal, pesticide is defined according to the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act (FIFRA), as “any substance or mixture of substances intended for preventing, destroying, repelling or mitigating any pest.” This includes weed killers (herbicides), bug killers (insecticides), rodent killers, and antimicrobials (e.g., disinfectants, algaecides, and fungicides). In this proposal we are focusing on the use of any pesticides used in the maintenance of turf areas. Common examples of turf grass pests can be, but are not limited to, crabgrass, dandelions, plantain and knot weed.

Per the Pesticide Reduction Committee of the Board’s meeting and discussion on Friday, September 8th, 2006, the following is an updated approach and proposal for the Pesticide-Free Pilot Project for the Santa Monica medians between Lake View and Montclair, School House Park, and Buckley Park. It is the desire of both Healthy Communities Project (HCP) and the Village Board to agree on a program that will be managed successfully and provide short-term weed reduction on the medians, ongoing weed reduction within all three pilot areas over time, and long-term success by demonstrating a safe and effective turf management alternative to the pesticide approach. **It should be noted that the attached schedule represents Best Practices for the full three years of the program with the idea that beyond the three year pilot project, costs would go down because the overall health of the soil and turf would be well established and require fewer enhancements to maintain.** Per our discussions with Jim Grassman and David Fee, it is the Board’s desire to have HCP coordinate the turf project in the following ways:

1. HCP will devise a three-year turf management plan with the ability to choose subcontractors and products to accomplish what we believe will be the best possible short- and long-term aesthetic results (weed reduction and soil/turf enhancement) based upon the usage needs of the three pilot areas and within a budget based upon our recommendations that will hopefully be approved by the Board and supplemented by the Whitefish Bay Civic Foundation.
2. With this in mind, the following proposal includes the use of corn gluten (a 9% nitrogen natural fertilizer/weed inhibitor), GreenQuest liquid plant and soil enhancer (referred to in the budget as “soil enhancer”), aeration, over-seeding, and HCP-organized weed-outs to hasten weed reduction on the medians (see attached schedule and budget figures).
3. Another large-scale weed-out on the medians would be organized for next May to remove as many weeds as possible at the outset of the program. HCP would approach local volunteer groups such as the Junior Women’s Club, the Whitefish Bay Garden Club, and local scout troops. As was done at last spring’s weed-out, volunteers could sign their waivers at the event. Individuals who wish to weed on their own could sign a waiver

to be kept on file at Village Hall. As always, we are happy to take whatever safety precautions are necessary to keep residents and volunteers safe at all times.

4. HCP will conduct photographic and manually counted weed surveys of each pilot area starting in spring, 2007, before any weeding is completed. These surveys would be conducted when weeds are most visible during late spring and early fall and would also record the types of weeds that are present, which serves to illuminate underlying soil issues. A grid system would be employed to count and plot weeds. In addition to photographic records, HCP would conduct the manual surveys in the same 20x20 square foot areas at School House and Buckley Parks each season, and would sample the medians in two areas of 10x10 square feet to achieve the same square footage sample. Photographic and manual survey results would be presented to the turf committee, which should ideally meet every spring and fall to review the program's progress.

Due to improper management over the past three years, the Santa Monica medians between Silver Spring Drive and Montclair have become increasingly infested with weeds in some areas. As we are all aware, these weeds have prompted ongoing resident complaints and requests to eliminate them. Given their proximity to two major school zones and the known health risks associated with exposing children to these chemicals, HCP would not support the Village of Whitefish Bay's decision to apply herbicides to the Santa Monica Medians. However, if the Board chooses to apply herbicides to these medians this fall in order to reduce weed counts in the short term, HCP recommends the following precautions be taken by the Village of Whitefish Bay to minimize exposure risk to those who must frequent these areas in order to get their children to and from school every day:

1. Post signage on the medians one week before spraying to notify residents of the
2. Be thoughtful about when to spray by investigating when there will be the least pedestrian traffic in the area (check school schedules and activities, both public and private).
3. Notify residents in the North Shore Herald and through Richards and St. Monica's Friday folders so that concerned parents have enough notice to plan alternate routes for drop-off and pick-up.
4. After spraying, double-post application signs and leave them up as long as possible, preferably a minimum of seventy two hours, which is the State posting requirement for all public schools.

If the Board approves the attached plan and budget and HCP is to coordinate the management of this pilot project, we ask that the Board firmly commit that no herbicides will be applied for the duration of the three-year project. Should HCP manage the pilot project, we would like to ask that the Board approve small signs for each area indicating that these areas are Pesticide-Free Demonstration Zones with our web address so interested parties can get more information on the project.

Other Considerations

Given that the Santa Monica medians have no direct recreational value to the community and require a substantial level of maintenance, we wish to once again suggest that the Board consider adding additional beds over time to gradually reduce the amount of turf to be maintained. These beds could include a combination of low maintenance perennials, evergreens, deciduous shrubs and trees, and appealing ground covers. The goal would be to increase the beauty of the medians while reducing the amount of money spent on turf maintenance.