

Reservoir Stewardship Program Update

FAQs for New and Current Program Participants

What is the Land Stewardship Program?

Hoover, O'Shaughnessy, and Griggs Reservoirs are owned and operated by the City of Columbus to provide drinking water to 1.2 million people and recreational opportunities for residents and visitors throughout central Ohio. The Land Stewardship Program, which has been in existence for over two decades, offers eligible contiguous property owners options for modifying city reservoir property for purposes such as path creation, boat dock installation, removal of invasive species, or creation of a filtered view.

The program defines the limits of access, and establishes design standards to guide permissible modifications. Over the last few years, Columbus Department of Public Utilities, in conjunction with the Recreation and Parks Department, has been preparing for an update to the Land Stewardship Program.

Are property owners required to participate in the program?

No. Contiguous landowners are not required to participate, but there are benefits to entering into a Land Stewardship Agreement. Only contiguous landowners with a current agreement will be able to modify city property. A Land Stewardship Agreement is also a prerequisite for a private boat dock.

What is a Land Stewardship Agreement (LSA)?

The Land Stewardship Agreement is a license agreement between the City and the current contiguous landowner that authorizes the property owner to modify city property in order to establish and/or maintain a path, filtered view corridor, or private boat dock. The Land Stewardship Agreement includes a pre-developed land stewardship design plan that is site-specific and details the extent and location of the authorized access to the reservoir.

How will I know if my current agreement and plan are changing?

There are approximately 300 land stewardship agreements currently in place, which may or may not meet the updated design standards. Some of the existing agreements allow for a variety of maintenance and/or structures that do not conform to the final draft design standards. These elements will be phased out through the creation of a "sunset plan" to help the property transition to the new standards.

An individualized sunset plan will identify any items in the previous stewardship plan and agreement requiring change in order to comply with the updated design standards. If modifications are required, the sunset plan for the city property will outline the necessary changes and timeframes for implementation.

How can I view my property plan to know if I will be eligible for a path or boat dock?

To provide consistency and transparency, the city will update all existing stewardship agreements and prepare design plans for all properties contiguous to the reservoirs. The final design plan and sunset plan for each property will be publicly available online at the conclusion of the project. Advanced notification will be provided on the finalization and roll-out of the updated Land Stewardship Program.

Will the Land Stewardship Agreement and plan be transferable?

The final stewardship design plan that is developed for each contiguous parcel will be a plan that remains in place as the contiguous property ownership changes. The stewardship agreement is not transferable from one contiguous property owner to another. To be eligible for the Land Stewardship Program the current owner of a contiguous property is required to sign a Land Stewardship agreement.

What type of access will be allowed in the future?

The city is currently considering options to sunset existing agreements and manage the transition to meet the updated design standards. The city recognizes there is a long and complex history associated with both authorized and unauthorized maintenance of city property. While elements to sunset current agreements are still being discussed, the city is using the following guidelines to develop the individual sunset plans. Application of the final stewardship design plans and sunset plans will not begin until the updated Land Stewardship Program is implemented in 2020.

Mowing:

The updated standards allow mowing of an approved 5-foot wide path and, where applicable, a 10-foot wide strip adjacent to inhabited structures if located within 15 feet of the property line.

- Modify existing agreements to restore the reservoir shoreline and transition from turf grass to native grasses, shrubs, and/or trees.

Paths:

The updated design standards allow for a maximum 5-foot wide path.

- Paths will be limited to a 5-foot wide by 10-foot high dimension. Paths may be created from grass or other approved materials, but may not exceed 5 feet in width

View Corridors:

The updated standards allow for a filtered reservoir view, up to 1/3 of the contiguous property width or 50-foot, whichever is less. Filtered view corridors can be created and maintained by removal of invasive vegetation, removal of dead standing woody vegetation, and potentially pruning of shrubs and side trimming of limbs in accordance with the updated design standards. No native vegetation removal is allowed for creation of a view.

- View corridors that exceed the widths allowed in the updated standards will be reclaimed by restricting mowing and/or replanting of native trees and shrubs in areas outside the proposed filtered view corridor area.
- No mowing will be allowed in existing view corridors to allow for understory vegetation to develop.

Boat Stakes:

The updated design standards will phase out boat stakes on city property.

- New private boat stakes will not be issued.
- Current boat stakes will be permitted until property ownership transfers, or the contiguous landowner fails to renew their annual boat stake permit.

Structures:

The city has not permitted contiguous residential landowners to build permanent structures such as walls or boat houses upon city property for many decades. However, several of these structures remain. The city is evaluating options to address the structures in accordance with the current use, condition, and feasibility of removal.