Garden Tour – 5 Takeaways

1. Irrigation Groupings (IG) – group plants with like water requirements in the same landscape area.

- IG 1: low water use/reduced summer water
- IG 2: regular garden watering/summer water.
- Most of the plants we saw were IG 1.
- Trees require less frequent watering cycles, of longer duration, than IG 1 and IG 2. They should have their own valves and cycles.

2. Planting areas – choose plants to meet the needs of the planting area. What is the function of the plant? What benefit would the community like to see from the plant?

- High profile areas - clubhouses, community entrances, gatehouses, signage, islands may justify targeted use of non-drought tolerant plants
- Shrub beds – medium to low growing plants, small trees with well-behaved roots
- Slopes within the community – plants which need minimal pruning and serve an erosion control purpose; a mixture of trees, shrubs, ground covers depending on slope size
- Buffer slopes – interface area with native ecosystems, use shrubs and trees native to the area

3. Training Young Trees – 1-2 years after planting and establishment, young trees should be lightly pruned to create good structure, branch spacing and attachment. This is easier and less costly to do when the tree is young. Use only people who have been trained to do this specific task.

- Early structural pruning extends tree life by reducing risk at maturity and associated mitigation requirements (i.e. frequent pruning).
- Trees with excurrent forms should be pruned early to establish a strong central leader (main stem) with well-spaced, scaffolding branches one-third the size of the trunk they're connected to.
- Decurrent trees with round, wide forms should be pruned to reduce load on branches more than one-third the size of the trunk they're connected to.
- If a branch collar cannot be developed, then the goal is to encourage visible branch tapering, which is a strong mechanical form that less likely to fail.

4. Tree structure – scaffold branches off the trunk should be 1/3 the size of the main trunk. Branches larger than this should be target pruned with a reduction cut to subordinate the larger limb, enabling the growth of that specific branch to slow down relative to the rest of the tree.

- Branch to trunk ratio is directly related to branch collar.
- The branch collar is a defense mechanism against decay.
- Branches with diameters greater than 1/3 of the trunk they're connected to generally don't have collars.
- Branch collars help subordinate the branch and keep them less than a third the size of the trunk.

5. Planting depth – trees and shrubs should be planted with the root flare visible above finished grade, in a hole only as deep as the root system. The root flare is the trunk area which "flares" out to begin root formation. Mulch well underneath, but do not bunch up mulch around trunks.