



## SSAFE CASE STUDY REPORT

### Countersett Court Accessible Landscape Renovation with Native Plants

**Chapter:** Kendal at Longwood

**Location:** Kennett Square, Pennsylvania

**Recorder:** Jeffrey Stann

**Date Submitted:** 05/13/2024

**Who to Contact for More Information:**

The Countersett Team:

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**Keywords:** Landscape, Environmental sustainability, Native Plants, Accessibility

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### Summary:

The Countersett project attempts to change the 50-year-old landscape of one of the neighborhood courtyards at Kendal at Longwood into a model for our larger community in its second 50 years.

**Objective:** The Countersett Court neighbors developed six objectives for this landscape renovation project:

- To remove all turf grass
- To plant a native garden
- To create accessible community gathering and transiting spaces in and across the courtyard
- To use low maintenance plantings in terms of both upkeep and watering
- To reduce surface water runoff and protect the aquifer
- To screen parking areas

### Project Description:

#### General Description.

Countersett Court contains about 10,000 sq. ft. of land planted in a traditional residential manner with a handful of trees set in a lawn. The courtyard is framed by a walkway and 10 independent living units. It is a collection basin for surface water runoff from a good deal of Kendal. The transition between the walkway and the lawn is uneven,



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making access to the lawn difficult for many residents. This situation limits neighborhood outdoor gatherings and subjects residents to the weekly blast of mowers and leaf blowers, as well as the chemical treatments that go along with American lawns of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century.

## The Community.

Kendal at Longwood (KAL) was the original Kendal development, having just celebrated its fiftieth anniversary in 2023. It shares approximately 500 acres with its sister Crosslands community in rural Chester County, near Philadelphia. KAL has about 400 residents in independent living, assisted living, and skilled nursing care. There are about 200 village-type independent living units built around courtyards such as Countersett and another 60 newer more suburban-styled cottages. KAL is part of the not-for-profit Kendal-Crosslands Communities (KCC) that includes Crosslands (with independent living, assisted living, and skilled nursing units), as well as Cartmel and Coniston, both 50-and-older communities in the vicinity. KAL began very much as a resident-driven community and retains much of that quality today.

## Applicability.

The project would be applicable to any community with landscaped property.

## **Methodology:**

- The neighborhood was encouraged to prepare a plan for refreshing the Countersett landscape in summer 2022, and the grounds department provided outdoor benches
- Residents met to define goals for the project in autumn 2022
- One resident drew up a landscape design, which was shared with the immediate Countersett neighbors as well as those in the two adjacent courts in early 2024
- The three-person Countersett Team was formed to coordinate next steps
- The plans were revised and shared in turn with the relevant KAL committees, the larger KAL community, and the KCC Grounds Supervisor
- Staff accepted elements of the plan to begin, and indicated that installation would have to be done by outside contractors
- The Team identified contractors and pervious walkway materials
- The Team appointed a resident Countersett treasurer and arranged with the KCC finance office to manage accounting and disbursement of funds
- The Team secured funding from three resident committees (Arboretum, Horticulture, and Natural Areas Conservancy) and gifts from many individual residents for initial planting of a raingarden at the lowest area in the courtyard, which was completed in summer 2023



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- The KCC Grounds Supervisor agreed to submit a budget request for Kendal-Crosslands Communities funding for walkways and seating areas, part of which was funded in late 2023
- We are now waiting for installation of the walkway and Phase 2 planting to begin in spring 2024
- KCC facilities staff have indicated they would try to secure funding for seating areas in 2025
- Planting is expected to continue through two more phases

## **Funding:**

Funding is being provided by three KAL resident committees, individual residents, and the KCC central budget. The total cost is estimated at \$75,000.

## **Involvement/Support of Community Administration:**

The administration has approved plans, provided partial funding, and assisted with securing outside contractors.

## **Key Challenges:**

One challenge has been to move the administration from its accustomed “mow-and-blow” grounds approach to one that incorporates more diverse plantings. In general, residents – all members of the first Earth Day generation – have supported the project. The administration is also concerned that future residents may not be equally supportive of a more natural landscape and be willing to help to maintain it.

## **Outcome:**

So far, the project has been very successful, and Countersett Court has become a destination for residents from across Kendal at Longwood.

## **Lessons Learned:**

Working broadly to secure community support has been essential. Persistence is equally important – it is taking far longer to complete the project in the not-for-profit milieu here than in a typical landscape project. Furthermore, traditional Quaker ways of arriving at agreement among community members may cause more delays, though once arrived at such agreement may facilitate further progress.

## **Next Steps:**

- Complete Phase 2 planting in 2024
- Complete walkway construction in 2024



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- Secure KCC funding for seating areas for 2025
- Complete planting plans for 2025 and beyond
- Work with administration and residents to secure agreement and funding for Phase 3 and 4 plantings

## Resources:

- Douglas Tallamy, *Nature's Best Hope*, and other books.
- Homegrown Natural Park, [homegrownnationalpark.org](http://homegrownnationalpark.org)

## Photos:

- The existing Countersett Court
- Raingarden planted in 2023

## Attached:

- Landscape plan for Phase 2



## Countersett Court – existing landscape, viewed from new raingarden



## Countersett Court – Raingarden planted 2023

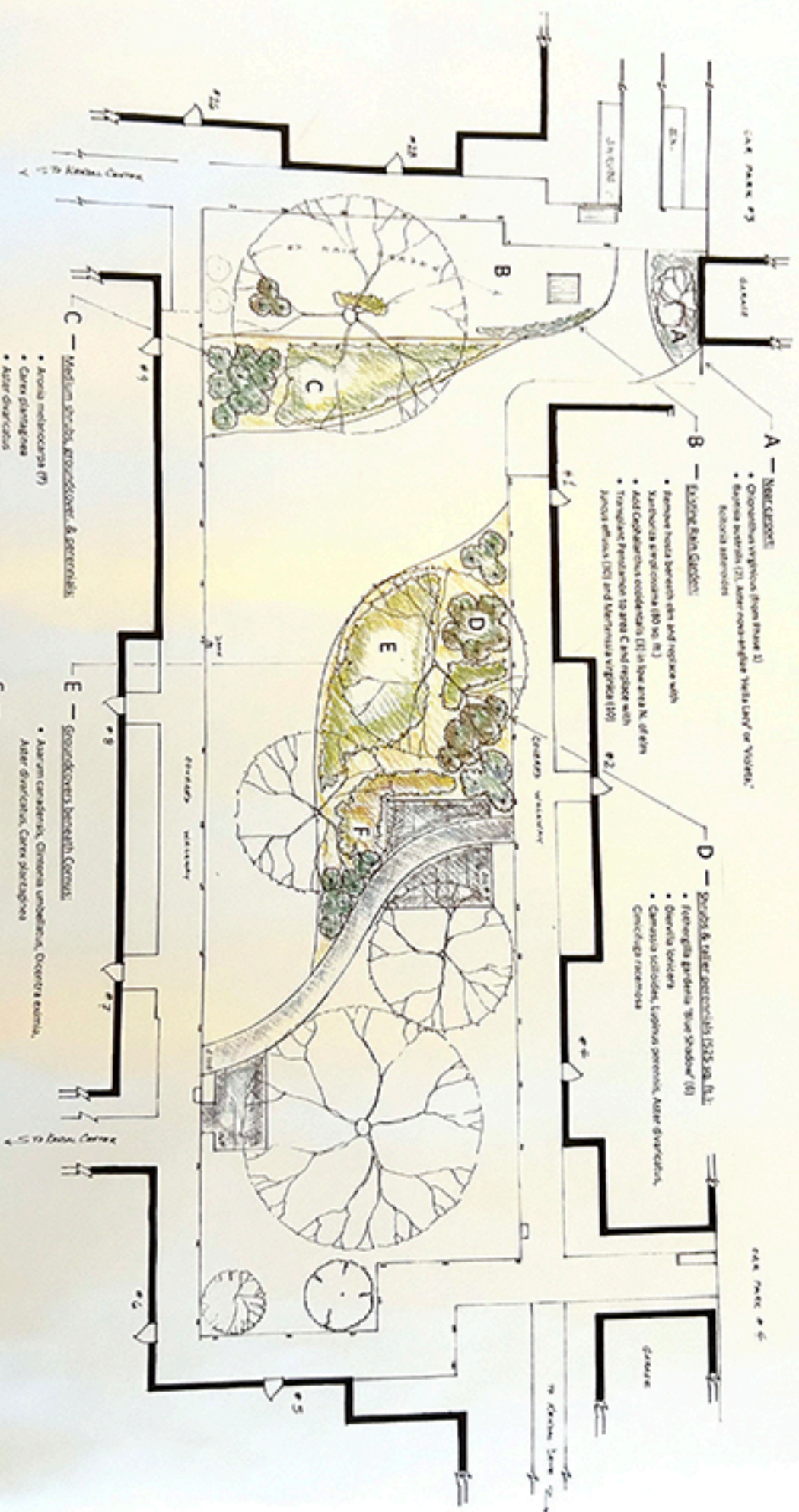


# COUNTERSETT COURT

# HARDSCAPE & PLANTINGS, Phase 2



Rev. 14 January 2024



- A — Near Garage:**
- *Crataegus virginica* (from Phase 1)
  - *Bursera mexicana* (2), *Aster novae-angliae* 'Vista Line' or 'Vista', *Rubus idaeus*

- B — Eastern Side Garden:**
- Remove trees beneath epi and replace with *Saururus cespitosus* (10 to 15)
  - Add *Cordylanthus occidentalis* (5) in low area N. of epi
  - Transplant *Pennisetum* to area C and replace with *Amorpha canescens* (10) and *Bernonia virginica* (10)

- D — South & West perennials (15x25 sq. ft.):**
- *Festuca gracilis* 'Blue Shadow' (10)
  - *Oenothera biennis*
  - *Gaura bicolor*, *Lupinus perennis*, *Aster divaricatus*, *Corniclipa racemosa*

- C — Medium shrubs, arborescens, & perennials:**
- *Acrois melanocarpa* (7)
  - *Carex plantaginifolia*
  - *Aster divaricatus*
  - *Pennisetum* moved from ex. Main Garden

- E — Groundcovers beneath Cornus:**
- *Aurum canadense*, *Osmunda umbellata*, *Osmunda cinnam.*, *Aster divaricatus*, *Carex plantaginifolia*

- F — Medium shrubs & perennials near fountain area:**
- *Acrois melanocarpa*
  - *Pennisetum*

