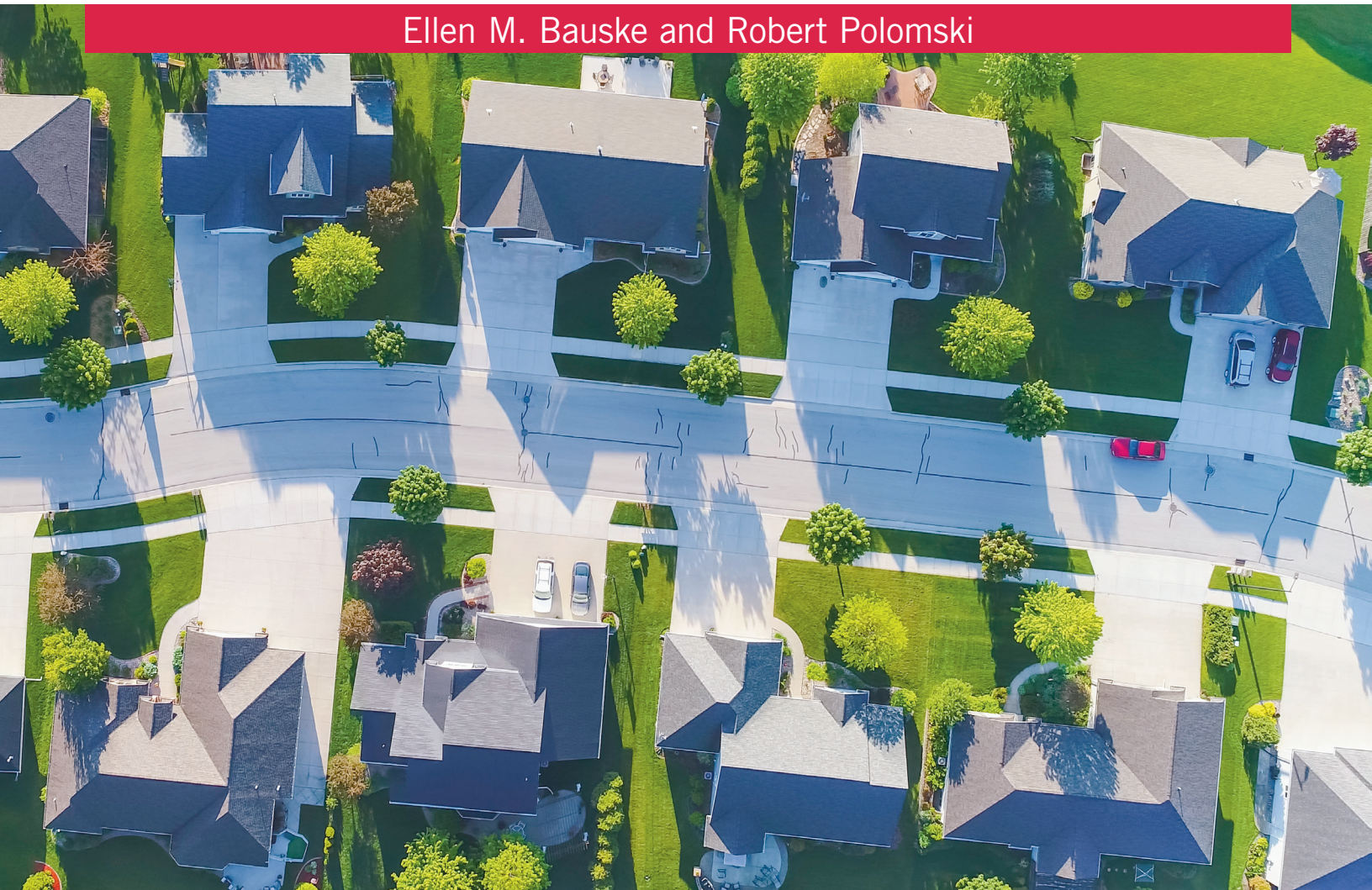


Help for Homeowner Associations: Your County Extension Agent Has Answers

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Did you know that your local University of Georgia Cooperative Extension agent is your gateway to university resources and information? Your Extension agent can help you get on the right side of landscape science and help ensure that your community has attractive and functional landscapes.



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Community water features

Your Extension agent can help you with community stormwater features. Some homeowner associations (HOAs) have ponds, but most have stormwater detention vaults and/or retention ponds that must be managed accordingly. It is important to maintain the dams on these stormwater features, where sedimentation and aquatic weeds can create problems. Mosquito control is often an important concern to residents, and Extension agents can educate residents about a variety of integrated pest management strategies that are practical and effective.

Wildlife, such as insects, beavers, and geese, may also present challenges to the association. Your Extension agent can provide the most current research-based management practices to address these issues.

Landscape advice

Your Extension agent can help you create tree policies and find certified arborists to manage, protect, and inspect community trees. They can help you with the appropriate selection and placement of trees and shrubs and address concerns regarding turfgrass establishment and management. Most Extension agents will accept opportunities to deliver landscape seminars that focus on plant health and selection to your homeowners. Some Extension offices have trained volunteers, Master Gardener Extension Volunteers, who can advise your community's residents. Your Extension agent can identify any Master Gardeners within the association.

Diagnosis, pest identification, and management

When stumped by a landscape problem or issue, your county agent can almost certainly help you. They are experts in diagnosing landscape problems, identifying pests (such as weeds, insects, and diseases), and making appropriate pest management recommendations. In addition, your Extension agent has access to university resources such as plant disease diagnostic labs and soil testing labs to support their efforts.

HOA covenants

Over the years, aspirations and demands for our home landscapes have evolved and changed. It may be wise to update HOA covenants to accommodate new priorities or challenges. Perhaps it is time to accommodate bee hives and backyard chicken flocks? Some HOAs allow residents to grow vegetables in common landscape areas or create community garden spaces for residents.

Many association bylaws specify the amount of lawn area and sometimes the quality of the turfgrass in the lawn, particularly in the front of the home. Shade from mature trees may no longer allow homeowners to maintain a lawn that satisfies these covenant specifications.

Before you update your covenants, speak to your Extension agent. They are aware of current landscape trends and best management practices for landscapes.

Homeowner disputes with HOAs

Homeowners in HOAs are subject to the association's rules and bylaws. The Extension agent cannot settle disputes between homeowners and their HOA. HOAs have broad legal powers to collect fines and fees and regulate activities regardless of the age or scientific accuracy of their rules and regulations.

Your Extension agent will be able to present evidence-based practices to the HOA board or homeowners at meetings, but they cannot effect rule changes.

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