



Landscaping



This early 20th century photograph depicts a uniform planting of street trees and landscaping beds in the median on the 1300 block of Dewey Avenue. Historic photographs are invaluable resources for researching now vanished landscape features. (Courtesy: St. Joseph Planning and Community Services Dept.)

Landscape elements, both natural and man-made, play an important role in helping to define the total cultural environment of St. Joseph's historic districts. Mature trees, hedge rows, foundation plantings, formal and informal gardens, grassy lawns, fencing, curbing and walkway treatments, lighting, art and statuary, street and alley materials, and streetscape furniture all contribute to the character of a specific site and the historic districts as a whole. Equally as important, they help to further define man's interaction with his surroundings.

The public areas of the residential sections of the City's historic districts are characterized generally by tree-lined streets. The location of trees, however, varies. On some blocks, a generous planting strip exists between the curb and the public sidewalk affording an opportunity to plant trees in a uniform manner adjacent to the street. In other areas, trees are situated in planting

pockets when the sidewalk treatment extends to the curb line. In still other locations, sidewalk placement has resulted in a narrow planting strip where tree planting is rendered undesirable. In such cases, the planting of trees on private property in close proximity to the public sidewalk has occurred, resulting in the desired street tree canopy that is indicative of many of the City's older, more established neighborhoods.

Preservation of the tree canopy in the City's historic districts is desirable. Existing street trees should be preserved through proper pruning, and a replacement program should be established for aged or diseased specimens. When tree replacement is necessary, new trees should be of a deciduous, large canopy variety that will help to establish a definable urban forest "edge" at the street. Historically, the American Elm was responsible for the creation of this forested street edge appearance in many neighborhoods across the country. Dutch Elm Disease largely eradicated the species, forever changing the character of communities and underscoring the practical need to diversify the urban forest to prevent such widespread and dramatic losses. Replacement trees should duplicate the Elm's characteristics (i.e., tall, open, arching, and deciduous), while providing resistance to disease. Oak and hard maple varieties are among the more common replacement street trees found in St. Joseph. Poplar and Sweetgum (fruitless variety) are also found. Other possible large tree options include varieties of ash and linden, Lacebark Elm, Sycamore, Hackberry, Black Walnut, Hickory, and Zelkova. Certain tree species are discouraged, such as those with weak wood (e.g., Silver Maple, Bradford Pear) or those with undesirable characteristics (e.g., Ginkgo, female species). **Property owners are asked to consult with the City's Tree Board and the Department of Public Works when considering the planting of trees in the right-of-way. A permit and Certificate of Appropriateness for tree planting are required. The planting of approved street trees may be authorized by the City's Historic Preservation Planner as a minor works item. Removal of dead or diseased trees does not require a Certificate of Appropriateness from the Landmark Commission. Likewise, the planting of new trees, shrubbery, and flowers on private property does not require a Certificate of Appropriateness. Such activities are considered routine maintenance.**

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Smaller-to-mid size trees may be permitted in areas where utility wires and other site features cause overhead obstruction. Large trees that are located in areas where overhead utilities exist and have been improperly pruned or “topped” should be removed and replaced with smaller tree varieties. American Holly, Washington Hawthorn, Japanese Pagoda, Amur Cork, Eastern Redbud, Saucer Magnolia, American Hornbeam, and Norway Maple are some examples of acceptable mid-size replacement trees. Approved small trees include Downy Serviceberry, Kwansan Cherry, Eastern Hophornbeam, and Purple-leaf Plum.

In cases where a planting strip is present along the street, this feature should be preserved as green space. Paving the strip with a hard surface is not appropriate. While frequently planted in grass, a green groundcover could be considered if lower maintenance is desired. Examples of groundcovers which are appropriate include Vinca Minor, Ajuga, Pachysandra, Liriope, and some ivy varieties. The width of the planting strip, as well as the sidewalk, should remain constant within a block in order to maintain the strong alignment of streetscape features.

Tree planting in Downtown St. Joseph is also encouraged as part of an effort to revitalize the city center and make it more inviting for pedestrians. The City’s Downtown Master Plan outlines recommendations for tree placement that should be followed. Careful consideration should be given to choosing tree species that will survive in tree wells and in confined conditions created by the close proximity of buildings to the planting areas. Large canopy trees are generally not recommended along the street because their branches will impact the buildings as they mature. Columnar-shaped tree species should be considered in this environment. Tree and hedgerow planting, sometimes in combination with walls or fencing, is also encouraged within and around the perimeter of parking lots to soften and beautify their presence. This “green screen” will also help to maintain the sense of a definable edge along the parking lot frontage that is lost when a building is not present.

Sidewalks, curbs, and streets are three additional site features of the public streetscape that should be evaluated. The City’s historic districts reveal a mixture of brick and concrete sidewalks. Many of the surviving brick sidewalks are buried under grass, dirt, and, in some cases, later concrete sidewalks. These brick sidewalks are an important reflection of St. Joseph’s wealth and prosperity in the late 19th century. Many of the sidewalks are laid with red brick pavers in a herringbone weave pattern. Some brick sidewalks may have an uneven walking surface, necessitating relaying of the brick following preparation of a new substrate. Subtle variations in paving materials can be considered to enrich sidewalks at specific locations, such as street crossings or plazas in front of public buildings. The City’s Downtown Master Plan provides recommendations for sidewalk treatments within certain areas of the core Downtown. These recommendations should be followed in order to achieve an overall coordinated image streetscape for Downtown St. Joseph.



Perspective sketch of proposed Felix Street Square improvements. (Source: Downtown St. Joseph Master Plan)



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Herringbone-patterned brick sidewalks are common historic landscape features found in many of St. Joseph's historic districts.

As a general rule, retention and preservation of brick sidewalks are encouraged throughout the City's historic districts. In situations where the majority of sidewalks on a given block are concrete and an existing brick sidewalk warrants repair, the Commission may consider replacement of the brick with concrete to achieve uniformity of sidewalk treatment. In such cases, the City shall stockpile the brick for re-use in other sidewalk repair projects. Likewise, removal of damaged concrete and its replacement with brick pavers in a historic pattern may be authorized by the Landmark Commission.

Stone curbing is found along many of the City's streets, particularly in the historic districts. Both limestone and granite were used because of their durability. These stones often extend three feet (3') or more into the ground. Occasionally, the stone curbing has been replaced with concrete that fails to match the color and texture of the original stone. Efforts should be made to maintain stone curbing and to replace the feature in kind, when necessary.

Preservation of brick streets and alleys is also important. Many of St. Joseph's brick streets and alleys have been covered with asphalt over the years. In some cases, brick streets have been damaged by utility companies that have trenched holes in the street/ alley for installation and/or repair of service lines. Often these trenches were patched with concrete or asphalt instead of being replaced with the brick pavers. The City of St. Joseph has been increasingly more vigilant about monitoring utility repairs in existing brick streets/ alleys and requires that utility providers reinstall brick pavers when removed for utility installation and repairs.

Historic street furniture along public rights-of-way should also be recognized and preserved. Features may include hitching posts and steps; inscriptions in plaques, steps, and walls that bear an address or family name; concrete pyramidal street markers from the 1940s, and decorative street lighting. All of these features contribute to the historic character of a neighborhood or commercial district and should be catalogued and maintained.

New street lighting should complement the character of the historic district and should replace existing modern fixtures incrementally as funding allows. The City's Public Works Department is currently responsible for stocking replacement parts for a variety of lighting types. A smaller number of lighting standards used throughout the City would greatly reduce inventory and costs and increase efficiency and repair. To aid in this goal, a street light standard should be selected which would be appropriate for all of St. Joseph's residential historic districts. A similar approach has been taken in the City's Central Business District and Patee Town neighborhood in recent years. The period lighting should utilize a white light such as a metal halide bulb and should be scaled to the pedestrian. A cast iron or aluminum pole should be utilized instead of fiberglass.

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In addition to street lights, street furniture installations, particularly in the City's Downtown, should be of the same "family" to create a unified streetscape design. Recommendations for the implementation of specific streetscape improvements in the Central Business District are detailed in the Downtown St. Joseph Master Plan and should be followed.

Plantings On Private Property

In addition to structures, plantings and "green space" are important components of a building site. The relationship between open space and building mass in St. Joseph's residential historic districts is essential to preserving the character of the streetscape and the historic districts as a whole. Separations between buildings provide areas for plantings and gardens. The repetition of these elements establishes a rhythm to the streetscape that is an important component of the pedestrian experience. Because many lots have been subdivided and developed over time and building losses have occurred because of demolitions, the ratio of open space to building mass changes from block to block. Efforts should be made to preserve the established open space/building mass relationship that existed historically on a given block.

Planting design should complement the style or period in which the building on the site was constructed. Today's standard border plantings – flowering bushes, evergreens, and hedgerows – were largely absent from foundations of houses built in the mid-to-late 19th century. Victorians planted sparingly around the perimeter of their buildings, particularly in the early Victorian period when it was believed that large plantings placed too close to the home would attract insects and contribute to damp and humid conditions that would foster disease and decay. Period photographs reveal that most buildings were devoid of plantings in close proximity to the house. Exceptions included vines which were often incorporated into porches or trellises and seasonal flowers and low deciduous plants that were placed strategically at building corners or in the recesses of the architecture to accentuate the building. To the Victorian mindset, the architecture was of paramount importance and plantings were intended to complement and not compete with the building.

By the end of the Victorian era, more elaborate gardens and ornamental landscape elements gained popularity. Flower beds, often dominated by plantings of the same height and color hue and accentuated with statuary, fountains, urns, and other architectural elements, were incorporated into grassy lawns to create vignettes. Foundation plantings became more popular, especially for larger homes set on high foundations. Large leaf and needle type evergreens were combined with deciduous plants to soften and conceal foundations. Shade and ornamental trees were placed around the yard to create interesting vistas to and from the house. Fencing executed in either wood or ornamental iron became an important component of the landscape and helped to demarcate public and private as well as ornamental and utilitarian spaces. See FENCES AND WALLS.



Stone retaining walls and perennial flower beds help to demarcate public and private spaces in the Hall Street Historic District.



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World War I Monument, Mt. Mora Cemetery.

The early 20th century saw a continuation of the eclecticism of landscape design that began in the Late Victorian period. French, Italian, Oriental and English landscape garden design became increasingly more popular. Often elements from these diverse landscape traditions were incorporated into a single yard. A very structured, geometric, French-influenced garden, for example, might be placed next to the house where it could be viewed out a window by its inhabitants. However, a more naturalistic, English style garden might exist in the rest of the yard. This later landscape design approach became more popular in the post-Victorian period as the Arts and Crafts Movement began to dominate American architecture and decorative arts. The bungalows of the period were intended to blend with the natural environment through their use of natural colors and building materials and the horizontal emphasis of their architecture. Occupants of these houses were encouraged to interact with nature. Thus, pergolas, courtyards, terraces, and rock gardens became more prevalent, functioning as outdoor rooms that became an extension of the indoor space.

Landscaping: Guidelines

1. Maintain mature street trees. When removal or replacement is warranted, replace with a tree of the same species or another tree that will achieve a similar canopy and street edge definition at maturity.
2. Consult with the City's Tree Board and Department of Public Works prior to planting trees in the City's right-of-way. Obtain a tree permit and a Certificate of Appropriateness under the Landmark Commission's minor works provision.
3. Plant smaller trees in areas where overhead utility lines or other overhead obstructions exist.
4. Preserve the planting strip found between the public sidewalk and the street curb. This area should be planted with grass and/or groundcover and trees.
5. Use plant materials that are indigenous to the area. New plant materials should complement those found on the site and in the historic district.
6. Retain and maintain landscape elements that contribute to the character of the historic district such as mature trees and hedgerows, grassy lawns, ground covers, garden areas, fountains, walkways, statuary, and outbuildings.

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Landscaping: Guidelines continued

7. Keep the location of new landscape features consistent with landscape design principles from the period in which the building was constructed. Early Victorian buildings, for example, tended to have few foundation plantings and more utilitarian landscapes. Late Victorian structures saw a gradual increase in the number of plantings in the yard with a more eclectic style that continued into the early 20th century. Post-Victorian landscapes wedded the house with the landscape to achieve a more naturalistic environment.
8. Maintain the relationship between building mass and open space that exists on the block or streetscape.
9. Avoid the use of contemporary plant edging materials such as exposed landscape timbers in front and side yard areas. Stone and brick and low fencing are appropriate treatments. See FENCES AND GARDEN WALLS for more details.
10. Maintain brick sidewalks in their original patterns. When considering sidewalk replacement due to condition, evaluate adjacent sidewalks and the surrounding block to determine the predominant sidewalk treatment in the area. While the Landmark Commission encourages the preservation of brick sidewalks, it recognizes the value in a unified pavement treatment within a block and may allow for brick or concrete installations based on this approach.
11. Maintain stone curbing. New replacement curbing should match the original in terms of color, texture, and size.
12. Retain historic streetscape features such as hitching posts, inscribed stone stairs and sidewalks, and concrete sign posts.
13. Use the approved lighting standard for ornamental street lights in the City's historic districts. Cast iron or aluminum should be utilized instead of fiberglass for the pole material. A white light source such as a metal halide bulb should be used.
14. Use outbuildings, art, statuary, and fountains as focal points in public and private spaces. Avoid placing such elements in areas where they will obscure historic buildings or their architectural features. Due to the subjectivity involved in the evaluation of art, the Commission shall only consider the appropriateness of the location of public art in reviewing applications for certificates of appropriateness.
15. Utilize the family of streetscape furniture that is recommended in the St. Joseph Downtown Master Plan whenever public improvements are undertaken in the Central Business District.