

V

Public Spaces and Landscape Areas

V.1 INTRODUCTION

Chestertown's unique character and identity have as much to do with streetscapes and landscapes – trees, plantings, street widths, sidewalks, and the like – as they do with its historic buildings. Well-designed and maintained landscaping enhances the District, as do well-designed streets, sidewalks, and parking lots. Publicly used spaces should be both functional and aesthetically pleasing, while enhancing the character of the area. In commercial parts of the town, landscaping and design should reflect the commercial nature of the area, while other landscape design should reflect the residential nature of the area.



Although the Town bears the primary responsibility for major streetscape improvements and maintenance, individual property owners contribute to the area through plantings and landscaping in yards and along commercial buildings, through paving of walks, and through a variety of other features such as fences and walls. The maintenance of these streetscapes and landscapes is important to the well-being of the Historic District. If new construction requires alterations to existing streetscapes or landscapes, new elements should be designed and installed that are compatible with the District.

V.2 SIDEWALKS, WALKWAYS, DRIVEWAYS & PARKING LOTS

Streets and sidewalks knit the District together, providing a network along which cars and pedestrians travel. They should be designed with these functions in mind. Sidewalks are maintained by the Town and may be constructed of concrete or brick. Repairs to sidewalks should be done so that they match the older sections in texture, color, materials, and design. New sidewalks should be constructed in a manner that is compatible with the character of the Historic District. Tinted materials or concrete scored and tinted to resemble brick are not appropriate in the Historic District.

Walkways that connect sidewalks, driveways, and parking lots with other structures are made of a variety of materials, including brick and concrete. As with sidewalks, repairs to walkways should match the original as closely as possible, and new construction must either duplicate the original in texture, color, materials, and design, or be executed in a form that is compatible

with adjacent properties. Walkways should be appropriate for the style of the principle structure on the property.



Driveways in Chestertown's Historic District are constructed of brick, concrete, asphalt and gravel. Repairs to driveways should duplicate the original, using the same materials, colors, textures and designs. New driveways should be in keeping with adjacent properties and appropriate both to the District and to the style of the principle structure on the property.

Off-street parking lots tend to break the rhythm and consistency of a streetscape, and they should therefore be placed at the rear (or side) of a building or lot whenever possible. They are most appropriate in the commercial sections of the Town and should be screened from view. The screening requirements will vary based on the size and location of the lot, but a four-foot deep landscaping edge is recommended. Plantings should be high enough to screen vehicles from immediate view, but should still allow visual access into the lots. The design and materials for parking lots must be approved by the HDC prior to construction.

V.3 STREET FURNITURE

Element such as trash receptacles, benches, parking meters, utility poles, and street lights are referred to as street furniture. Street furniture can have an aesthetic impact on an area, and should be designed with this in mind. Such elements also should be safe and convenient, as well as designed to require minimal maintenance.

The style, design, materials and colors of street furniture should be appropriate to the different parts of the Historic District, as residential and commercial areas will have differing requirements. Street furniture located on sidewalks should not obstruct or impede pedestrian traffic, nor should it obscure views for motorists.

V.4 TREES, SHRUBS & OTHER PLANTINGS



Trees, shrubs, flowers, and grass can have a strong visual impact. Planting can offer shade and privacy, while adding color and texture to the area. If trees or shrubs are planted, they should be located with their mature size in mind. Plantings should be considered as building elements to balance and proportion in accordance with the buildings they surround.

The Historic District Commission recommends that landscaping in front yards be designed to reflect the period or style of the principle structure on the

property. Styles of landscaping changed over time, as did the types of plants that were popular. Up to the mid-19th century, native plants were most common, while a variety of exotic species were used during the Victorian period. Victorian landscapes often set the front yard apart from the street or sidewalk with a low brick wall, cast iron or wood fences, or by a change in elevation. Plantings were used along property lines to separate properties, and flowers and shrubs were used to hide building foundations. While front yards tended to be landscaped in aesthetically pleasing ways, rear yards were more utilitarian, serving as a focus for accessory buildings, as well as for kitchen and house-related chores. In the early 20th century, cast iron and ornamental fences were less commonly used, and landscapes were created with isolated trees and foundation plantings. Shrubs and fences often were used to separate individual properties. Accessory buildings typically were placed in side or rear yards.

The Commission recommends the following:

- Trees greater than six inches in diameter should be conserved whenever possible.
- Plantings and landscapes that are significant in defining the character of a property or area should be retained.
- Diseased or deteriorated plantings and landscapes that are significant in defining the character of a property or area should be replaced with healthy specimens of identical or similar species, and the landscape should be retained.
- Landscaping in front yards should be designed to reflect the period or style of the principle structure on the property.

The Town has published the highly useful *Chestertown Green Book*, which has numerous tips on landscaping curbside design. A landscape architect or a local nursery will be able to provide additional information on site improvements. Please also refer to section IV.3.10 above.

V.5 WALLS AND FENCES

Walls and fences are also important streetscape elements, and they work in conjunction with plantings (see V.4 above). Brick walls are common in Chestertown, as are painted wood board fences and cast iron fences. Unless they can be concealed by plantings, concrete block walls, and natural wood board, stockade, and split rail fences should be avoided.



The Commission recommends the following

- Flat, vertical board fences, painted or stained with straight tops are most suitable for interior lot and other secondary locations to screen yards, driveways, and walks and to provide privacy for residential backyards.
- Chain link fencing is not allowed in the Historic District.
- Vinyl or plastic fencing is easily recognizable and produces reflections or glare that is not seen on wood. Such fencing is out of character with in the Historic District and will not be approved in areas where it is visible from the public way.
- Concrete block walls, and natural wood board, stockade, and split rail fences are not recommended in most areas.
- Fences and walls that contribute to the character of a property or an area, such as cast iron fences or brick walls, should be retained whenever possible.
- If a significant fence or wall requires repair, repairs should be made using materials, design, color and textures that match the original. For masonry walls, please refer to Section III.2 for guidelines on masonry repairs.
- If a significant wall or fence is so deteriorated that it requires replacement, replacement should be done in kind, using design, materials, and colors that duplicate the original as closely as possible.



Fences have traditionally been a pleasing part of older neighborhoods, adding variety to the streetscape while marking property lines and outdoor spaces. A fence should be chosen to harmonize with the structure and the surrounding area.

V.6 DECKS, PATIOS, & POOLS

Decks, patios and pools are discussed in Section IV.4 and IV.6 above. As these types of installations may also be considered landscape elements, they are noted here as well. Decks, patios and pools also must be compatible with these guidelines and the character of the Historic District. Decks built with pressure treated lumber are not recommended on significant historic structures (please refer to III.3.5 above), nor are decks that would obscure, alter, or otherwise compromise the character of a significant building, building elevation, or significant landscape. When considering installation or enlargement of an in-ground pool, it should be noted that this requires significant ground-disturbance and will almost certainly require an archeological assessment. Above-ground pools are not recommended and will not be approved if visible from the public way.



Mill Street