CHARLOTTESVILLE

ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN CONTROL DISTRICTS

DESIGN GUIDELINES

Approved by City Council, September 17, 2012

II

SITE DESIGN & ELEMENTS

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II SITE DESIGN AND ELEMENTS

A. INTRODUCTION

The relationship between a historic building and its site, landscape features, outbuildings, and other elements within the property boundary all contribute to a historic district's overall image. Site features should be considered an important part of any project to be reviewed by the Board of Architectural Review.

There is much variety in site design and elements between and within the various historic districts in Charlottesville. The commercial areas of the downtown mall, West Main Street Corridor and the Corner, generally have few site features since the buildings usually cover much of the lot and have very limited setbacks. The early nineteenth century rowhouses near the courthouse are similar to commercial lot coverage with the exception that some may have a very small front yard with limited foundation or ground cover plantings.

Many of the nineteenth century dwellings in the North Downtown area and along parts of Ridge and Wertland streets also have limited setbacks and are spaced closely together. In these cases there are small front yards composed of grass or ground cover and often containing large canopy trees. The edges of these areas often are planted with low shrubs or flower beds, and the houses are surrounded by foundation plantings. Iron fences, hedges or low stone walls may separate the homeowner's property from the public sidewalk.

In other parts of the North Downtown area, particulary along Park Street, many of the dwellings are sited on larger lots and are placed further back on the lot. In these cases the front yard is a large lawn defined by border plantings and usually a low stone retaining wall or iron fence. Some have larger boxwood hedges and rows of box defining the entrance walkway. Large canopy trees, smaller ornamental trees and flower beds are additional elements often found within these spaces.

The resulting character of many of the residential streets in the historic districts is one of lush plantings and mature shade trees. While there may be much variety within the house types and styles along a particular street, the landscape character ties together the setting and plays an important role in defining the distinctiveness of the districts.

When making changes to a property within one of the historic districts, the entire site should be studied to better understand its original design and its context within its sub-area. When planning changes to a site in a historic district, create a new plan that reflects the site traditions of the area and that fits the scale of the lot. Consider using different types and scales of plantings that will create scale, define edges and enclose outdoor spaces of the site. The following sections provide more specific guidance.

The elements of urban landscapes, parks, and other open spaces in public ownership, including sidewalks, streets, plantings, street furniture, and street lighting also contribute to the character of the district and are discussed in *Chapter VI: Public Improvements*.

Plantings are a critical part of the historic appearance of the residential sections of Charlottesville's historic districts. The character of the plantings often changes within each district's sub-areas as well as from district to district. Many properties have extensive plantings in the form of trees, foundation plantings, shrub borders, and flowerbeds. Plantings are limited in commercial areas due to minimal setbacks.

Mature plantings and trees dominate the setting of this large dwelling while the historic iron fence defines and separates the public realm from the private site.

1. Encourage the maintenance and planting of large trees on private property along the streetfronts, which contribute to an "avenue" effect.

2. Generally, use trees and plants that are compatible with the existing plantings in the neighborhood.

3. Use trees and plants that are indigenous to the area.

4. Retain existing trees and plants that help define the character of the district, especially street trees and hedges.

5. Replace diseased or dead plants with like or similar species if appropriate.

6. When constructing new buildings, identify and take care to protect significant existing trees and other plantings.

7. Choose ground cover plantings that are compatible with adjacent sites, existing site conditions, and the character of the building.

8. Select mulching and edging materials carefully and do not use plastic edgings, lava, crushed rock, unnaturally colored mulch or other historically unsuitable materials.

Even on an urban lot with a shallow setback, the opportunity exists for site plantings, such as this edge of hedge on West Main Street.

Common to many neighborhoods in Charlottesville, the deep setback of this house provides a setting for a planted buffer near the street, large site trees and a yard with accent plantings.

II SITE DESIGN AND ELEMENTS

C. WALLS & FENCES

There is a great variety of fences and low retaining walls in Charlottesville's historic districts, particularly the historically residential areas. While most rear yards and many side yards have some combination of fencing and landscaped screening, the use of such features in front yards varies. Materials may relate to materials used on the structures on the site and may include brick, stone, wrought iron, wood pickets, or concrete.

1. Maintain existing materials such as stone walls, hedges, wooden picket fences, and wrought-iron fences.

2. When a portion of a fence needs replacing, salvage original parts for a prominent location.

3. Match old fencing in material, height, and detail.

4. If it is not possible to match old fencing, use a simplified design of similar materials and height.

5. For new fences, use materials that relate to materials in the neighborhood.

6. Take design clues from nearby historic fences and walls.

7. Chain-link fencing, split rail fences, and vinyl plastic fences should not be used.

8. Traditional concrete block walls may be appropriate.

9. Modular block wall systems or modular concrete block retaining walls are strongly discouraged, but may be appropriate in areas not visible from the public right-of-way.

10. If street-front fences or walls are necessary or desirable, they should not exceed four (4) feet in height from the sidewalk or public right-of-way and should use traditional materials and design.

11. Residential privacy fences may be appropriate in side or rear yards where not visible from the primary street.

12. Fences should not exceed six (6) feet in height in the side and rear yards.

13. Fence structure should face the inside of the fenced property.

14. Relate commercial privacy fences to the materials of the building. If the commercial property adjoins a residential neighborhood, use brick or painted wood fence or heavily planted screen as a buffer.

15. Avoid the installation of new fences or walls if possible in areas where there are no are no fences or walls and yards are open.

16. 16) Retaining walls should respect the scale, materials and context of the site and adjacent properties.

17. Respect the existing conditions of the majority of the lots on the street in planning new construction or a rehabilitation of an existing site.

A low stone wall accented with evergreen plantings provides a historically appropriate border between a private lot and the sidewalk.

An ornate Victorian iron fence with low plantings adorns this lot line while not obscuring the view of the house and yard beyond.

A low, wood, picket fence coordinates with the materials used in the consturction of the house as well as the paint color of the trim.

Charlottesville's residential areas have few examples of private site lighting. Most houses, including those used for commercial purposes, have attractive, often historically styled fixtures located on the house at various entry points. In the commercial areas, there is a wide variety of site lighting including large utilitarian lighting, floodlights and lights mounted on buildings. Charlottesville has a "Dark Sky" ordinance that requires full cutoff for lamps that emit 3,000 or more lumens. Within an ADC District, the BAR can impose limitations on lighting levels relative to the surrounding context.

1. In residential areas, use fixtures that are understated and compatible with the residential quality of the surrounding area and the building while providing subdued illumination.

2. Choose light levels that provide for adequate safety yet do not overly emphasize the site or building. Often, existing porch lights are sufficient.

3. In commercial areas, avoid lights that create a glare. High intensity commercial lighting fixtures must provide full cutoff.

4. Do not use numerous "crime" lights or bright floodlights to illuminate a building or site when surrounding lighting is subdued.

5. In the downtown and along West Main Street, consider special lighting of key landmarks and facades to provide a focal point in evening hours.

6. Encourage merchants to leave their display window lights on in the evening to provide extra illumination at the sidewalk level.

7. Consider motion-activated lighting for security.

Gooseneck lights provide moderate levels of illumination and focus the light downward onto the awnings and the storefront.

A pendant light fixture attached to the curved underside of this portico illuminates the entrance.

Traditionally styled, pole-mounted light fixtures are an appropriate way to provide site lighting for many historic residences.

E. WALKWAYS & DRIVEWAYS

Providing circulation and parking for the automobile on private sites can be a challenging task, particularly on smaller lots and on streets that do not accommodate parking. The use of appropriate paving materials in conjunction with strategically placed plantings can help reinforce the character of each district while reducing the visual impact of driveways.

1. Use appropriate traditional paving materials like brick, stone, and scored concrete.

2. Concrete pavers are appropriate in new construction, and may be appropriate in site renovations, depending on the context of adjacent building materials, and continuity with the surrounding site and district.

3. Gravel or stone dust may be appropriate, but must be contained.

4. Stamped concrete and stamped asphalt are not appropriate paving materials.

5. Limit asphalt use to driveways and parking areas.

6. Place driveways through the front yard only when no rear access to parking is available.

7. Do not demolish historic structures to provide areas for parking.

8. Add separate pedestrian pathways within larger parking lots, and provide crosswalks at vehicular lanes within a site.

The use of brick laid in a herringbone pattern coordinates well with the dwelling's construction materials and traditional construction.

Interlocking concrete pavers laid in a traditional pattern may be appropriate for site walkways in historic district new construction.

This older asphalt driveway provides shared access to appropriately placed garages at the rear of these residential lots.

Most of the parking areas in the downtown consist of public or private surface lots or parking decks. Along West Main Street, Wertland Street, and the Corner, some larger lots have parking areas contained within the individual site.

1. If new parking areas are necessary, construct them so that they reinforce the street wall of buildings and the grid system of rectangular blocks in commercial areas.

2. Locate parking lots behind buildings.

3. Screen parking lots from streets, sidewalks, and neighboring sites through the use of walls, trees, and plantings of a height and type appropriate to reduce the visual impact year-round.

4. Avoid creating parking areas in the front yards of historic building sites.

5. Avoid excessive curb cuts to gain entry to parking areas.

6. Avoid large expanses of asphalt.

7. On large lots, provide interior plantings and pedestrian walkways.

8. Provide screening from adjacent land uses as needed.

9. Install adequate lighting in parking areas to provide security in evening hours.

10. Select lighting fixtures that are appropriate to a historic setting.

A planted island softens the impact of this asphalt parking lot in a historic district.

Site trees in parking lots add visual interest as well as shade for vehicles.
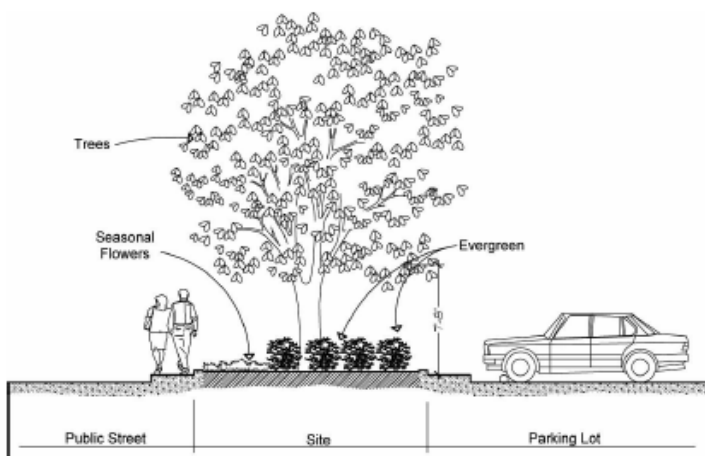
The sketch above illustrates an appropriate buffer between a parking lot and street in a historic district.

A planted entrance with directional signage and sculptural fountain provides a buffered gateway to this parking lot.

G. GARAGES, SHEDS & OTHER STRUCTURES

A number of houses in Charlottesville's historic districts have garages, outbuildings and distinctive site features, particularly properties that contain a large house on a large lot. The most common outbuilding is the garage. Site features may vary considerably and may include fountains, ponds, pools, trellises, pergolas or benches, as well as recreational spaces such as playsets or basketball courts.

1. Retain existing historic garages, outbuildings, and site features in their original locations.

2. If it is acceptable to relocate a secondary structure, locate it in such a way that it remains consistent with the general pattern of outbuildings to the main structure. (See *Chapter VII C. Moving Historic Structures.*)

3. Choose designs for new outbuildings that are compatible with the major buildings on the site.

4. Take clues and scale from older outbuildings in the area.

5. Use traditional roof slopes and traditional materials.

6. Place new outbuildings behind the dwelling.

7. If the design complements the main building however, it can be visible from primary elevations or streets.

8. The design and location of any new site features should relate to the existing character of the property.

This historic double garage with tile roof, placed at the rear of a deep city lot, retains its integrity although it has been renovated for alternate purposes since the house to which it related no longer survives.
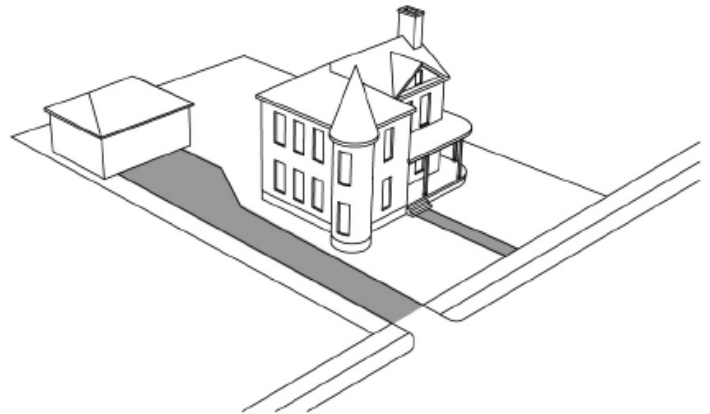
This drawing illustrates the proper placement of a garage or other outbuilding on a lot in a historic district.

Accessed from a side street, this double garage with hipped, standing-seam metal roof is accessed using a driveway paved in stamped concrete. Its paint scheme coordinates with the dwelling on the lot.

H. UTILITIES & OTHER SITE APPURTENANCES

Site appurtenances, such as overhead utilities, fuel tanks, utility poles and meters, antennae, exterior mechanical units, and trash containers, are a necessary part of contemporary life. However, their placement may detract from the character of the site and building.

1. Plan the location of overhead wires, utility poles and meters, electrical panels, antennae, trash containers, and exterior mechanical units where they are least likely to detract from the character of the site.

2. Screen utilities and other site elements with fences, walls or plantings

3. Encourage the installation of utility services underground.

4. Antennae and communication dishes should be placed in inconspicuous rooftop locations, not in a front yard.

5. Screen all rooftop mechanical equipment with a wall of material harmonious with the building or structure.

Mechanical equipment is placed to the rear of the building and screened with a material similar to that found on the site's primary structure.

Strategically placed plantings would screen the view of this utility area from passerbys in this residential neighborhood.

With diagonal lattice cladding and a hipped, standing-seam metal roof, this structure hides refuse containers from view.

In commercial areas, the only location available for the placement of utilities may be the roof of the building. In this case, care should be taken to screen mechanical systems from view, as seen in this example.

The placement of this utility box calls attention to its placement rather than minimizing its visual impact.

AVAILABLE GUIDELINES SECTIONS

These entrance corridor design guidelines have been divided into the following sections so that you need only read those pertinent to your project.

Guideline sections are available from the Charlottesville Department of Neighborhood Services. Online they may be accessed through http://www.charlottesville.org at the Board of Architectural Review home page.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS