Chapter 5

Landscaping, Site Amenities, Public Improvements, and Open Space

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Chapter 5

Landscaping, Site Amenities, Public Improvements, and Open Space

Introduction

Landscaping, site amenities, public improvements, and open space are the elements of the Great Falls Historic District (GFH District) that provide the setting for the historic buildings and define the relationships between them. Landscaping generally refers to plant materials; site amenities include walls, fences, walks, and paved areas such as plazas, courtyards, site lighting, and parking lots; public improvements are generally considered sidewalks, street paving, public lighting, street furniture, and public signage; open space refers to public land that is intended to remain open, such as the raceway parks and the park land along the Passaic River and overlooking the Great Falls. The appropriate handling of these elements will give strong definition to the character of the GFH District and will serve to unify the sense of the district as a defined and significant place. They are the matrix in which the buildings are fixed in place and time. As such, improvements and changes should be designed using appropriate colors, textures, and materials.

There are several historic resources within the district that are in the realm of historic infrastructure and have become a part of the landscape. The preservation of these resources is essential to maintaining the character and interpreting the significance of the GFH District. The raceways stand out as extraordinary resources, but the historic bridge that carries Spruce Street over the middle raceway and the bridge over the lower raceway where Passaic ends at Mill Street are also impor-
tant examples. The abandoned pipes and huge hopper behind the Essex Mill and even abandoned areas of Belgian block paving should be preserved.

The maintenance of landscaping, site amenities, public improvements, and open space is as important as their design. Unfortunately, landscaping requires annual maintenance at a minimum. By definition, exterior features lack protection from the elements, wear-and-tear, and vandalism, and require that a thorough maintenance program be established and followed.

As stated in Chapter 4 of this document, there is a near certainty that excavation for landscaping and site amenities within the GFH District will encounter archeological resources. The Historic Preservation Commission and applicants for building permits should anticipate the impact of excavating in archeologically-sensitive areas.
# Landscaping and Site Amenities

Although landscaping is not a traditional feature of the GFH District, when used judiciously it can disguise and soften the appearance of some of the less attractive modern features of the district such as parking lots, recycling bins, and mechanical equipment. It can also be used to enhance the beauty of the district, making it a more attractive place for both residents and visitors, and can even provide shade that will help conserve energy.

The following design guidelines apply to all planting in the GFH District.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approved</th>
<th>Not Approved</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>✓ Use landscape elements to create buffers around parking lots, mechanical equipment, and garbage or recycling bins which would otherwise be visible from the street.</td>
<td>✓ Landscape elements must not obliterate the views of historic buildings and storefronts, or obstruct the flow of traffic.</td>
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<td>✓ When possible, locate utilities underground.</td>
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<td>✓ Unless a deliberate contrast is desired, select and locate plant material so as to accent and enhance significant architectural forms, rather than to obscure them. Plant material should not overwhelm or detract from the views of historic buildings. Plant materials should not block the view of significant elements such as entrances, water tables, or windows.</td>
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<td>✓ Consider the “texture” of a plant—its branch structure and degree of transparency. Consider also its “habit”—i.e., its form, be it round, columnar, horizontal, etc.</td>
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<td>✓ Combine finely-textured, airy plants with finer architectural detail, and dense, coarse-textured plants with massive construction such as solid brick. Columnar plants complement vertical elements such as columns and pilasters, while lower rounded forms will complement foundation features.</td>
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✓ Use plants at the perimeter of foundations to reinforce the rhythm of the building itself. For example, where a building’s repetitive pilasters establish a strong rhythm of vertical elements with infill, plantings could follow that rhythm with vertical landscape elements centered on the pilasters alternating with lower plantings, or blank wall spaces, between. Continuous foundation planting did not become popular until the early 20th century.

✓ Select and locate plant material according to site conditions of sun, shade, soil, and adjacent plant material.

✓ Select plant material according to its mature size to allow for the long-term impact of the mature plant.

✓ Select plant species appropriate to the climate and growing conditions of Paterson.

✓ Every effort should be made to save large trees.

✓ Where planting to screen or complement masonry walls, provide a wire or wood frame for the vine or plant to cling to. This technique is known as “espalier,” and will prevent roots from infiltrating into masonry joints.

✓ Do not “over plant.” Allow for the mature size of trees and shrubs.

✓ Provide enough space between buildings and plantings so that the structure and site will not be visually “crowded.” This will also prevent roots from infiltrating into foundation walls and will promote air circulation that will prevent organic growth such as moss and molds that will also con-
Approved cont'd...

tribute to deterioration of the exterior building elements.

✓ Any lot left vacant over one year should be landscaped so as not to become an eyesore.

✓ Provide adequate drainage away from structures on a site.

✓ While the "overgrown" effect adds to the character of the district, tree roots and branches should be kept trimmed and away from masonry buildings and site walls.

✓ The design, landscaping, and paving of spaces to the rear of structures should be considered if they are used by customers for parking or other reasons, even if they are not visible from the public right-of-way.

In the GFH District, site design must include consideration of the views from the public roadway parks.

Design Guidelines for the
Great Falls National Historic Landmark District
Fences and Walls

There are historic precedents for sturdy wood and iron fences throughout the GFH District. It is clear that security has been an issue historically throughout the Great Falls area; industrial property owners have had to protect their property for a variety of reasons including the area’s being largely vacated at night, and the fear of vandalism during the worker uprisings of the early 20th century.

At present, fences are often erected around vacant or semi-vacant lots in the GFH District in order to prevent vandalism. Since long periods of time often elapse before these sites are redeveloped, these fences become aesthetic features, and defining characteristics of the district. As such, their design must be carefully reviewed. The following guidelines apply to fences which remain standing for longer than eight months.

Approved

✓ Walls and fences must be made of durable materials, and must be compatible with the surrounding buildings and street furniture with regard to style, materials, and color.

✓ Design and install fencing that establishes a regular rhythm; for instance, the solid-and-void rhythm of brick piers and metal pickets.

✓ Chain-link fencing can be used in areas which are not visible from the public right-of-way—either the street or the raceway parks—provided that the fencing is painted dark green or black. Where it exists, chain-link fence may be successfully planted out by encouraging vines to trail across and through it.

✓ Board-on-board wood fencing is permitted in areas which are not visible from either the street or the raceway parks.

✓ Generally, site fences and walls in the GFH District should not exceed 6'-0" in height,

Not Approved

✗ Concrete walls are not approved as a fencing material visible from a public right-of-way within the GFH District and should be prohibited. Existing concrete walls visible from a public right-of-way should be stuccoed and painted; existing masonry screens made of perforated blocks should be painted black or dark green.

✗ Split-rail wooden fencing, barbed wire or razor wire fencing, and highway-style guardrail fencing are not approved.

✗ Chain-link fence visible from a public right-of-way is not approved.
should be transparent, and should be designed to be permanent.

✓ The fence along the ATP site on Van Houten Street and the fence around the museum of the city of Paterson are good models.

![Image of a fence]

*The Paterson Museum parking lot is enclosed along Spruce Street by an attractive wall that combines brick with metal fencing.*

✓ Cast-iron fencing is appropriate for new fences. Existing cast-iron fencing should be repaired or replaced in-kind.

✓ New metal fences should be transparent and of relatively simple design with regular horizontal and vertical members. Vertical pickets may be pointed to discourage scaling.

✓ There is precedent in Paterson for solid, unpainted wood fences of durable non-pressure-treated lumber.

✓ Rustic wood-rail fences are approved for use in the natural areas of Stoney Road.
**Site Lighting**

Site lighting is required to provide visibility for safe walking and to provide security for people and the buildings themselves.

### Approved

- Site light fixtures should be appropriate to the style of the surrounding buildings and with the style of street fixtures. Small-scale residential buildings should have residential-scale and -style light fixtures. The historic mill buildings should have larger and more industrial-type fixtures. Given the utilitarian nature of the buildings and the district, understated fixtures are preferable to overly elaborate fixtures. Simple, modern light fixtures are appropriate within the GFH District.

- The use of reproduction light fixtures must be very carefully considered. While reproduction fixtures need not replicate the actual historic fixture that was once on a building, they should be similar in scale, material, elaboration, and general character to the fixture that is documented as having once been on the building.

- Lighting within the district should create an even, glowing effect with a minimum of bright or "hot" spots. The color of the light created by the lamps should be warm and not harsh.

### Not Approved

- Highway-type and cobra-head street and yard light fixtures are not approved.

- Low-pressure sodium and mercury vapor lights are not approved within the GFH District.

- Residential-scale fixtures are not approved for use on and around the large-scale commercial buildings in the district.

### Not Recommended

- The illumination of the buildings should be consistent with the type and scale of the buildings. The lighting should be designed to enhance the architectural character of the buildings.
Courtyards and Plazas

In Paterson, the ongoing expansion of the mills, their dependence on daylight, and their need for secure outdoor areas for deliveries, shipping, and lay-down of raw materials created courtyards and plazas almost by accident.

Courtyards and plazas are semi-public outdoor spaces, surrounded on at least three sides by buildings. They can serve to mediate between the noisy and busy streets of the district and the interior of buildings, and offer opportunities to create pleasant, easily secured outdoor space. Two very different but very good examples of the potential uses for courtyards exist at the Essex Mill and at the Phoenix Mill.

Approved

✓ The edges of courtyards and plazas should be defined by buildings, walls, fences, or planting. These spaces should not occur on corner lots.

✓ Courtyards and plazas must relate to their immediate environment, including adjacent buildings, pedestrian routes, historic features, and available views.

✓ Courtyards and plazas must be designed for year-round use, including shade in the summertime and good sunlight in the winter.

✓ Courtyards and plazas must include elements that make them desirable places to be in and use such as landscaping, lighting, textured paving, planters, and benches.

The courtyard at the Phoenix Mill has been landscaped to provide a real amenity to the residents.
Parking Lots

Parking lots are the unfortunate by-product of our mobile culture. Their incorporation into historic districts, while essential, is never easy. The guidelines that follow are intended to minimize the visual effect of parking lots on the character of the GFH District.

**Approved**

✓ Public parking garages are preferable to open-air lots, and should be encouraged.

✓ Where permitted by the Zoning Ordinance, parking lots must be located to the back of new construction, or to the interior of a site where the visual impact to adjoining properties and the street is minimized.

✓ When parking cannot be accommodated behind a commercial building, it can be placed to the side of the building, set back between five and fifteen feet from the sidewalk to provide a buffer zone. This type of lot must be located mid-block and between two lots, not on a corner.

✓ New and existing parking lots that can be seen from the street or from the raceway parks should be kept to a minimum size with minimum street frontage, and landscaped with low walls parallel to the street, trees, and planted strips to screen cars. The parking lot between the Franklin and Essex Mills, two car rows wide, provides a good model, although it would benefit from more visual screening from the street.

✓ Parking lots should be laid out and buffered to avoid spill-over light, glare, noise, and exhaust fumes from affecting adjacent properties or public streets.

**Not Approved**

✗ Surface parking located on corner lots is not approved.

✗ Parking in front yards or on lots in front of buildings is not approved.

**Not Recommended**

- Street parking is unacceptable, and should be discouraged at all times.

- Parking lot between the Franklin and Essex Mills, two car rows wide, provides a good model, although it would benefit from more visual screening from the street.
Approved cont'd...

✓ Vehicular access to parking lots should be from side streets whenever possible.

✓ The number and width of curb cuts should be minimized.

✓ Transition areas between a parking lot and the building it serves, and between the parking lot and the public street, must be designed with landscape elements including paving.

✓ Pedestrian passage must be provided between parking areas and public streets.

Pedestrian passage between the street and the parking lot between the Franklin Mill and the Essex Mill.
Paving and Bordering

The paving along or within the perimeter of a property serves as the continuation of the sidewalk and/or street.

**Approved**

✓ Existing historic paving materials such as Belgian block, bluestone, or brick should be preserved in place and incorporated in new walks, or removed and reused.

✓ Brick, bluestone, Belgian block, gravel, granite, cobblestone, compressed earth paths, and paving are approved.

✓ Brick paving should be dry-laid in one of several patterns.

✓ Tinted concrete and exposed aggregate walks are approved in the GFH District.

✓ Repairs to or replacement of public sidewalks should follow the existing prototype for the GFH District—either bluestone or scored concrete. See the following section on Public Improvements.

**Not Approved**

✗ The removal of historic paving surfaces such as Belgian block or brick is not approved within the GFH District.
Public Improvements: Street Paving, Pedestrian Walks, and Curbs

In 1979, Paterson established standards for the design of street lighting, sidewalks, curbs, and street furniture (see Appendix). The standards for public improvements require the use of particularly good quality materials such as bluestone walks, granite curbs, and pavers at curb cuts, or, alternatively, the distinctive treatment of more common materials such as concrete sidewalks scored with an ashlar pattern. The standardized public improvements are important elements of the image and coherence of the district as an important place, and should be extended and maintained throughout the district. Street paving within the GFH District will most likely be predominantly asphalt, which is inexpensive and easily replaced for utility work.

Approved

✓ The sense of the district as a significant place would be reinforced by a change in texture at intersections and crosswalks.

✓ The design of sidewalks is established by existing guidelines. The design of pedestrian walkways throughout the district should complement the design of the public sidewalks and promote the district as a good place to walk.

✓ Gravel paths are appropriate for the raceway park and river walk. Transitions between different paving materials should relate to an element in the landscape, and should be articulated by a border or "threshold," not just butted into one another.

The public improvements within the GFH District provide an attractive consistency that helps to give the district a clear identity.
Public Signage

Public signage that identifies the GFH District or provides direction to or within the district is virtually non-existent. Interpretive signage is inconsistent.

Approved

✓ A comprehensive signage program should be established that will create a logic and consistency to the signs that direct visitors to and around the GFH District and interpret its history.

✓ There should be some sense of a gateway that indicates when a visitor is entering the district. This could be provided by permanent signs or, more literally, by the reconstruction, based on historic documentation, of factory gates over the streets that bring most of the traffic into the district.

✓ All city signs should have a coordinated graphic system with design standards regulating graphics, colors, and sign placement. Signs within the GFH District should have their own style and/or color.

✓ Signs should be installed that mark the boundaries of the GFH District and direct visitors to sites and public parking facilities.

✓ Interpretive signs should be added to sites in the district.

✓ The visual impact of all regulatory and directional signs should be minimized.

Clear, simple signs, similar to the street signs on the left of this photo, are appropriate.
Open Space

Open space is an important amenity within the GFH District. It provides the chance to experience the dramatic physical setting that determined the founding of the city and its industrial past. The open space within the GFH District also lends a certain poetry to the place, recalling the American myth of the machine.

The presence of the past is everywhere in the GFH District. Ruins, such as these abandoned pipes at the northeast end of the middle raceway, are important historic resources and must be preserved.

Exploring the GFH District on foot is the best means to appreciate fully the relationship between Paterson's extraordinary natural setting, the complexity of the engineering feats that captured the power of the Passaic River, and Paterson's remarkable history.

Design Guidelines for the Great Falls National Historic Landmark District

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