



City of Newton Historic Preservation

GUIDELINES FOR SITE ELEMENTS



The gate structure provides a welcoming entrance to the property. It has a similar architectural style and materials as the main residence.

PURPOSE

These *Guidelines* were prepared to provide property owners with information on the rehabilitation or modification of site elements within a historic context. They are not intended to replace consultation with qualified architects, landscape architects, contractors, or the Newton Historical Commission (NHC), or Local Historic District Commissions (HDC) and their Staff.

These *Guidelines* were developed in conjunction with the City of Newton's Historical Commission (NHC), Local Historic Districts Commissions (HDC), and the Planning and Development Department (PDD). Familiarity with this material can assist owners of designated historic properties to move a project quickly through the City of Newton review and approval process. Information pertaining to all properties with a City of Newton historic preservation review designation is marked with the abbreviation **(ALL)**. Information pertaining specifically to properties in Local Historic Districts **(LHD)**, to Local Landmarks **(LL)**, or to properties with Preservation Restrictions **(PR)** is marked accordingly. Information in the Guidelines that is advisory only is marked with the abbreviation **(AO)**. Please refer to the Introduction section for background information on historic preservation designations and the project review process in the City of Newton.

Additional Guidelines addressing other historic preservation topics are available at City Hall and on the City's website at www.newtonma.gov. The NHC, HDC, and PDD are available to provide informational meetings or preliminary consultation with applicants prior to filing. For more information, questions regarding the application process, or to clarify whether a project requires review please contact the PDD at (617) 796-1120.

NEWTON'S SITE ELEMENTS

Site elements frame the architecture of a streetscape. In some areas, established features such as sidewalks, street trees, walls, fences, walkways and driveways provide a consistent setting that strongly defines the unique character of a neighborhood.

When considering alterations to a site, property owners are encouraged to develop an understanding of the environmental characteristics of the immediate surroundings of the site, and to allow that understanding to direct the design of the alterations. This will allow a more compatible relationship between a property and its neighborhood. When planning alterations to a historic site or a site within a historic context, owners should consider the following:

The NHC / HDC encourage:

- Keeping views of historic buildings open to street, rather than obscuring views with new structures
- Front yard development with traditional, simple arrangements, appropriate to the historic context

The NHC / HDC discourage:

- Placement of modern amenities in front and side yards visible from public ways
- Addition of walls, fences or other screening structures that block views of historic buildings from the public way

In the City of Newton, with the exception of some properties with preservation restrictions (PR), vegetation and plantings do not come under historic preservation purview.

- The PDD recommends the use of plantings for screening modern site elements such as air conditioning units and trash collection receptacles. Property owners are encouraged to select regionally native plants well-adapted to the site environment to minimize the use of water and chemicals in their upkeep. (AO)

FENCES, WALLS & GATES (ALL)

Walls, fences and gates are important elements of the overall character of a neighborhood. They:

- Identify boundaries
- Provide privacy and security
- Often represent a major element of a streetscape, separating public from private property
- Often relate to a building's design



Wood fencing can have a variety of styles. In many instances, the fencing is painted with similar colors as the principal house.

FENCES (ALL)

Wood is a traditional fence material in the City of Newton. Some traditional metal fencing is also present. Traditional fencing types not only mark the boundaries of a specific space, but also allow visual access between the historic structures on a property and the street. To retain visibilities of historic properties, fences in front yards should be limited to 48" in height, and should use a picket style that is at least 30% open.



Similar to building walls, landscape walls and fences require regular maintenance, particularly at retaining walls. There is significant cracking at both of the piers that might indicate a structural problem.

WALLS (ALL)

Landscape walls are typically constructed of fieldstone or brick, and can include a stucco finish. Historically, the materials and style of walls were often related to a building's design.

The construction of walls that visually block primary building façades from the public way, particularly at historically important buildings, is discouraged. The recommended height limit of new walls in front yards is 36". While new walls that are stylistically compatible with the property may be appropriate, the construction of walls made of incompatible materials, such as concrete block, is discouraged.



The wood gate is mounted on stone piers. The arched form complements the bays of the front porch.

GATES (ALL)

Pedestrian gates, traditionally along a walkway, are generally 3 to 3½ feet wide. Gates for residential vehicular access are generally 10 to 12 feet wide. When installed with a fence, gates tend to be of the same material and similar design as the fence, although often more elaborate. When installed with a wall, they are generally flanked by piers, or gate posts that can be either wood or metal.

The NHC / HDC encourage:

- Using traditional materials for walls, fences, gates and other boundary markers in an appropriate manner
- Maintaining building views open to the surrounding public streets and sidewalks
- Installing fence posts towards the interior of a property
- Regularly maintaining fences, walls and gates (AO)

The NHC / HDC discourage:

- Blocking views to historic buildings and settings with solid walls, or dense fencing materials (ALL) or planting (PR)
- Front yard fences that are greater than 48" in height, or walls that are greater than 36" in height
- Use of non-traditional fencing materials such as vinyl
- Use of stockade fencing
- Use of chain-link fencing



This stone wall is topped by a decorative iron fence with an S-shaped profile.

MODERN LANDSCAPE FEATURES, EQUIPMENT & SMALL STRUCTURES (ALL)

Modern site amenities can greatly increase the enjoyment of a property as well as serve functional needs. However, many of these amenities can be visually obtrusive and are not appropriate within a historic context or setting.

- **Landscape Features:** Landscape features such as pergolas, fountains and sculpture, and play equipment such as jungle gyms, swimming pools, hot tubs and tennis courts can add to the outdoor enjoyment of our properties, but can be visually obtrusive in a historic setting.
- **Ground-Mounted Equipment:** Air-conditioner condensers, solar collectors, trash dumpsters and satellite dishes are all examples of modern, ground-mounted mechanical equipment that can affect the historic integrity of a site and its surroundings.
- **Small Structures:** Small structures can be functional and provide enjoyment for property owners. Generally less than 100 square feet in size, they include tool or garden sheds, play houses, dog houses, permanent sun shading canopies, building or wall-mounted awnings, and gazebos. These modern alterations can affect the historic integrity of a site and its surroundings. Small structures that are visible from the public way are generally more appropriate if their walls and roof are constructed of the same historic materials as those of the existing main building. The installation of pre-manufactured sheds visible from the public way, particularly those with metal or vinyl wall cladding, is typically discouraged.

To minimize their visual impact, modern landscape features, equipment and small structures should be located in the rear yard and should not block the view of historic buildings or features from the public way.

The NHC / HDC encourage:

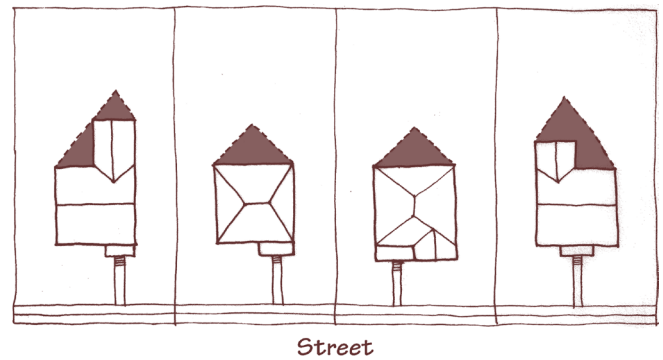
- Unobtrusively locating landscape features, small structures and ground mounted equipment where they are not visible from the public way
- Screening landscape features, play equipment, small structures and ground-mounted equipment that might be visible from the public way with either dense planting, a wall or wood fencing

The NHC / HDC discourage:

- Visually prominent landscape features, play equipment, small structures and ground-mounted equipment

SECONDARY STRUCTURES

For more information regarding secondary structures such as garages, larger sheds and carports please refer to the *Guidelines for Additions and New Construction, Page 11.*



This diagram illustrates the areas of a property that are out-of-view from a public right of way (concealed by buildings). Although it is not always possible to conceal modern landscape features, equipment and small structures from the public way, every effort should be made to minimize their visibility.

LIGHTING FIXTURES (LL, PR) FREE STANDING LIGHTING FIXTURES (LHD)

Outdoor lighting is an amenity of modern life. For a historic house, outdoor lighting should highlight the architecture and be of a style appropriate for the historic building. A wide variety of wall-mounted or free-standing reproduction replica historic lighting is available to meet the lighting needs of historic properties.

The NHC / HDC encourage:

- Lighting fixtures that complement the building's architectural style and material

The NHC / HDC discourage:

- Lighting fixtures that are not stylistically appropriate on historic buildings

ILLUMINATION (AO)

Prior to installation of lighting please consult the City of Newton's Light Trespass Ordinance which regulates light pollution and illumination. Residential lighting should be installed to illuminate only pathways and access routes, limiting the spillage onto adjacent properties and the public way. Generally, lighting on one property should not extend onto the neighboring lots or into the night sky. To minimize light spillage, many lights are available that cast light downward where it is needed to illuminate walking surfaces. In addition, existing lights can often be fitted with hoods or shields to direct light downwards.

If security lighting is desired, it is recommended that it be located as discretely as possible, generally limited to side and rear elevations. The number of security lights should be limited, and they should be activated by motion sensors whenever possible.

The NHC / HDC encourage:

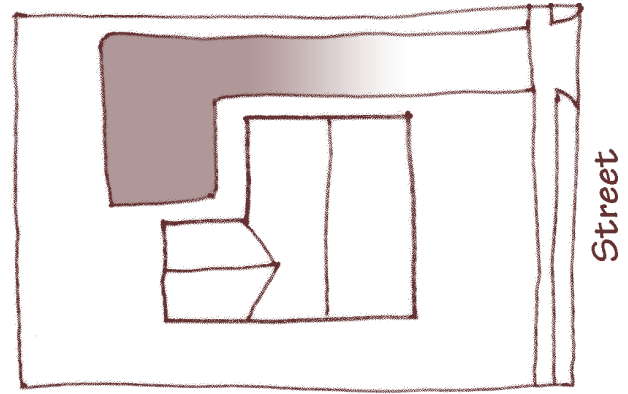
- Unobtrusive lighting of historic properties that limits light spillage onto neighboring properties and into the night sky

The NHC / HDC discourage:

- Obtrusive lighting of historic properties that illuminates neighboring properties
- Highly visible security lighting
- Security lighting that is constantly "on"



The stone walkway with brick edging complements the Tudor style of the house as does the curved configuration.



The preferred location for parking, as indicated by the darker shaded area, is towards the rear of the property, preferably concealed by a building, and away from the public roadway.

PAVING (ALL)

Paving, which includes sidewalks, walkways, patios and driveways, has changed significantly with the development of new materials. Historic paving could be as simple as gravel or crushed shells, or hard materials such as brick or stone, laid in simple or ornamental patterns. Materials popularized in the 20th century include concrete and asphalt, and more recently cast concrete pavers, often colored and shaped to resemble brick or stone.

In an effort to retain the quality of the City's historic properties and districts, the retention and maintenance of existing historic paving materials is encouraged. Property owners are also encouraged to minimize new paving, and (AO) to use porous paving whenever possible to minimize runoff onto neighboring properties and into storm drains.

Since the character and context of every property is unique, each application for changes in paving location and material is reviewed on a case-by-case basis. When submitting an application for proposed paving, applicants should provide detailed, dimensioned site plans indicating the size and location of all existing buildings, paving and proposed paving changes.

The NHC / HDC encourage:

- Retaining, repairing and maintaining historic paving materials
- Minimizing the amount of paving on a site
- Installing permeable small-scale paving materials, such as gravel or exposed aggregate paving, instead of poured concrete or asphalt
- Installing simple, troweled concrete finish or stamped concrete
- Installing narrow parking strips instead of driveways
- Installing patios instead of raised decks

The NHC / HDC discourage:

- Removing historic paving materials
- Placing parking areas in the front yards of residences
- Installing asphalt at walkways

ZONING REQUIREMENTS

Lighting, fencing, walls, and paving are all subject to the City of Newton ordinances including those for Zoning, Lighting, and Scenic Roads. These ordinances dictate the height and location of fences and walls, the amount of paving permitted, the level of illumination allowable, and other requirements. These are separate and independent from historic preservation review, and it is highly recommended that applicants contact the Inspectional Services Department at (617) 796-1060 to review requirements prior to filing.

MAINTENANCE

Fences, landscape walls, gates and paving are all property features that require regular maintenance. Refer to the *Guidelines for Exterior Woodwork* and *Guidelines for Masonry & Stucco* for additional information.

SIDEWALKS

Property owners may, with City approval, replace sidewalks and curbing at their own expense. If historic sidewalks and curbing require replacement, use of a compatible replacement material is recommended. Please contact the Engineering Department at (617) 796-1020 for additional information regarding sidewalk and curbing requirements including compliance with the Americans With Disabilities Act.

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