



# • DESIGN • REVIEW • GUIDE •

## Landscaping

Burlington is well known as a community with a high quality of life, small and cohesive neighborhoods, a vibrant downtown and waterfront – all within a spectacular setting on the shores of Lake Champlain. This deserving reputation is due in part to the City's small size, entrepreneurial spirit, civic-minded citizens and activist government. One of the many factors that makes Burlington such a great place to live, work and visit is the community's attention to detail, and respect for its setting, heritage and quality urban design.

Burlington's Design Review process strives to protect the city's unique qualities and strong sense of place by carrying out citywide development and design objectives. The purpose of this *Design Review Guide* is to help applicants in preparing projects to be reviewed by the Design Review Board and the Burlington Planning Commission. Through materials such as this, the Department of Planning & Zoning seeks to make information available well before the final design of a project saving the applicant, and the city, time and money.

### DESIGN ISSUES

Landscaping is much more than window-dressing, it is an important consideration in the Design Review process. Plants and trees add accent and value to a property, improve air quality, provide wind breaks and shade, and can be used for screening.

#### Planned into a Project.

Too often landscaping is the last part of a project to be planned and the first to be cut when the project is over budget. The result can be disastrous for the property as well as the neighborhood.



Screened parking

Use your landscaping to serve a purpose such as emphasizing a style or design element, screening an object, or defining an area. Trees in the front yard and greenbelt help frame buildings and add a sense of privacy from the road. Size, placement, color and/or texture of your plantings should compliment the building and site year round.

#### Choosing Appropriate Plants.

Getting the right plant for the job means faster results, less cost and greater enjoyment. It makes sense to use native species where appropriate – given they already enjoy Vermont's weather and soil conditions. However, remember that Burlington is not a rural place, and trees and plants must also be adapted to thrive in an urban environment as well. This is especially important when thinking about trees. Sugar Maple in particular don't tolerate high salt planting sites.

Think ahead to when the plant is full grown. Will it be too large for the area, overpowering its surroundings or lessening its life-span? Will it tangle with overhead utilities, affect drainage patterns or damage to the foundation? Will it bear fruit that will litter a walkway making it slippery? In addition, understanding blooming cycles will help you choose a collection of plants that will be colorful year-round.



Mature landscaping



Screening utilities

Finally, consider using plants to meet specific design needs. Consider a barberry hedge or other type of "living fence." It will keep people and pets out, and you don't have to paint it like a picket or stockade fence! Shrubs can provide an excellent screen for utility meters or foundation walls. Trees can help lower energy bills by providing summer shade and winter windbreaks, and flowers add color and life to almost any site.

#### Proper Planting.

As much of a plant lives under the ground as you see above. Plants need good soil, and an area large enough to support them as they grow. When planting trees especially, place them away from foundation walls and overhead wires, don't plant them too deeply, and avoid smothering the trunk with mulch. Finally, new plants need plenty of moisture to help establish new root systems. Planting correctly from the beginning ensures success, and may eliminate the need to turn around and do the job again later down the road.

### Maintenance.

Nothing is maintenance free and landscaping is no exception. The maintenance required to keep various plants vigorous should be part of the initial planning and design. Don't use high maintenance or very sensitive plants if you don't have the time and resources to care for them! An easy way to minimize maintenance is to use native landscaping materials when appropriate.

Periodic pruning, especially in the plant's early growth, will set the stage for a long healthy life by ensuring the tree or shrub develops a strong branching pattern. Finally, remain on the lookout for signs of insects or disease which may damage or even kill your valuable investment. Regular watering will help your plants get through the droughty periods.

### TREATMENT OBJECTIVES

Landscaping is an important investment. It should be used to add value and function to your project. Plantings can effectively be used to form barriers, define areas, screen objects or emphasize a design objective. It is typically a small investment compared to the total project, but its benefits really do grow over time!



Landscaping in a commercial facelift

**Specific points the City will be considering when reviewing your plans include:**

- ◆ **Have you made every effort to save and protect existing trees and landscaping?**
- ◆ **Is your landscaping part of the overall design or a last minute add-on?**
- ◆ **Will landscaping be used as screening for utility meters and other objects?**
- ◆ **Is the amount of landscaping appropriate (not too little or too much) to the site?**
- ◆ **Have you chosen appropriate plant materials for the site and the intended purpose?**

The landscaping is considered part of the entire development project, and is part of the zoning permit approval. If you make changes, you will need to amend the original permit. If the landscaping is not maintained adequately and dies, it must be replaced.



Retain mature trees

Trees in the public right-of-way are the responsibility of the city. You should contact the City Arborist before planting or pruning trees in the greenbelt.

Finally, seek out professional help! Nurseries can guide you to otherwise unknown varieties and make suggestions for species friendly to our planting zone. Local nurseries will often offer free design consultation when purchasing plants. The City Arborist can help you choose trees that will do well in the urban environment. A landscape architect can ensure the landscaping works into the design of the entire project. You'll be given a roadmap to a finished product that can be added to over time.



City Hall planters

### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

*city permits & general information*

- ◆ **Burlington Dept. of Planning & Zoning**  
135 Church St., Burlington, VT 05401  
802.865.7188

*city arborist, street trees and greenbelts*

- ◆ **Burlington Dept. of Parks and Recreation**  
1 LaValley Lane, Burlington, VT 05401  
802.865.7247

*soil tests, landscaping and gardening*

- ◆ **UVM Extension System**  
P.O. Box 53010, 655-A Spear St.  
So. Burlington, VT 05405-3010  
802.656.5433

*urban forestry and arboriculture*

- ◆ **VT Urban & Community Forestry Program**  
103 South Main St., Bldg. 10 South  
Waterbury, VT 05671-0601  
802.241.3678

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