

SETTING & SITE

A neighborhood's character is defined not only by its buildings, but also by the setting where the buildings are located. Street width, building setbacks, sidewalks, curbing, street lights, parking, fence patterns, granite walls, trees, signs, and open spaces like neighborhood parks and cemeteries, define a neighborhood's setting. The term "streetscape" refers to the area between the front of a building and the street. Streetscape elements and their relationship to buildings, as well as the relationship of buildings to each other and the street itself, establish an overall pattern and rhythm, which help define a community's character.

For example, houses in one area may be situated in a regular pattern close to the street with narrow front and side yards, whereas in another neighborhood, a mixture of setbacks and yard dimensions may result in an irregular pattern. It is important to identify the overall rhythm and pattern for each neighborhood so that these existing parameters can be used to evaluate and guide future changes.

Brunswick has a mix of formal (paved sidewalks, granite curbs, streetlights, trees, fences, small retaining walls/pillars) and informal (no sidewalks, no curbing) streetscapes. A wide variety of sidewalk paving materials are used throughout Brunswick's district, including concrete, asphalt and brick. Granite curbing is also found in several areas. Historic images are an excellent source of information for understanding how a neighborhood's streetscape elements have changed through the years.

On a smaller scale, each individual property has its own characteristics, which are also important to understand. The relationship between buildings on the site and the amount of open space contributes to each property's character. Is a large portion of the lot covered with a building and/or outbuildings, or is the building set far back from the street with a large front yard? Is the outbuilding (garage, barn, tool shed) attached to the main house or freestanding? Where is the outbuilding in relation to the main house? Directly behind it or next to it? If buildings are connected, how are they configured? Do they form an "L" or do they run straight back?

Driveways and their entrances establish a rhythm along the street. Brunswick has several properties where adjoining lots share a driveway.

In many cases, the driveway leads to parking along the side of the house or in the rear where there may be a garage or outbuilding.

Wooden front and side yard fences are important character-defining features in several areas of the district. Fences or low retaining walls define the semi-public space between the sidewalk and the building itself. Since fences sustain a great deal of weathering, it is unusual when original fencing survives. Property owners can look to historic photographs to determine if their property had fencing and, if so, the design and scale of the fence. Wood and granite are the most prominent fence and wall materials in the district.

The location of parking areas is an important issue, particularly when considering a new use for a property. For example, if a house is going to be converted for use as an office, the placement of the parking area should be carefully considered to ensure that it enhances the neighborhood's character.

Landscape features such as hedges, terraces, and mature trees also contribute to a neighborhood's setting. Trees are important streetscape elements, and they have a dramatic impact on the scale and character of a town.



Left: This streetscape along School Street is defined by a sidewalk, houses situated close to the street and close to each other, and front steps leading directly onto the sidewalk.

GUIDELINES:

1. The relationship between buildings, the sidewalk, and street should be maintained and preserved.
2. New buildings and alterations to existing buildings should be compatible with the setback of adjacent properties. If there is variation in the setback within a district, then the location of previously existing structures on the site should guide the placement of a new building.
3. Street trees should be maintained wherever possible. Review historic photographs to determine type and placement of trees. Consult with an arborist to determine appropriate tree species. Plant new trees to complete patterns where trees may have been lost in the past.
4. Distinctive landscape features such as terraces, mature trees, and hedges should be maintained and preserved.
5. Existing driveways should be maintained. New driveways should be avoided as they interrupt sidewalks, pedestrian activity and the established rhythm of openings along the street edge.
6. Historic sidewalk paving and curbing materials such as granite and brick should be maintained, repaired and preserved.
7. If replacement of the paving material is necessary, every reasonable effort should be made to use historically appropriate materials or to replace in kind.
8. Materials such as granite, stone and wood have been historically used in the district for steps and retaining walls. These materials or similar quality materials should be used if a new retaining wall or steps are needed. Artificial materials such as concrete block or concrete masonry units, should not be used on along primary building facades.
9. Every reasonable effort should be made to preserve and maintain fences and retaining walls. It is not appropriate to replace an entire fence or wall when minor repairs and limited replacement of deteriorated or missing features is possible.
10. If it is necessary to replace a small section of fence, the replacement section should replicate the existing sections in material, height, and detail.
11. If it necessary to replace a large section of fence or an entire fence, the replacement should be compatible in material, height, and detail to other historic fences in the district and to the materials of the primary structure on the property.
12. Chain link is not an appropriate fencing material for any areas that are visible from a public way.
13. Parking areas should be located to the side or rear of the primary building. In no cases shall it be located in the front yard.
14. Dumpsters or other large trash receptacles should be located to the side or rear of the property and, if necessary, screened using materials that are in keeping with the primary structure.



Left: The formal sidewalk and curbing ends at this intersection and the side street maintains a soft (or informal) street edge with no curbing or sidewalk. This change in the streetscape character reflects the difference between a major and a minor street. When considering alterations to the streetscape it is critical to understand the hierarchy of the streets, as well as the streetscape elements historically used in that particular neighborhood.