



Rockville Historic District Commission
TECHNICAL GUIDES FOR EXTERIOR ALTERATIONS
A Practical Series for the Preservation and Maintenance of Rockville's Historic Resources

7: Landscaping and Trees

BACKGROUND

As noted in Maryland Law, "It is a public purpose in the State to preserve sites, structures and districts of historical, archaeological or architectural significance and their appurtenances and environmental settings." [Land Use Article, Sec. 8-102]. In Rockville, the HDC reviews proposed exterior alterations, new construction, and removal of trees and shrubs that are visible or intended to be visible from a public right-of-way within a designated historic district.

Appropriate landscaping within Rockville's historic districts complements the buildings and maintains the environmental setting and streetscape. A mature tree canopy and mature landscape material are often indicative of an older neighborhood or property. The HDC encourages landscape preservation as an element of the distinctive character of each of Rockville's historic districts and individual sites. On occasion, however, a property owner will request approval to remove a mature tree. The HDC shall consider the tree's contribution to the historic context and the policies described on the following pages.

The City has designated nine multi-site neighborhoods and many single sites as historic districts. These areas contain a number of different streetscapes and building types. The West Montgomery Avenue District and the South Washington Street Historic District contain multiple properties, primarily single-family houses or structures originally built as such. The West Montgomery Avenue Historic District is predominantly comprised of residential structures that represent a wide range of architectural styles from the 18th to the 21st century. The South Washington Street Historic District includes seven houses in the Queen Anne and Colonial Revival styles.

In addition, there are 31 single sites with structures that have local historic district designation ranging from Lincoln High School to the Rockville and Haiti Cemeteries to individual single-family homes. Among the more significant sites are the 20th century Glenview Mansion and the 19th century Beall-Dawson House. These "historic designed landscapes" are governed by management plans that include a discussion of the original landscape design, identification of significant plant materials, and a management strategy to preserve the landscape design.

HISTORIC LANDSCAPES

Although the West Montgomery Avenue District spans three centuries and many architectural styles, the streetscape was defined by the suburban ideal, with houses set back from the street, with open lawns and landscaping on a small scale. The historic district character is composed of yard, trees, landscape plantings, fences, sidewalks, and the buildings and their individual elements, such as porches and bays. Each historic district in Rockville has a unique character made up of many elements.

On some blocks, trees line a street adding a rhythmic progression and definition to the street edge. They create a seasonal canopy that reinforces the sense of enclosure along the “top boundary” of that street. On other blocks foliage placed between the house and the street serves as a screen for visual privacy and as a buffer against noise. In addition, trees and vegetation enrich the spaces between buildings and add texture to the side boundaries of the streetscape.

Alteration of any of these elements can result in adverse change or loss of that character. Destruction or overgrowth may lessen the quality, texture, and harmony of the streetscape. As noted in the 1977 Design Guidelines:

“The landscaping elements in the Rockville Historic Districts, together with the building masses, form continuous, cohesive enclosures along the streetscape; every effort should be made to preserve them. The concern here is for mass and continuity and not for particular types or species of vegetation.

Most yards contain mature vegetation with large trees creating a cool, shady atmosphere. Every effort should be made to retain these large trees and other mature vegetation. Under this tree cover or canopy, street-facing yards are now and should continue to be mostly open and uncluttered. Walls or fences should be discouraged in front yards. Hedges, bushes, or ornamental shrubs may line the building foundation wall...”

To illustrate the historical authenticity of native plants, consider some historic properties in Rockville. Outstanding trees of Rockville Civic Center Park are identified in the publication *Noteworthy Trees of Rockville Civic Center Park*).

When recommending removal or replanting of foliage on historic sites, environmental sustainability should also be considered. Such considerations include encouraging the use of native plants and discouraging the use of non-native and invasive species.

HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION POLICY

The HDC utilizes the following policies and documents as the basis of decisions and Certificates of Approval for tree and landscape applications.

- The landscaping elements in the Rockville Historic Districts, together with the building masses, form continuous, cohesive enclosures along the streetscape; every effort should be made to preserve them. The concern here is for mass and continuity and not for particular types or species of vegetation.
- Most yards contain mature vegetation with large trees creating a cool, shady atmosphere. Every effort should be made to retain these large trees and other mature vegetation. Under this tree cover or canopy, street-facing yards are now and should continue to be mostly open and uncluttered. Walls or fences should be discouraged in front yards. Hedges, bushes, or ornamental shrubs may line the building foundation wall.
- The significance of mature trees and shrubs will be evaluated according to:
 - the HDC Adopted *Architectural Design Guidelines*;
 - whether the tree or shrub is a “familiar feature of the neighborhood due to its singular physical characteristic or aspect of the landscape;”
 - documentation contained in the Designation or Nomination Form outlining the distinctive tree and landscape materials that contribute to the characteristics of the site or district.
- Mature shrubs may have varying importance depending on quantity and siting within the particular landscape.
- Maintaining or replacing mature trees may also be subject to the City’s Forest and Tree Protection Ordinance (FTPO, see <http://md-rockville.civicplus.com/documentcenter/view/3394>)
- The HDC reviews applications for removal of trees with a minimum of 12 inches trunk dbh (diameter at breast height), and removal of mature shrubs.
- Trees under the minimum of 12” dbh may be removed by a property owner without HDC review (if consistent with the FTPO).

- To maintain the environmental setting, historically significant trees that are approved for removal shall be replaced with similar species that are not on an invasive species list.
(http://www.rockvillemd.gov/environment/stewardship/rockville_invasive_species_1208.pdf)
- Trees that are certified as diseased and/or hazardous by an arborist certified in the State of Maryland may be removed with Chief of Planning approval. Replacement of hazardous trees approved for removal is encouraged.

Tree replacement may be eligible for a rebate through the City's Rainscapes program.
<http://md-rockville.civicplus.com/documentcenter/view/1320>

APPLICATION FOR A CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

PLEASE NOTE – With typical yearly planting and garden maintenance, the Certificate of Approval (COA) is not required.

Detailed HDC application requirements can be found in Articles 5, 7 and 14 of the Rockville Zoning Ordinance – and are summarized below. If the removal of healthy mature trees or shrubs, substantial grading, or if hardscape such as garden walls, patios, sidewalks, and garden structures is proposed, the application for a COA must include the following:

1. Site plan with existing conditions, with tree species and tree diameters identified;
2. Site plan with proposed plan (indicate plant removal and new installations);
3. Description of proposed grading; and
4. Schedule for work and contractor.

POINTS TO CONSIDER

- The ideal landscaping retains mature trees and shrubs or replaces them with similar landscape elements, if known or documented, to maintain the historic character.
- New plantings of non-native invasives is discouraged. Other non-natives that are not environmental destroyers may be appropriate for planting for their historic value. Consult with the City or State environmental divisions for current information and species lists.
- Select edging and mulch materials that are historically accurate, especially when visible from public way. Avoid modern plastic or synthetic edgings, marble, lava, crushed rock or other historically unsuitable ground covers.

- In general, replace dead trees or shrubs with native plants that contribute to environmental sustainability.
- Plant historically accurate, preferably native species and not invasives.
- Avoid planting non-native and invasive species.
- Minimize the effects of grading on the environmental setting and historic buildings.

For additional information and questions, please contact:

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<http://www.rockvillemd.gov/index.aspx?NID=182>

City Forester
(240) 314-8710

Visit the Rockville Civic Center Park to walk through the landscape designed by James H. Small III for Mr. and Mrs. Lyon in 1926. This garden contrasts the tightly landscaped boxwood garden with open vistas across the meadows surrounding the house. Native trees of note include American elm (*Ulmus Americana*), American beech (*Fagus grandifolia*), flowering dogwood (*Cornus florida*), black walnut (*Juglans nigra*), black locust (*Robinia pseudoacacia*), American Linden (*Tilia americana*), white pine (*Pinus strobus*), sycamore (*Platanus occidentalis*), silver maple (*Acer saccharinum*), white oak (*Quercus alba*) and southern red oak (*Quercus falcate*).¹

The landscape we see today at the 1815 Beall-Dawson House dates to the middle of the 19th century, when the terraces and boxwood plantings in the south lawn were created. The landscape management plan notes that “The south lawn landscape is a sophisticated, designed landscape that carefully controls views to and from the Beall-Dawson house...” [p.4.]

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Adopted Architectural Design Guidelines for the Exterior Rehabilitation of Buildings in Rockville's Historic Districts, Rockville Historic District Commission, 1977.

<http://www.rockvillemd.gov/historic/guidelines1977.htm>

Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for Rehabilitation, National Park Service, 1995 - <http://www.nps.gov/tps/standards/rehabilitation.htm#Guidelines>

David L. Ames, Linda Flint McClelland, *Historic Residential Suburbs*, National Register Bulletin (2002).

<http://www.nps.gov/history/nr/publications/bulletins/suburbs/index.htm>

NPS Preservation Briefs Series - No.36 - *Protecting Cultural Landscapes*

<http://www.nps.gov/history/hps/tps/briefs/brief36.htm>

City of Rockville, Environment Division, *Exotic and invasive Plant List 2008*

<http://www.rockvillemd.gov/environment/watersheds/conservation-landscaping.html#nativeplants>

For general information about historic gardens and plant material through the 19th century, see the Center for Historic Plants at Monticello

<http://www.monticello.org/chp/index.html>

Visit the United States Botanical Gardens

<http://www.usbg.gov/>

Visit the US National Arboretum

<http://www.usna.usda.gov/index.html>

For updated information on invasive species, see The Maryland Invasive Species Council (MISC) http://www.mdinvasivesp.org/species/terrestrial_plants/

Douglas W. Tallamy, *Bringing Nature Home* (2013)

J. Swearingen, B. Slattery, K. Reshetiloff, and S. Zwicker, *Plant Invaders of the Mid-Atlantic Natural Areas* (2010)

J. B. Slattery, K. Reshetiloff, and S. Zwicker, *Native Plants for Wildlife Habitat and Conservation Landscaping 2003*