



# CITY OF PORTSMOUTH

## Historic District Commission

### Guidelines for Site Elements & Streetscapes



*Sidewalks, street lights, trees and bollards are all of the streetscape and are part of the public realm.*

#### PORTSMOUTH'S STREETScape

The streetscape includes features of the private realm, under the ownership of individual property owners, as well as the public realm, as those controlled by the City of Portsmouth and other governmental entities. Examples of elements of the private realm include features that project onto or over a sidewalk such as entrance stoops and projecting signs. Items that are part of the public realm include the sidewalk as well as utility poles and street lights.

These *Guidelines* were developed in conjunction with the City of Portsmouth's Historic District Commission (HDC) and the Planning Department. Please review this information during the early stages of planning a project. Familiarity with this material can assist in moving a project quickly through the approval process, saving applicants both time and money.

In its review, the HDC considers a property's classification, recommending the greatest historic authenticity at focal buildings, with more flexibility at contributing structures, and the most at non-contributing properties. The HDC Staff in the Planning Department is available to provide informal informational meetings with potential applicants who are considering improvements to their properties.

Additional *Guidelines* addressing other historic building topics are available at City Hall and on the Commission's website at [www.planportsmouth.com/historicdistrictcommission](http://www.planportsmouth.com/historicdistrictcommission). For more information, to clarify whether a proposed project requires HDC review, or to obtain permit applications, please call the Planning Department at (603) 610-7216.

#### PORTSMOUTH'S SITE ELEMENTS

Established site features such as sidewalks, street trees, yards, walls, fences, walkways and driveways provide can define the unique character of a neighborhood and frame the city's architecture. Established characteristics and patterns vary amongst the Historic District's neighborhoods, be they residential or commercial, and from street to street, be they primary thoroughfares or secondary service roadways.

For each property, the relationships of landscape elements can be viewed in terms of the front, side and rear yards around primary structures, as well as the locations of secondary structures within the landscape setting. Aspects of the landscape surrounding individual or groups of historic structures represent important associations of traditional organization and visual and physical relationships.

With the dominance of waterways in Portsmouth, the historic context can also be framed across a pond, river or other water feature. When seen from the water, yards, outbuildings, terraces, docks describe the connection of the City's residences and small commercial properties with its nautical past. Site elements and landscape features include:

- Fences, walls and gates
- Walkways, driveways and parking arrangements
- Site lighting
- Plantings of trees, shrubs, gardens and placement in relation to structures
- Mechanical equipment
- Recreational features such as pools and play equipment
- Water access features such as piers, gangways, floats and docks



*The waterways, including the ponds and the river, play an important part in the perception and appreciation of Portsmouth's unique setting and environment.*

## FENCES, WALLS & GATES

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

- Identify property boundaries
- Provide privacy and security
- Are often a major element of a streetscape, separating public from private property
- Relate to a building's type and architectural style

Many of Portsmouth's residences that with a front yard set back include fence or a wall along a sidewalk. In addition to separating a property from the sidewalk, walls and fences are used to separate adjoining properties. When considering the construction of a new fence, wall or gate, it should be designed to be compatible with the architectural character of the building type and style.

*A garbage enclosure has been designed to complement this vertical board fence and gate that separates the driveway from the rear yard.*



## FENCES

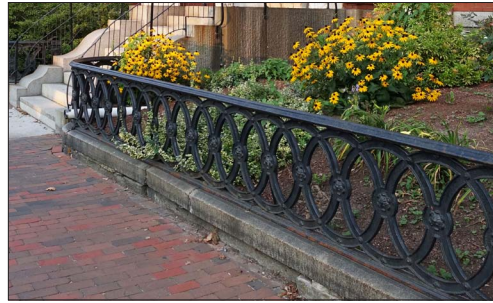
Historically, fences in Portsmouth are either wood or metal, and sometimes installed on top of a masonry wall or granite curb. The style of a fence and its level of detailing was often linked to the building's style and the fence's location on the property. More elaborate and expensive fences, such as highly detailed wood fences, cast or wrought iron, tended to be located at the front elevation of a building that was set back from 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. Simpler wood fences often separate neighbor's properties at side and rear yards, and can include privacy fences that are taller and solid. Walls along sidewalks should be limited to 36" in height to maintain public visibility of historic buildings.

### Wood Fences

Wood is a traditional fence material in the City of Portsmouth. They can be ornate or simple, or more elaborate detailing can be limited to areas adjacent to entrances and gates.

A common problem with wood fences is they deteriorate over time. Exterior woodwork, and particularly fences and gates that are fully exposed to the elements, are subject to rot and deterioration from moisture and pests. Regular repainting, maintenance and repair can postpone the need for replacement. (Refer to the *Guidelines for Exterior Maintenance* and *Guidelines for Exterior Woodwork*.)



*Ornate metal shapes, such as these interlocking circles, are generally made of cast metal. This example rests upon a granite curb.*

### Metal Fences

The casting of metal into molds allowed fences and gates to be made of highly elaborate and detailed patterns. By contrast, wrought iron tended to be used for simple, slender pickets. One of the advantages of iron fencing is that it is visually "thinner" than wood, increasing the view of the front of the building from the public right-of-way. In Portsmouth, metal fencing was often installed on top of a granite curb.

*This dry-laid stone wall does not include any mortar. Small stones are wedged between larger ones to provide stability.*



## LANDSCAPE WALLS & PIERS

Historically, landscape walls and piers were constructed of stone and occasionally brick. They can be installed alone or in combination with metal picket fencing or wood fencing. They can also be used for retaining walls to address changes in grade. The type, size and shape of the stone used in the construction of a wall can dramatically alter its appearance, as can whether it is dry-laid, without mortar, or includes mortar joints. Similar to masonry on a building, stone and brick walls and piers require regular maintenance. (Refer to *Guidelines for Masonry & Stucco*.)



*Granite piers support this paired wrought iron gate. The circle motif of the gate is more ornate than the picket fence.*

## GATES

Pedestrian gates, traditionally along a walkway, are generally 3- to 4-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.



Steps in the landscape provide pedestrian access where there are changes in grade on a site. This example includes granite steps and curbing flanking a brick walkway.

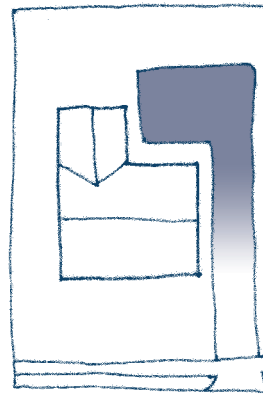
## PAVING

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 Portsmouth Historic District, the retention and maintenance of existing historic paving materials is encouraged. Property owners are also encouraged to minimize new paving and to use porous paving whenever possible to minimize runoff onto neighboring properties and into storm drains and waterways.

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.

Many of the sidewalks in Portsmouth were historically brick or stone, however, almost all examples included a granite curb along the street edge.



Street

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.



The parking area is brick and the driveway apron is made from cobblestones. The parking area is flanked by dry-laid stone walls, and shrubs provide a visual separation with the neighboring property.

## ZONING REQUIREMENTS

Lighting, fencing, walls, and paving are all subject to the City of Portsmouth ordinances. These ordinances dictate the height and location of fences and walls, the amount of paving permitted, the level of illumination allowable, and other requirements. Often, these are separate and independent from historic preservation review, and it is highly recommended that applicants contact the Planning Department at (603) 610-7216 to review requirements prior to filing.

## SIDEWALKS

Property owners may, with City approval, replace sidewalks and curbing at their own expense, particularly at a commercial development. If historic sidewalks and curbing require replacement, use of a compatible replacement material with granite curbs is recommended. Please contact the Planning Department at (603) 610-7216 for additional information regarding sidewalk and curbing requirements including compliance with the Americans With Disabilities Act.

## TREES, SHRUBS & GARDENS

Historically, plantings and vegetation around residences in the City of Portsmouth consisted of a few trees, shrubs and mixed gardens. The trees and shrubs surrounding the house provided shade and protection, while gardens provided food, herbs and flowers. In many cases, the perimeter or decorative planting beds or sections of lawn have granite curbing, particularly at street elevations. Native plants were transplanted from nearby and traditional plants were carried from homelands. Showy, ornamental trees, shrubs, perennials and annuals became more common in the 19th century.

Because native plants are more tolerant to the temperature and environmental conditions of Portsmouth, they tend to be more resistant to weather conditions and can require less maintenance, water and fertilizer than plants from other locations. In addition, evergreen shrubs and similar plantings can be used to provide privacy screening for a rear yard or to minimize visibility of equipment or a parking area.

*Lighting should be compatible with the architectural style of a building. It should be installed in a manner that illuminates the needed areas, such as next to an entrance door, while minimizing spillover onto adjacent properties or into the night sky.*



## EXTERIOR LIGHTING

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.

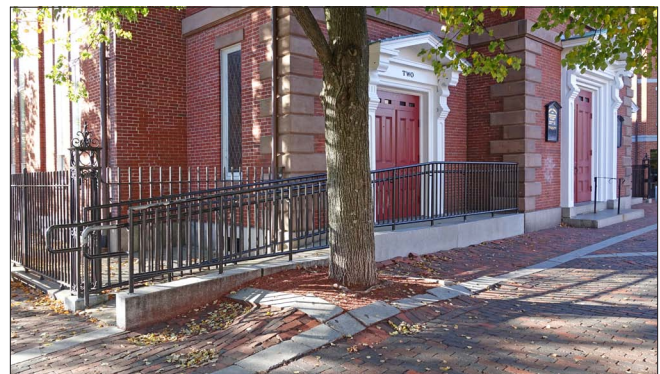
Prior to installation of lighting please consult the City of Portsmouth ordinance which regulates light pollution, illumination and requires dark sky lighting. Residential lighting should be installed to illuminate only pathways and access routes, limiting the spillage onto adjacent properties and the 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.

## MODERN LANDSCAPE FEATURES, EQUIPMENT & SMALL STRUCTURES

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 and satellite dishes are all examples of modern, ground-mounted mechanical equipment that can affect the historic integrity of a site and its surroundings. All equipment and associated conduit should be installed in an unobtrusive location and screened to limit visibility.
- **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. (Refer to *Secondary Buildings & Structures, Guidelines for Small Scale New Construction & Additions*, page 10-9 for garages and larger secondary structures.
- **Accessibility:** To allow property owners with physical challenges remain in their homes as long as possible, it might become necessary to install a ramp, lift or similar accommodation. Rather than remove or modify an existing building element, accessible accommodations can often be installed in a low-impact manner that allows their removal by a future property owner, returning the building to its historic configuration. (Refer to *Accessibility, Guidelines for Commercial Development & Storefronts*, page 12-12.)
- **Refuse & Recycling:** Refuse and recycling bins can be enclosed in small structures and bins, as well as behind fences and shrubs to minimize their public visibility.



*The location of the accessible ramp allows wheelchair access to the church at a previously existing secondary door near the principal entrance to the building. The ramp design includes a simple, metal picket railing and granite base, aligning with the building foundation.*



*Water access features such as docks, gangways, float and piers are a reminder of Portsmouth's nautical history, and the City's ongoing relationship with the water. The use of traditional, unobtrusive materials for water access features is encouraged.*

## WATER ACCESS FEATURES

Piers, gangways, docks and floats provide access to watercraft and enjoyment of Portsmouth's waterways. Traditionally, many of these features were constructed of wood, but more recently other materials such as steel and aluminum have gained in popularity. In many instances, metal elements are visually prominent, not only because of their difference with traditional materials, but metal elements also tend to be highly reflective, therefore visually prominent. The HDC recommends the use of traditional materials, such as wood, for water access feature whenever possible. Note that these features typically require additional reviews and permits.

## HDC CRITERIA FOR SITE ELEMENT & STREETScape REVIEW

When evaluating a new site element or proposed repair, modification or replacement of a site element or streetscape, the HDC's goal is to preserve the integrity of the remaining historic fabric in Portsmouth's Historic District to ensure continued access to this shared heritage.

One of the major factors in the review process is the property's historical and/or architectural value as determined by the historic designation. When considering an existing building, the more significant the property, the more critical its authenticity.

- **Focal Properties** — Maintain the highest historic integrity with restoration of historic sites with original materials throughout
- **Contributing Properties** — Restoration of historic site elements is encouraged and compatible site elements possible, particularly at altered properties
- **Non-Contributing Properties** — Restoration of any remaining historic site elements is encouraged, with the greatest flexibility for alteration
- **New Construction & Additions** — Site elements at new small scale residential construction should be compatible to adjacent properties; New commercial properties or developments should utilize site elements to mitigate otherwise obtrusive site elements such as parking, loading docks, refuse collection areas appropriate to the proposed building's style and design

## SITE MAINTENANCE

Keeping a site clear of debris will aid in drainage during a storm and reduce the potential for debris becoming airborne in high winds. In addition, if not promptly removed some types of debris, such as garden waste and wood items, can become a home for termites and other pests.

## SITE DRAINAGE

Substantial damage to a building can occur through ground water. One of the best ways to mitigate damage from storm water is to establish positive site drainage away from a building to prevent standing water along or near foundation walls. In addition, the drainage pattern of a property should not be modified in a manner that increases storm water runoff to a neighboring property.

## SNOW & ICE REMOVAL

The use of salt and chemical snow and ice removal techniques can damage stone and brick foundations. In addition, melting snow against wood elements such as building siding and fences can saturate woodwork. Removal of snow away from a building by shovelling or a snow blower is recommended.

## When is HDC Review Not Required?

A Certificate of Approval is not required for:

- Ordinary maintenance and repair of an existing site or streetscape element in-kind, such as wood or metal fencing (except for chain-link) and exterior lighting, including location, size, design and materials
- Accessible ramp systems on single- or two-family homes with black metal railing components
- Building accessories and décor, such as window-mounted portable air conditioning units, play equipment, window boxes, small mailboxes, flags, hose reels, door bells and knockers, weathervanes, bells, wind chimes, birdfeeders, artwork, sculpture and other similar exterior décor
- Plantings, except as required to screen equipment
- Wall-mounted mechanical, electrical and ventilation equipment for a single- or two-family homes where it is painted to blend with the wall color, extends no more than 6-inches from the wall plane and not located on a public way; and where all duct work or equipment feeds enter the building at ground level so it is not visible
- Ground-mounted mechanical or electrical equipment for a single- or two-family homes when it is located behind the structure and is not in public view, and all duct work or equipment feeds are located inside the building or immediately adjacent to the equipment (Refer to *Roof-Mounted Equipment, Guidelines for Roofing*, page 04-8.)
- New or replacement piers, floats, docks or gangways for single- and two-family homes with metal, wire, rope or wood handrail systems

## HDC CRITERIA FOR SITE ELEMENT & STREETScape REVIEW

### Fences, Walls & Gates

#### *The HDC recommends:*

- 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
- Regular repainting of wood and metal fences and gates

#### *The HDC discourages:*

- Blocking views to historic buildings and settings with solid walls, or dense fencing materials or planting
- Installing front yard fences that are greater than 48" in height, or walls that are greater than 36" in height
- Using stockade fencing at publicly visible locations

#### *The HDC strongly discourages:*

- Installing chain-link fencing
- Installing non-traditional fence materials such as vinyl, PVC or other synthetic materials for fences
- Installing concrete block or stucco at landscape walls that are publicly visible

### Paving

#### *The HDC recommends:*

- Minimizing the amount of paving on a site
- Retaining and maintaining historic paving, particularly stone paving
- Replacing existing brick or stone paving in-kind, matching what is existing in material and pattern appropriate to the building type and construction period
- Installing patios in lieu of raised decks

#### *The HDC discourages:*

- Installing asphalt paving at any location, particularly walkways
- Installing stamped concrete paving or concrete pavers except at new construction
- Creating a parking area in the front yard of a residence

### Lighting

#### *The HDC recommends:*

- Installing lighting fixtures that complement the building's architectural style and material
- Installing unobtrusive lighting of historic properties that limits light spillage onto neighboring properties and into the night sky

#### *The HDC discourages:*

- Installing lighting fixtures that are not stylistically appropriate on historic buildings
- Installing obtrusive lighting of historic properties that illuminates neighboring properties
- Highly visible security lighting, particularly if always "on"

### Modern Landscape Features, Equipment & Small Structures

#### *The HDC recommends:*

- Maintaining building views open to the surrounding public streets and sidewalks and locating landscape features, equipment small structures where they are not publicly visible
- Constructing small structures in a manner that their walls and roof are of the same historic materials as those of the existing main building
- Screening modern site features such as air conditioning units and trash collection receptacles with plantings (preferably native) or fencing
- Minimizing the impact of accessible accommodations on historic buildings by installing a low-impact solution in a discreet location when possible, using visually unobtrusive materials, storing any removed historic building fabric such as railings on site, and designing them in a manner that can be removed by a future property owner allowing the building to be returned to its historic condition
- Screening of refuse and recycling bins from the public way by plantings, shrubs or fencing

#### *The HDC discourages:*

- Locating landscape features, ground-mounted equipment and small structures to be visible from the public way
- Installing pre-manufactured sheds visible from the public way, particularly those with metal or vinyl wall cladding

### Water Access Features

#### *The HDC recommends:*

- Utilizing of traditional materials such as wood at piers, gangways, docks and floats with wood or rope handrails
- Maintaining water access feature components
- Removing of abandoned elements from piers, gangways, docks and floats

#### *The HDC discourages:*

- Installing synthetic or highly reflective materials at water access features

