



TRANSPORTATION DEPARTMENT
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GUIDELINES FOR REVIEWING LANDSCAPING ON PUBLIC ROAD RIGHTS-OF-WAY

Definitions and Purpose

Various bylaws state that boulevards must be maintained in grass. These bylaws and other regulations state trees or shrubs cannot be planted on City property (including boulevards), and they cannot be removed or pruned, without the prior approval of the City. Boulevards can be defined as being “(i) that portion of City highway lying between the curb line of a City highway and the adjacent front property line excepting that portion occupied by a constructed sidewalk, or (ii) where there is no curb that portion of the City highway lying between the portion of the highway ordinarily traveled by vehicles and the adjacent front property line excepting that portion occupied by a constructed sidewalk.”

It is recognized that there are many locations throughout the City where landscaping has been provided, or landscaping features constructed, that are intended to improve the aesthetics of an area by an individual landowner (residential, commercial, or industrial) or a business or community group. Alternative landscaping using xeroscaping methods have been used in many locations to achieve water conservation, to change to low-maintenance landscaping, and to lessen other environmental impacts, as encouraged through various City programs.

The purpose of these guidelines is to provide criteria for the review of public complaints and/or circulations that call into question the use of existing landscaping other than grass. In addition to the definition of boulevards, the bylaws have been interpreted to include the areas from the property line to any adjacent multi-use trail or edge of travel surface of an alley. These guidelines do not apply to City landscaping within roadway medians or islands that are maintained by the City, or for permanent structures or features that would be more appropriately dealt with in other ways.

These guidelines are geared toward ensuring that safety is never compromised and that the other users of the road right-of-way are not negatively impacted. The intent is not to create a bureaucratic permitting system, but rather to ensure that landscaping other than grass that does not create problems will be allowed to remain wherever possible.

For landscaping other than grass to be acceptable, the landscaping must not adversely affect adjacent properties, vehicular access, pedestrian movements (including accessing City sidewalks from parked vehicles), boulevard trees, existing and proposed utilities, the City’s roadway maintenance operations, or overland drainage. These guidelines establish reasonable conditions to ensure proposals for the use of public space are acceptable, and that landowners are not unreasonably limited to landscape the boulevards adjacent to their property with just grass.

The landscaping on City road rights-of-way encompassed by these guidelines can be described as being:

- bedding plants (annuals or perennials);
- edging and/or retaining walls that are “temporary” (i.e. movable);
- statues, lawn ornaments, or other decorative features that are movable;

- alternate ground cover vegetation (vegetation other than grass); and/or
- alternate surface treatments (shale, rocks, bark mulch, wood chips, and/or paving stone).

Safety Considerations

1. Adequate sightlines must be maintained at all intersections and access locations (private driveways, walkway connections, etc.) at all times. When considering sightlines, one must ensure the review recognizes the size of the mature trees or shrubs. No landscaping above 1.05 metres high will be allowed in corner cut locations. This includes any planting that can eventually grow to be above this maximum height.
2. Ground cover and/or surface treatments cannot create trip hazards for able bodied or handicapped pedestrians, or create problems for roadway maintenance operations and/or utility crews. All surface treatments must be kept lower than the adjacent sidewalk or curb, or be retained with edging or other temporary structures to prevent spillage of the materials onto the adjacent sidewalk or roadway. Offsets from City sidewalks may be required.
3. Landscaping cannot block traffic devices, including signage.
4. Streetlight illumination of the sidewalk or roadway should not be reduced by any landscaping.
5. Applicable Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles should be followed including but not limited to:
 - the avoidance of creating confined and hidden spaces;
 - allowing pedestrians to see around, over, or through landscaping to see if danger exists; and
 - allowing for casual surveillance by passing motorists, other pedestrians, or adjacent residents.

Access

6. Landscaping adjacent to roadways must allow adequate space for passengers getting into and out of vehicles parked on the road, and must reasonably allow for pedestrians to walk to the closest City sidewalk if one exists.

Utility Considerations

7. Trees or shrubs placed in close proximity to overhead or underground utilities should be referred to the affected utility for review.
8. Trees or shrubs cannot be placed within 3.5 metres of a fire hydrant or other fire connections. Surface treatments can incorporate the area around hydrants.
9. Overland drainage cannot be affected, nor can landscaping materials cause gutters or catch basins in the neighbourhood to become blocked.

Other Municipal Issues

10. Overhanging branches or vegetation cannot obstruct sidewalks, multi-use trails, alleys, or roadways unless an adequate vertical clearance is always provided.
11. Surface treatments cannot negatively impact existing or proposed boulevard trees. Some materials prevent water from seeping down to the roots of the trees, while other materials interfere with the root system during installation.
12. Landscaping cannot obstruct visibility or use of transit zones.
13. Landscaping (trees, shrubs, or ground cover treatments) cannot interfere with garbage collection by City forces and/or contractors.
14. Raised landscape features (including edging for surface treatments or ground cover materials) must meet the following setbacks:
 - 1.5 metres from the back of any curb to allow for unobstructed pedestrian access and to reduce problems with snow clearing operations; or
 - 0.5 metres from the edge of any roadway surface, any sidewalk that is plowed by the City, and/or multi-use trail where snow clearing operations occur (including alleys).
15. The City will not provide authorization in advance of the installation of any PAH and/or CCA treated timbers to be used for landscaping purposes (retaining wall, edging). Evidence of leaching of contaminants from existing timbers may result in reporting, as may be required of the City, to Alberta Environment as per the *Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act*.
16. Landscaping fabric cannot be installed in or around boulevard trees, as it negatively affects the tree roots over time.