

SIDEWALK LANDSCAPING GUIDELINES

Guidelines are subject to change by the DPW Director. Contact DPW staff at 641-2676 for assistance.

Disclaimer: These comments are based on personal experience and conversations with DPW-BUF regarding this permit process in its first year of use (2006-2007). It is important for you to confirm any interpretations of the guidelines with the Bureau as guidelines and interpretations are subject to change and each project is addressed specific to its conditions.

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| DPW | Department of Public Works | City Hall, Room 348 | 415 554 6290 or 311 |
| BUF | Bureau of Urban Forestry (a division of DPW) | 2323 Cesar Chavez Street – 94124 (no counter service) | 415 554 6700 |
| BSM | Bureau of Street Use and Mapping (a division of DPW) | 875 Stevenson Street #460 – 94103 (counter service) | 415 554 5801 |

1. In no case shall new landscaping result in an unobstructed sidewalk width of less than 48 inches, or increase the cross-slope of the portion of the sidewalk designated as an accessible path-of-travel.

{This means there must be a continuous, straight (not curved or diagonal) concrete sidewalk path-of-travel (a.k.a. walkway) that remains, which is at least 4 feet wide. In some cases you may want to leave a wider walkway. This can be done either by leaving more concrete, or by providing pavers or decomposed granite alongside the walkway as an additional walkable area.}

2. Street tree plantings are strongly encouraged in conjunction with sidewalk landscaping. A separate permit is required for street trees and may be submitted together with this permit. *For information on planting a street tree, call DPW-BUF at (415) 641-2676 or go online at www.sfgov.org/site/uploadedfiles/sfdpw/buf/StreetTreeGuidelines.pdf.*

{Leafy canopied trees are one of the most effective ways to reduce the flow rate of rain into our sewer system, as they hold water on their leaves and release it over time. It is important to select trees which retain their leaves through the winter – our wet season. Deciduous trees not only lack foliage to hold the rain, they drop their leaves in the fall, contributing to the blockage of sewers.

DPW-BUF requires trees to be planted in a straight line, and in line with existing trees on the same block.

Consider planting multiple rows of trees or two levels of canopy, one taller (20-40 feet high), and another shorter (ie. maximum height 12 feet) to increase the number of trees in your project. Also consider planting trees closer together (distance depends on the species) to fit more trees into your project.}

3. Plant species and layout are subject to DPW staff approval. Plants shall not pose a hazard to public health. To conserve water, plant species requiring minimal irrigation and adapted to local site and climate conditions are recommended. Planting within 3 feet of the trunk of trees less than 3 years old or near the root crown of an established tree is not recommended and will likely not be permitted.

{“Native”, “drought tolerant” and climate adapted” plants are all generally appropriate in terms of water use and durability. For water conservation and plant transplanting stress, is best to install plants just as the wet season gets underway – usually in October or November – to benefit from the rains and cooler weather. Hand water plants to establish them. Once established these categories of plants will generally thrive without irrigation. For watering to establish or during times of unusually hot weather, consider using rainwater collected in a cistern or pre-drain water collected from domestic sources (sink, bathtub, shower).

Avoid using plants that may be physically harmful to passers-by (ie. via stickers, thorns, irritants, poisons).

Plants close to trees compete with the tree’s roots for water and nutrients. Larger planting areas around trees allow room for companion plants while giving the tree more access to water, establishing deeper roots and resulting in a healthier, better stabilized tree. Keep the “trunk flare” area (base of the tree) clear of mulch and plants. For new trees this is a 3’ radius. For mature trees this is at least ½ the diameter of the trunk at its base.}

4. To ensure accessibility and maximize environmental benefits, raised planters are discouraged. In locations where in-ground plantings are not allowed, raised planters may be permitted. It is recommended that an applicant desiring raised planters contact SFDPW to discuss this option prior to submitting a completed permit application.

{“Ensuring accessibility” means not having raised obstructions in the sidewalk. The “environmental benefits” mentioned refers to the fact that soil in raised planters dries out due to heat and wind, requiring artificial watering, and that stormwater cannot enter a raised planter as it does a planting area that is at or below sidewalk level. For those cases where in-ground planters are not possible due to underground obstructions (ie. vaults under the sidewalk), raised planters may be possible and require a Minor Sidewalk Encroachment Permit, administered through DPW-BSM. In addition to a one-time permit fee (approximately \$800), there may be an annual fee assessed for items allowed by this permit. Check with DPW-BSM for more details. For these reasons, avoid raised planters if possible.}

5. A minimum of 24-inch from the face of the curb shall remain accessible and clear of landscaping where curbside parking exists.

{Sometimes referred to as a ‘courtesy strip’ for people getting in and out of vehicles, this is measured from the street side of the curb. Curbs are generally 6 inches wide, so 18 inches beyond that makes 24 inches. This area has been permitted to be pavers or decomposed granite and other materials which meet the conditions of No. 7 below.}

6. For each curbside parking space (approximately 20 feet of curb), a minimum 48-inch wide accessible path is required to pass perpendicularly from the curb to the sidewalk path-of-travel. This path shall be located at the approximate centerline of each curbside parking stall, and must be made of concrete, pavers or brick and must be set on a firm base.

{This path is only required where curbside parking (parallel or diagonal) already exists. It is not required where curbside parking does not exist, and is not required where parking is less than a small car length, even if motorcycles do fit. For parking areas smaller than 10' consult with the BUF inspector. Decomposed granite has also been permitted for this path.}

7. Surfaces other than the curbside parking path in item #6 may be made of pavers, permeable pavers, bricks, compacted crushed stone, concrete, permeable concrete or other firm and level material clear of tripping hazards. Any such material must be set on a firm base.

{It may also be useful to note that materials used for walkways and courtesy strip should provide suitable traction and should not be slippery when wet. Pavers must already be on the DPW-BSM approved list, or meet their requirements for friction coefficient. For pavers not on the list, manufacturers should be able to provide you with this data which you may give to DPW-BSM to consider. Contact DPW-BSM for a current list of approved pavers. Note that when proposing pavers for driveway areas you may need to obtain permission through DPW-BSM separately from the landscaping permit. Contact BSM for details.}

8. Sidewalk landscaping may not exceed 3 feet in height in the following locations:
 - a. Within 25 feet in front of a **traffic sign or signal**
 - b. Within 25 feet of the property line on the **approach to an intersection** and 10 feet of the property line on the **exit from an intersection** as the traffic flows.

{This is measured from the property line perpendicular to the roadway. You may have plantings in these areas; they just need to not be taller than 3 feet high. Select plants which mature at or under this height, rather than selecting larger plants which will need to be maintained (trimmed, pruned, etc.)}

9. A raised edging treatment is required at both ends of the landscaped area to delineate the presence of landscaping to visually impaired pedestrians. The edging treatment must be at least 6 inches and no more than 15 inches tall from the grade of the sidewalk, and allow water to flow around or through into the landscaped area. It may be made of wood, stone, decorative metal or other material, subject to staff approval.

{This raised edging is to provide a "heads up" for all people encountering the landscaping. It may also serve to prevent dogs and people from trampling and urinating on plants. Several inexpensive products are available in rolls from local hardware stores.}

10. Other raised structures, decorative and/or protective fencing may be permitted but typically require additional permits.

{As with No. 4 above, this refers to the Minor Sidewalk Encroachment Permit.}

11. The grade of the planted area shall be at least one inch lower than the grade of the sidewalk, and shall be terraced on sites with significant slope to avoid soil erosion and spillage onto the sidewalk. Landscaping and edging treatments shall allow water to drain from the sidewalk into the landscaped area. In areas with a known high-water table and other subsoil issues, the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission may review sites as to their appropriateness for permeable landscaping.

{This provision discourages creating mounds with soil and mulch. The idea here is for stormwater to flow into the area and to prevent soil and mulch from migrating onto the sidewalk, into the gutter and end up in the sewer system as sediment which reduces the sewer system capacity. Also for this reason, consider using heavier mulching materials such as stone. Avoid small pebbles that can migrate into sewer pipes.}

12. Any parking signs, street lights, utility poles or other above-ground infrastructure must remain set within concrete for adequate anchoring.

{These items generally have their own foundations/anchoring. Removing concrete sidewalk slabs around them generally does not effect them. If in doubt, hire a licensed contractor to work in the areas around these items.}

13. Streetlights, utility poles, mailboxes, trash receptacles, bike racks, and other street fixtures with the exception of parking meters must remain accessible by a 36-inch clear path perpendicular to the curb, as measured from the centerline of the fixture.

{The location of this 36" path is generally between the item and the remaining sidewalk, however in the case of utility poles access is only needed from the curb to the pole, not from the pole to the sidewalk.}

14. Points of access to underground utilities must remain unobstructed. Plantings adjacent to such points of access shall be kept a minimum of 6 inches clear from all sides.

{You may remove the concrete sidewalk completely around utility covers (PGE, SFWD, etc). Keep plantings away by 6" so the utilities can be easily located as needed.}

15. Sidewalk-landscape plantings are NOT permitted in the following cases:

a. If the existing sidewalk is less than 7 feet wide.

{Plantings ARE possible in sidewalks measuring less than 7' wide. At sidewalks with adjacent parking, plantings may need to be against buildings, or in configurations such as spot plantings (street trees or other plants) or strip planters. At locations without parking, planting areas may be up to 3' wide (allowing a 4' walkway to remain). Consult with BUF to identify your options.}

b. Adjacent to existing Bus Zones where the sidewalk is less than or equal to 15 feet.

{Bus zones are those painted with a red curb where buses stop for loading and unloading passengers. Depending on the width of the sidewalk, there may be room for plantings against buildings at bus zones. Pavers or other hardscape materials may be used within this area. Consult with BUF regarding your specific location.}

c. Adjacent to an existing designated Blue (Handicap) Parking Zone.

{Handicap parking zones are those painted with a blue curb. Depending on the width of the sidewalk, there may be room for plantings away from the curb (ie. against buildings) at these areas. Pavers or other hardscape materials may be used within this area. Consult with BUF regarding your specific location.}

d. Adjacent to an existing Crosswalk Zone.

{Plantings are not to obstruct crosswalks. Generally, crosswalks align within curb returns (the curved portion of the sidewalk at intersections, however, some are wider. This is non-negotiable; however pavers or other hardscape materials may be used within this area.}

e. Within curb return (the curved portion of the sidewalk at intersections).

{Curb returns are generally in line with property lines. Plantings are not allowed in the curved areas at corners as these are city owned and maintained areas. Some exceptions may exist, such as where sidewalks are extended as "bulb-outs" or "sidewalk extensions". Consult with BUF regarding such areas.}

f. If impacting existing or potential curb ramp locations.

{Planting areas may go up to but not within areas of existing or potential curb ramps.}

g. Within 5 feet of a fire hydrant.

{This is non-negotiable; however pavers or other hardscape materials may be used within this area.}

16. The permit holder is responsible for maintaining the sidewalk landscaping in a condition that is safe to pedestrians and vehicular traffic, free of litter and unsightly weeds, is responsible for maintaining plants with appropriate pruning, watering, and other care as needed, and ensuring that landscaping does not encroach into the 48-inch accessible path of travel as described in #1 above.

{This provision elaborates on the existing responsibility property owners have of sidewalk space whether or not plantings exist. Per Municipal Police Code 34/Public Works Code 174: "Occupant/owner is responsible for the cleanliness of the sidewalk directly in front of their residence or business. Litter/debris, grease, grime stains and weeds shall not accumulate or remain upon the sidewalk ".}

17. The property owner shall check for the presence of underground utilities in the area of proposed plantings and shall be solely responsible in avoiding interference with or damage to electric or telephone conduits, sewers and other utilities.

{This is an important pre-demolition step, especially when tree planting is involved. Most utilities can be identified free of charge by calling USA (Underground Service Alert at 800-227-2600) at least two days before you demolish and dig. See www.USAnorth.org for further details. If you have any doubt or concerns, hire a qualified contractor or installer to do the work. If you encounter unexpected utilities, be sure to have them adequately assessed before proceeding.}

KEEP THESE INSTRUCTIONS FOR YOUR REFERENCE

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