

State Street Landscaping Guidelines

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Introduction

The goal of the State Street Landscaping Guidelines is to bring a sense of order and vision to future changes proposed for the State Street Plaza and to simplify the design review process for applicants. The Guidelines encompass a range of issues related to both the aesthetic nature of the street and the practical needs of property owners, merchants, residents of Santa Barbara and visitors. The overriding consideration of the Guidelines is to ensure that the continuing evolution of Santa Barbara's most important and aesthetically rich street respects the established themes of the Plaza while responding to the changing needs of Santa Barbara's citizens, businesses and visitors.

Incorporated in the Guidelines is the assumption that there is value in the existing landscape amenities and that proposed changes should continue to blend with the established character of the State Street Plaza.

The Guidelines recognize that design ideas and practical needs will continually evolve. As alterations are made, care must be taken that new features are harmonious with the surrounding context. Within each of the four existing design themes, the overall streetscape must appear to be all of the "same cloth".

It is the intent of the State Street Landscaping Guidelines that when alterations to the State Street Plaza are proposed it is of utmost importance to maintain the continuity of the unique visual character of the area, while enhancing the commercial viability of the businesses that attract people to the Plaza.

These guidelines have been included within the overall purview of the Historic Landmarks Commission. By becoming familiar with this document, and working within its prescribed framework, the design review process for landscape-related projects will be streamlined and applicants' costs related to design development should be reduced.

State Street Landscaping Task Force

In March 1993, the Parks Commission voiced its concern regarding the changes to landscaping occurring within the downtown State Street Plaza. Various groups were working at cross purposes and the Commission felt that a single vision was needed for the area. Of particular concern to the Commission were:

- Pending proposals by some merchants to remove areas of landscaping and site furnishings in the downtown plaza. Merchant concerns focused on increasing attractiveness, improving visibility of businesses, convenience for shoppers and safety;
- Approval of projects which altered the downtown streetscape away from the original design themes;

- Parks Commission and Staff's feeling that the gradual changes to the landscaping were leading to a loss of color, horticultural diversity and the cohesion of the original landscape plan.

The Commission discussion centered on the need to develop a set of guidelines which would meet the needs of the businesses, retain the unique character of the shopping district, satisfy the concerns of the Historic Landmarks Commission, represent the community's horticultural and aesthetic desires and be of a modest financial investment.

The Commission recommended a joint meeting with City Council, the design review bodies and concerned merchants to develop guidelines for future changes. That meeting was convened on April 9, 1993, at which time Council appointed the State Street Landscaping Task Force, consisting of representatives from the Parks Commission, Downtown Organization, Old Town Merchants Association, Architectural Board of Review and the Historic Landmarks Commission. The Task Force was supported by Staff from the Parks and Recreation Department and the Community Development Department.

The assignment to the Task Force was to examine the plaza and make recommendations for future improvements to the 700-1200 blocks of State Street. The main themes presented to Council were:

1. Improve visibility of businesses.
2. Improve pedestrian circulation and safety.
3. Work with the existing design theme - informal plantings highlighting horticultural diversity.
4. Develop long-term maintenance guidelines and consider ease of care for future improvements.
5. Consider limitation of public funding.
6. Allow for gradual phasing-in of improvements.
7. Keep the approval process simple to provide an incentive for participation by abutting property owners.

Development of the Guidelines

The process for developing these Guidelines consisted of a detailed analysis utilizing photographs, videotaping from numerous vantage points, a series of on-site tours noting suggestions and variations on a series of maps, and meetings with the Task Force and the design review boards to work out the final version.

The result of this process is a set of descriptive plans outlining desired alterations to the landscaping, and written guidelines regarding paving, furnishings, plantings, lighting, etc.

During the initial discussions, the Task Force decided to extend their analysis and recommendations to include the 400, 500 and 600 blocks, in order to address the idea of continuity for the entire Plaza.

Aesthetic Vision

As previously stated, these Guidelines recognize the inevitability of change. But critical to the process of change is the recognition that new design elements must fit within the overall context of the surrounding design style.

As changes occur and new ideas and styles gain acceptance, it is the responsibility of the City, the nearby property owners and merchants, and the design review bodies to uphold the aesthetic vision for the Plaza.

Because the Plaza actually consists of four separate design themes, this vision varies within the downtown area. But in all cases, there is a need to design with a sense of attention to detail, enhancement of the architecture that comprises the dominant portion of the streetscape, and providing color and textural interest through interesting use of plant materials.

The oldest section of the Plaza (700–1200 blocks) is the most horticulturally rich, but is viewed by some as having an overabundance of walls and raised planters which reduce visibility of storefronts. The desired effect for this portion of the Plaza would be to maintain, and even selectively expand, the abundant plantings while reducing the higher walls and shrubs that impede visibility.

The 600 block borrows from the original concept of the upper plaza, displaying a variety of richly planted areas, although this block does pose certain problems related to planters and other furnishings which act as impediments to movement and visibility.

In the 400 and 500 blocks, there is a strong, linear formality established by evenly spaced trees, yet there is a lack of color and variety. Here, care should be taken to maintain the overall regularity of the trees while inserting more enlivening plantings at ground level.

The Business District

State Street is the commercial heart of downtown Santa Barbara. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that an attractive and supportive environment be maintained in order to attract shoppers and new businesses to this area.

Downtown State Street is more than a collection of stores and services. Since the redevelopment of the 700–1200 blocks in 1969, it has been recognized as an unique pedestrian-oriented district that provides beauty, comfort and a distinctive sense of style.

The guidelines recognize the desire to create “windows” to storefronts, yet not at the expense of complete removal of the landscaping and other amenities along the street. Recommendations have been made to have the City’s Parks Division raise tree canopies when such action would not distort the tree’s growth habit or jeopardize the health of the tree. Removal of tall shrubs and planters are recommended in a number of locations, with the provision that equivalent amounts of attractive and varied plantings be replaced, but at a lower level.

Therefore, the Guidelines have been developed in a way which will strike a balance between the needs of individual property owners and merchants, and the ambiance that is created to attract shoppers and refresh visitors to the downtown business core.

History & Style

The name State Street, as well as its surveyed location, was determined in 1851, first in the survey by Salisbury Haley, and then in Vitus Wackenreuder's 1853 map of the survey. Actual construction of the street took place in the 1860's and early 1870's. From this moment on, State Street became the community's major thoroughfare, eventually connecting Stearns Wharf (1872), with the various retail stores, offices, hotels and theaters that lined its pathway as it proceeded up the valley.

The rebuilding of State Street's buildings after the earthquake of 1925 provided timely opportunity to transform the community's spine into one of America's foremost examples of a unified architectural style, related in this instance to the city's Spanish and Mexican inheritance. The Hispanic mode of design continued to be adhered to during the following decades, and it served as the theme for the first segment of what was to become the State Street Drive-through Plaza. The street was paved in 1887.

700–1200 blocks

In 1969 architect Robert Ingle Hoyt, together with the landscape architect Julio Juan Veyna, laid out the first six blocks of the Drive-through Plaza (from Victoria Street to Ortega Street) under a City contract. Though street furnishings in the way of mail boxes, seating, and raised planters were provided in this scheme, it was landscape architecture which primarily established the new character of the thoroughfare. Hoyt and Veyna's vision was that of an informal urban forest that would counter the straight lined geometry of the adjacent buildings.

Thought was given to the use of planters and other street furnishings to deflect pedestrians toward retail storefronts. This created a meandering circulation pattern where continuous lines of sight were frequently interrupted with plantings and low walls. This approach led to sidewalks of varying width, some grand and spacious, others more confined.

The predominant construction materials consisted of a continuous multicolored concrete pattern, stucco walls and planters accented with colorful ceramic tiles, and wooden slat benches built into walls and planters. Water was introduced as an enlivening element with a variety of traditional Spanish style and more modern fountains.

The plant palette was diverse and informal using Jacaranda trees as the dominant summer color interest; clusters of Mexican Fan Palms and single specimens of Eucalyptus and California Sycamore as skyline accents; and numerous varieties of shrubs, vines and groundcovers for seasonal interest.

600 block

In 1982, the architect/landscape architect Richard B. Taylor added the block between Ortega Street and Cota Street. His scheme carried on the earlier approach, though he simplified it considerably.

The dominant architectural element was still stucco walls and glazed tile, but expressed in mostly rectilinear forms and with a rougher textured finish. The colored concrete pattern of the upper blocks was replaced with traditional 12 inch square terra cotta tile.

The pedestrian circulation pattern in this block was more direct, although a number of planters impinge on the sidewalk, creating a crowded feeling in some areas.

The plantings continued to be quite varied and colorful, repeating the use of Fan Palm clusters and Jacaranda groupings, and also introducing additional species of lower growing palms and brilliantly colored Coral Trees. The shrub and groundcover plants offered a variety of seasonal effects and established a bold, subtropical texture.

400 & 500 blocks

The Taylor design was followed in 1988 by the architects Designworks and the landscape architect Sydney Baumgartner's two blocks, between Cota Street and Gutierrez Street. Their design approach was more formal and boulevard-like. Major stress was laid on emphasizing the architectural character of the buildings which line this section of State Street.

This design made significant use of simulated sandstone as raised curbs for planters and in the regular spacing of obelisk-like "hitching posts" (some adapted for use as bicycle parking stanchions). Terra cotta was again utilized as the paving material, but with mixed results. The uneven, bumpy texture and recessed joints of the tile have created difficulties for people in wheelchairs and others with mobility problems.

The plant palette in this section of the Plaza was considerably more simple – a straight-line planting of regularly spaced Tipu trees with broad, shady canopies and a high branching pattern. The trees provided ample shade and contributed the bonus of pale mustard colored flowers in spring. There is considerably less horticultural interest at the pedestrian eye level than in the upper blocks – mostly low growing tufts of Lily Turf accented with Pygmy Date Palms and occasional Bougainvillea shrubs.

000–300 blocks

The final segment of State Street from Gutierrez Street to Cabrillo Boulevard and the foot of Stearns Wharf entailed not only the street itself, but the new bridge for the then-being-built Highway 101 freeway. The street itself was designed by the the landscape architects Cunningham–Black and architects Brian Cearnal Associates, and was completed in 1991. The freeway bridge, and the adjacent section of State Street, were designed between 1984 and 1991 by CALTRANS and the City's Freeway Design Committee (composed of Julio Juan Veyna, William Mahan, Henry Lenny and David Gebhard).

Though also somewhat formal, this final segment of the State Street Plaza tended to be richer in its detailing, and the Spanish-inspired freeway bridge added a strong assertive note to its design.

Much of the special interest of this segment was accomplished through the use of bold, colorful tile patterns and the introduction of adoquin cantera stone as a cap for walls and columns for bus shelters. Diagonally scored concrete was used as the major sidewalk material, enhanced at intersections with terra cotta tile.

The plant palette consisted of plantings of single Mexican Fan Palms, contrasted by linear groupings of subtropical specimen trees (New Zealand Christmas Tree, Cassia, Jacaranda, Coral Tree). Very little ground level planting was attempted and some low walls were softened by flowering vines.

As one would expect, new perceptions and new needs have, and will continually bring about, functional and aesthetic changes within the twelve blocks of the State Street Plaza. In the years ahead, other changes will most likely take place, especially in the redesign of the various streets which intersect with State Street.

How to Use the Guidelines

Design Review Process

These guidelines are intended to give direction to private property owners along the Plaza regarding the direction which alterations to the streetscape should take. They will only be in effect if the property owner chooses to make changes to the City-owned landscaping in front of their property—no owner shall be required to make landscaping changes when making alterations to their building. The guidelines exist in order to assure that any changes that do occur are harmonious with the surrounding context and contribute to the overall improvement of the Plaza.

The applicant's steps toward project approval are as follows:

- Obtain copy of State Street Landscaping Guidelines and 11" x 17" plan of Guideline Drawings at ABR/HLC counter at 630 Garden Street.
- Review Guidelines for general principles governing projects within the State Street Plaza.
- Review Guideline Drawings for overall design intent for the project area.
- Develop conceptual design based on Guidelines.
- Submit Master Application for Conceptual Review by the Historic Landmarks Commission.
- Staff forwards application to Parks and Recreation staff for conformance with Guidelines and forwards comments to HLC.
- Proceed through design review process.

The Historic Landmarks Commission will take Parks and Recreation staff's comments into consideration when reviewing the project. Denials are appealable to City Council.

Task Force Drawings

The drawings encompass the Plaza from Gutierrez St. to Victoria St., schematically showing all planters and public site furnishings, including tree wells, walls, trash receptacles, bicycle racks, etc. Notes on the drawings include recommendations for reconfiguring seating areas, elimination of some unnecessary walls, planters and telephone kiosks, and changes in plant varieties in order to develop more horticultural interest and diversity.

The drawings do not, in and of themselves, constitute a complete action plan for all developments in the plaza. They do, however, serve as a *design intent statement* for all areas and can be used to guide the City, individual property owners, and their professional designers toward an acceptable project which will harmonize with existing and future developments. The notes are both site-specific and general, but do not attempt to pose final design solutions.

In addition, the drawings serve as a day-to-day reference for maintenance oversight by Parks Division Staff and guidance for maintenance crews for pruning and miscellaneous planting projects.

Design changes requiring construction modifications are noted in **TIMES** typeface. Horticultural recommendations for pruning and planting are noted in **HELVETICA ITALICS**, and will be accomplished by City Staff and contracted maintenance personnel.

Specific Design Guidelines:

Sidewalk Paving

- Paving in the 700 through 1200 block shall match the original pattern of the Plaza.
- New paving in the remaining blocks will continue to match the existing material until such a time that a large scale remodeling is undertaken and a significant amount of new material can be introduced.
- Root barriers shall be installed adjacent to new paving where existing or new trees are within five feet of pavement. Plans must be reviewed by the City Arborist.
- Pedestrian safety shall be considered when designing planting area edges. Scalloped edges found in original planter beds may be modified if safety would be improved by so doing.

Site Furnishings

- Reduce the visual impact of mail boxes, newspaper vending machines and trash receptacles by integrating them adjacent to substantial plantings.
- New bench and trash receptacle styles are allowable and are subject to review by Historic Landmarks Commission.

Pedestrian Circulation

- The ideal minimum allowable unobstructed passage for pedestrians shall be eight feet when selecting locations for sidewalk cafes, mailboxes, bicycle racks, benches, planters and sidewalk widths.
- All planters and site furnishings shall be located with consideration for circulation and safety.

Lighting

- Increased pedestrian lighting levels shall be encouraged for safety and security reasons. Lighting may be incorporated into building facades and require approval by HLC.
- Lighting of showcase windows is encouraged.
- Applicants are encouraged to work with the City to accommodate additional lighting fixtures or increase the intensity of existing fixtures.

Planting

- In the 700 through 1200 blocks, *Washingtonia robusta* (Mexican Fan Palm) shall be planted in informal groupings, in keeping with the original style of these blocks.
- Major skyline trees shall be used in prominent locations to add scale and interest. Skyline trees in the 700 through 1200 blocks shall be *Platanus racemosa* (California Sycamore), *Eucalyptus citriodora* (Lemon-scented Gum) and/or *Washingtonia robusta* (Mexican Fan Palm).

- Strive to utilize a diverse selection of plant varieties in order to achieve horticultural interest, color and contrast.
- Plants shall be selected from the El Pueblo Viejo approved list.
- New at-grade planters shall be extended to curb edges wherever possible.
- Shrub and groundcover areas at the base of trees shall be of substantial enough scale to compliment the scale of trees.

Maintenance

The landscape maintenance throughout the State Street Plaza is the responsibility of the Parks and Recreation Department, with planting, pruning and removal of trees as the responsibility of the Parks Division, and day-to-day maintenance of the sidewalks, shrub plantings, and general care being performed under contract with the Downtown Organization.

Since alterations to the existing design may create changes in landscape maintenance responsibilities, all proposed changes must be approved by Park Division staff prior to submitting an application to Historic Landmarks Commission.

CITY OF SANTA BARBARA
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STATE STREET
LANDSCAPING GUIDELINES
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Developed by
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