



## Section 2 **Site and Setting**



## 2.1 Public Rights-of-Way and Alleys

The overall character of Raleigh Historic Districts is defined not only by the historic buildings and their sites, but also by the network of streets, sidewalks, planting strips, and alleys that connect and relate those buildings and sites. The surface materials, dimensions, topography, and pattern of streets, sidewalks, and alleys in the historic districts all play a role in establishing the district character. Public right-of-way features such as trees, streetlights, benches, ground cover, sidewalk paving patterns, curbs, and gutters contribute to a district's character, as do necessary transportation and communication features, such as utility lines and poles, transformers, traffic signs, vending machines, transit stops, and parking booths. Consequently, maintaining the distinctive visual ambiance of a district requires attention to its streets and alleys and their features.



*The original patterned brick pavers still line many of the sidewalks in the Blount Street Historic District.*



*Retaining the granite curbing that edges so many district streets is important in preserving their historic character.*



*The curvilinear street grid of Boylan Heights was designed to follow the natural topography of the site.*



*Alleys like this one provide access to garages and storage buildings along the rear property lines of most properties in Boylan Heights and some properties in Oakwood.*

Right-of-way characteristics vary from district to district; some vary within districts. For example, the curvilinear streets of Boylan Heights contrast sharply with Moore Square's strong rectilinear street grid. On the other hand, the distinctive brick sidewalks in the Blount Street district are also found intermittently within Oakwood. The presence of tree canopies and alleys varies within districts, as do topography and sidewalk placement. Streets in the commercial historic districts incorporate broader sidewalks, a more formal spacing of street trees, and substantially fewer planting strips than those in the residential districts. One unifying characteristic of the districts is their pedestrian-friendly nature. Maintaining this quality requires thoughtful accommodation of current vehicular traffic needs in ways that continue to encourage rather than discourage pedestrian traffic.

### Things to Consider As You Plan

Routine maintenance and repair of the public rights-of-way and alleys should be undertaken with an understanding of the importance of preserving a district's distinctive features. For example, care should be taken to prune street trees appropriately, retain granite curbing, and preserve original brick and concrete sidewalks.

Downtown Raleigh and its early neighborhoods were the first in the city to be supplied with utilities, street lamps, and the related wiring. Although these elements are an inherent part of the districts, the proliferation of cables, lines, equipment, and poles, as well as the sometimes uncoordinated efforts of various utility and service companies, can result in visual clutter that bears little resemblance to the original appearance and clearly diminishes the historic character of the districts. Underground cables may be an option for reducing such visual noise.

Certainly, the introduction of large transformers, utility equipment, dumpsters, and other intrusive elements should be kept to a minimum, and if they must be introduced, they should be unobtrusively located and screened by plantings or fencing. In reviewing proposed new or replacement features, such as streetlights, street furniture, street signs, and walkways, compatibility with the character of the historic district should be considered in terms of location, design, materials, color, and scale.

The preservation and the replenishment of contributing street trees is critical to the historic character of many districts. Beyond monitoring existing trees for disease or damage and protecting them from nearby construction work, achieving this goal will require long-term planning and thoughtful selection of replacement species in consultation with the City's Urban Forester.



## 2.1 Public Rights-of-Way and Alleys: Guidelines

- .1 Preserve and maintain the topography, patterns, features, materials, and dimensions of streets, sidewalks, alleys, and street plantings that contribute to the overall historic character of the historic districts.
- .2 If repair or construction work in the public-right-of-way is necessary, protect and retain historic features such as granite curbing, brick gutters, and street plantings. Replace in kind any damaged or deteriorated historic features. Repair or replace sidewalks, curbs, and paving where needed, to match adjacent historic materials in design, color, module, pattern, texture, and tooling.
- .3 Repair and retain historic bridges whenever possible. Design new bridges to be compatible in design, material, color, and scale with the historic character of the district.
- .4 Prune and trim trees in the public right-of-way in a manner that preserves the existing tree canopies in the historic districts.
- .5 In consultation with the City's Urban Forester, introduce new and replacement plantings to ensure that existing tree canopies will be preserved.
- .6 Limit signage in the public-right-of-way to that necessary for traffic and pedestrian safety. Locate necessary signage so that the historic character of the district is least obscured.
- .7 Introduce necessary street furniture, trash receptacles, mailboxes, newspaper racks, and other similar elements in locations that do not compromise the historic character of the district. Keep such elements to a minimum so that pedestrian traffic is not disrupted. Select street furniture, such as benches, that is compatible in design, material, and scale with the district's historic character.
- .8 Maintain existing planting strips between the curb and the sidewalk. It is not appropriate to pave over existing planting areas.
- .9 Introduce new plantings in the public right-of-way that are compatible with the historic character of the district and coordinated with any overall landscape plan for the district.
- .10 Keep the introduction of additional utility poles, transformers, cables, and wires in the public right-of-way and alleys to a minimum. Seek alternative, less intrusive locations when possible so that the historic character of the district is not compromised by a proliferation of overhead lines, poles, and transformers. Consider introducing new utility lines underground to reduce their impact on the street character.
- .11 Select street lighting compatible in design, materials, and scale with the character and the pedestrian scale of the historic district.
- .12 It is not appropriate to introduce new paving materials, lighting, and streetscape features and furniture in the historic districts in an attempt to create a false historical appearance.
- .13 It is not appropriate to remove, obscure, or conceal granite curbing and granite or brick gutters in the process of repaving streets.



*Wide sidewalks characterize commercial districts.*



## 2.2 Archaeology

Archaeological resources include all material evidence of past human activity usually found below the earth's surface but sometimes exposed above the ground as well. In the historic districts a tremendous wealth of archaeological resources exists, documenting the long-time human habitation of these neighborhoods. The location of original foundations, porches, accessory buildings, walkways, and even gardens can be determined through archaeological surveys. Information on the life-styles of previous inhabitants and patterns of site use can also be culled from archaeological investigations. It is important that such sites be documented; if something is found, contact the RHDC. However, the uncovering of archaeological resources endangers them. Protecting them in place is the best way to safeguard them.



*Test excavations conducted on the grounds of the State Capitol resulted in recommendations for how future site development might occur without damage to remaining archaeological resources.*

### Things to Consider As You Plan

The disturbance of the ground, whether due to grading, excavating, or construction on a site, threatens unknown archaeological resources. Consequently, care must be taken to avoid destroying them when planning any type of substantial site work within the historic districts. It is best to investigate in advance, with a professional, the likelihood that proposed site changes will destroy significant archaeological resources. The Office of State Archaeology within the North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office can provide such professional assistance to property owners.



## 2.2 Archaeology: Guidelines

- .1 Protect and preserve known, significant archaeological resources in place.
- .2 Minimize disturbance of terrain in the district to reduce the possibility of destroying or damaging significant archaeological resources.
- .3 If a site is to be altered, survey and document the terrain in advance to determine the potential impact on significant archaeological resources.
- .4 If preservation of significant archaeological resources in place is not feasible, use professional archaeologists and modern archaeological methods in planning and executing any necessary investigations.
- .5 It is not appropriate to use heavy machinery or equipment on sites where doing so may disturb significant archaeological resources.



*Professional recovery of information from an archaeological site.*



## 2.3 Site Features and Plantings

Site features and plantings not only provide the context for the buildings of the historic districts; they also contribute significantly to the overall character of the districts. The elements of district setting include features that form spaces, including topography, setback and siting of buildings, vistas and views, and plantings such as hedges, foundation plantings, lawns, gardens, and tree canopies; features that define circulation, such as walkways, streets, alleys, driveways, and parking areas; and features that articulate or develop a site, such as accessory buildings, fences, walls, lighting, terraces, waterways, swales, fountains, patios, sculptures, arbors, pergolas, pools, furniture, and planters.

Landscaping and plantings play a significant role in creating the character of most of the historic districts in Raleigh and also reflect the regional climate. Mature gardens, grassy lawns, shrubs, climbing vines, ornamental trees, and tree canopies are typical of the residential historic districts. Historically, large shade trees, prudently located, were an important means of providing summer cooling. Today they still contribute shade as well as distinctive character to the historic districts. Landscaped public spaces such as Capitol Square and Moore Square continue to serve as points of orientation in the downtown while providing the amenity of open green space within an urban environment.

### Things to Consider As You Plan

The character, pattern, and rhythm of plantings and other site features within a historic district should be preserved through proper maintenance and the introduction of compatible new or replacement features. When developing a landscape plan, the property owner should consider the special characteristics of the specific site as well as those of the historic district. Selecting wisely from the existing vocabulary of distinctive site features to define circulation, create site spaces, or otherwise articulate and develop sites within a district is central to preserving the district's character.

Most early Raleigh neighborhoods are shaded by a heavy deciduous tree canopy that adds great aesthetic appeal and historically performed a needed cooling function during the hot summer. Removal of mature, healthy trees should be considered only for absolutely compelling reasons. Whenever a tree is removed, whether it is diseased, storm damaged, or healthy, the district setting is diminished. The planting of a similar replacement tree in its place or nearby helps perpetuate the tree canopy that is so important to the landscape as well as the individual building sites. Long-lived hardwoods are excellent replacement choices for street canopies.

Whenever construction or site work is undertaken, large trees and other significant site features should be protected from immediate damage during construction or delayed damage resulting from construction work, including compaction of the soil by equipment or loss of root area. The critical root zone of a threatened tree must be surrounded by temporary fencing to prevent any construction activity or equipment from endangering it.

The introduction of an intrusive contemporary site feature or item of equipment, such as a parking lot, a swimming pool, freestanding mechanical equipment, or a satellite dish, must be carefully reviewed to determine if it will compromise the historic character of the site and the district. Although the impact of intrusive contemporary site features or equipment can often be diminished through careful siting and screening, in some cases it may be so detrimental to the character of the site or the streetscape that the alteration cannot be accommodated. Such might be the case if the bulk of a residential rear yard were paved for parking or if an addition required the removal of several healthy, mature shade trees.



*Mature shade trees, foundation plantings, and grassy lawns are typical site features in the residential districts.*



*The visual impact of this dumpster and electrical equipment is diminished by the plantings and the enclosing brick wall.*



*As vines climb this contemporary trellis, they will provide additional privacy for the side-rear entrance of a corner lot house.*



## 2.3 Site Features and Plantings: Guidelines

- .1 Retain and preserve the building and landscape features that contribute to the overall historic character of the district, including trees, gardens, yards, arbors, ground cover, fences, accessory buildings, patios, terraces, fountains, fish ponds, and significant vistas and views.
- .2 Retain and preserve the historic relationship between buildings and landscape features of the district setting, including site topography, retaining walls, foundation plantings, hedges, streets, walkways, driveways, and parks.
- .3 Protect and maintain historic building materials and plant features through appropriate treatments, including routine maintenance and repair of constructed elements and pruning and vegetation management of plantings.
- .4 Replace missing or deteriorated site features with new features that are compatible with the character of the site and the historic district.
- .5 Replace a seriously diseased or severely damaged tree or hedge with a new tree or hedge of a similar or identical species. It is not appropriate to remove healthy, mature trees.
- .6 Design new construction or additions so that large trees and other significant site features such as vistas and views are preserved.
- .7 Protect large trees and other significant site features from immediate damage during construction and from delayed damage due to construction activities, such as loss of root area or compaction of the soil by equipment. It is especially critical to avoid compaction of the soil within the drip line of trees.
- .8 In the residential historic districts, it is not appropriate to alter the residential character of the district by significantly reducing the proportion of built area to open space on a given site through new construction, additions, or surface paving.
- .9 It is not appropriate to introduce contemporary equipment or incompatible site features, including satellite dishes, solar collectors, playground equipment, mechanical units, storage units, and swimming pools, in locations that compromise the historic character of the building, site, or the district. Locate such features unobtrusively, and screen them from view.
- .10 It is not appropriate to introduce features or objects that are similar in appearance, material, and scale to historic elements but are stylistically anachronistic with the character of the building or historic district.
- .11 It is not appropriate to alter the topography of a site substantially through grading, filling, or excavating, nor is it appropriate to relocate drainage features, unless there is a specific problem.
- .12 It is not appropriate to use heavy machinery or equipment on sites where doing so may disturb significant archaeological resources.



*A pergola provides a defining edge for this pathway, and provides separation for different areas of the site.*



## 2.4 Fences and Walls



*A wide variety of picket fences constructed of wood or cast iron are found throughout the historic districts. Decorative gates and openings embellish some.*



*Wooden privacy fences and gateways screen views of many backyards in the residential districts.*

Fences and walls were common site features in Raleigh's early neighborhoods, and like other elements of the nineteenth and early twentieth century built-environment, they were usually products of the technology of the Industrial Revolution. They served both decorative and utilitarian functions. Constructed of lattice, brick, cast iron, wooden pickets, and stone, decorative fences and walls reflected popular architecture styles and were an integral part of the site plan. Decorative cornerposts and gateways embellished some fences and walls. In tandem with constructed elements or standing alone, hedges were cultivated for both decorative and screening purposes. Utilitarian fences and walls served to secure boundaries, to confine animals, to protect planted areas, and to provide visual privacy. They were generally used in rear yard locations and were not usually visible from the street. Traditionally, utilitarian fences were constructed of vertical wooden slats or pickets, woven wire fencing mounted on wooden posts, and in some cases, barbed wire.

Simple wooden picket fences with shaped or squared-off tops usually 3 feet in height were popular amenities in early Raleigh neighborhoods. They generally followed the property line or were inset slightly to provide an outer planting strip. By the turn of the century, Victorian domestic cast-iron fences that followed the same proportions as older, more common picket fences were popular in some neighborhoods as well. Trimmed hedges of plant varieties typical in the region were common too.

Low masonry walls, many times combined with low hedge material, were used to define some front lawns or property lines. Masonry or stone retaining walls were occasionally employed to accommodate a significant shift in grade between the street and the front lawn.

### Things to Consider As You Plan

Preservation of existing historic fences and walls requires routine maintenance and repair when necessary. Keeping the bottom edge of wooden fencelines raised slightly above the ground and protected by a sound paint film, opaque stain, or wood preservative will significantly extend their life span. When deteriorated pickets or boards must be replaced, decay-resistant or pressure-treated wood should be selected. Cast-iron fences require similar separation from ground moisture and protection with a sound paint film to prevent corrosion. Removal of all rust and immediate priming with an appropriate metal primer are critical to the repainting process. If replacement is necessary, a variety of traditional and contemporary cast-iron fencing is manufactured today. Masonry walls, except those that are stucco coated, are usually unpainted. The structural integrity of a masonry wall can be compromised by deteriorated mortar joints, vegetation, and improper drainage of ground or surface water. Repointing as necessary and maintaining or introducing drainage weep holes near the base of masonry walls are advisable. Coating uncoated masonry walls with paint or sealants instead of properly repairing them may exacerbate any moisture problems and diminish their historic character. The guidelines for wood, architectural metals, and masonry provide additional information on proper maintenance and repair of traditional fence and wall materials.

A need for security or privacy or the desire to enhance a site may lead to a decision to introduce a new fence or wall. Within the historic districts any proposed new fence is reviewed with regard to the compatibility of location, materials, design, pattern, scale, spacing, and color with the character of the principal building on the site and the historic district. Although compatible contemporary fence and wall designs constructed in traditional materials are appropriate in the districts, new fencing or wall systems constructed of incompatible contemporary materials such as vinyl or chain-link fencing and imitation stone or stucco are not considered appropriate.



## 2.4 Fences and Walls: Guidelines

- .1 Retain and preserve fences and walls that contribute to the overall historic character of a building or a site, including such functional and decorative elements as gates, decorative rails and pickets, pillars, posts, and hardware.
- .2 Retain and preserve exterior fence and wall materials that contribute to the overall historic character of a building or a site, including brickwork, stucco, stone, concrete, wood, cast iron, and wrought iron.
- .3 Protect and maintain the wood, masonry, and metal elements of fences and walls through appropriate surface treatments:
  - Inspect regularly for signs of moisture damage, corrosion, structural damage or settlement, vegetation, and fungal or insect infestation.
  - Provide adequate drainage to prevent water from standing on flat, horizontal surfaces and collecting on decorative elements or along wall foundations.
  - Clean fences and walls as necessary to remove heavy soiling or corrosion or to prepare them for repainting. Use the gentlest means possible.
  - Retain protective surface coatings such as paint to prevent deterioration or corrosion.
  - Reapply protective surface coatings such as paint when they are damaged or deteriorated.
  - Follow the guidelines for masonry, architectural metals, and wood where applicable.
- .4 Repair fences and walls using recognized preservation repair methods for the material or the surface coating.
- .5 If replacement of a deteriorated detail or element of a fence or a wall is necessary, replace only the deteriorated portion in kind rather than the entire feature. Match the original in design, dimension, detail, texture, pattern, material, and color. Consider compatible substitute materials only if using the original material is not technically feasible.
- .6 If replacement of an entire fence or wall is necessary because of deterioration, replace it in kind, matching the original in design, dimension, detail, texture, pattern, material, and color. Consider compatible substitute materials only if using the original material is not technically feasible.
- .7 If a fence or wall is completely missing, replace it with a new wall or feature based on accurate documentation of the original or a new design compatible with the historic character of the building and the district.
- .8 Introduce compatible new fences and walls constructed of traditional materials only in locations and configurations that are characteristic of the historic district. Keep the height of new fences and walls consistent with the height of traditional fences and walls in the district.
- .9 It is not appropriate to cover historic fence or wall material, including wood, stone, brick, stucco, concrete, or cement block, with contemporary substitute coatings or materials.
- .10 It is not appropriate to introduce vinyl or metal chain-link fencing.
- .11 It is not appropriate to introduce walls or fences taller than 42” or that are more than 65% solid into the front yard area (and/or street side yard area of a corner lot).



*An arbor combined with a recessed gate provides an inviting entry.*



## 2.5 Walkways, Driveways, and Offstreet Parking

Walkways, driveways, and offstreet parking areas are all circulation site features that contribute to the character of the individual building site and the historic district. The consistency and the repetition of walkway and driveway spacing, placement, dimensions, materials, and design create a rhythm to the street in historic districts.

In Raleigh's early neighborhoods, front walks usually led directly to the front door from the sidewalk. Depending on the topography, the walkways often incorporated steps and, sometimes if the front yard was fenced, a decorative gateway. Traditional paving materials were concrete and brick or stone pavers. Plantings often lined the walkways.

Not all residential sites included driveways in Raleigh's early neighborhoods, and often single-lane driveways were shared in the more densely built neighborhoods such as Oakwood. Driveways usually led directly to the back yard, sometimes to a carriage house or a garage. Public alleys sometimes provided automobile access to back yards and garages instead. Occasionally, porte cochères provided a covered parking space attached to the main building. Typically, driveways were made of gravel or compacted soil. Often a grass median separated two gravel or aggregate-textured concrete runners. Occasionally, more decorative brick or stone pavers were used.

Historically, offstreet parking areas for multiple cars were not common in the residential neighborhoods or commercial areas. Initially, onstreet parking met the demand for parking spaces, even in the commercial districts.

### Things to Consider As You Plan

The preservation of existing walkways and driveways through routine maintenance and replacement of deteriorated surfaces in kind is essential to preserving the character of individual building sites and the district. When new walkways or driveways are proposed in a historic district, they should be designed to be compatible in location, patterns, spacing, configurations, dimensions, and materials with existing walkways and driveways.

If a parking lot must be located in a historic district, it should be located as unobtrusively as possible and must be screened from street view by a substantial planting strip or a combination of plantings and fencing. As many existing trees as possible should be saved, and new trees planted, to maintain or enhance the tree canopy. This not only helps integrate parking lots into the historic district; it also helps reduce the glare and the heat associated with parking lots and keeps the interiors of parked vehicles cooler. Large offstreet parking lots should be subdivided by planting strips to diminish the impact of the surface paving.

In the historic districts of primarily commercial or institutional character, increased demand for parking has led to the construction of some parking decks as well as numerous offstreet parking areas. Accommodating expanded parking needs within these districts demands thoughtful design solutions based on a thorough understanding of the significant characteristics of the districts.

Parking areas should be gravel, brick, or paved with an aggregate-textured asphalt. In residential districts, new paved areas should never directly abut the principal site structure, significantly alter the site topography, or overwhelm in area the residential, landscaped character of a backyard. Care must be taken that paved areas do not injure nearby trees by intruding onto their root areas.



*Single-lane shared driveways like this brick one are quite common in the Oakwood Historic District, where many residences are tightly spaced.*



*Simple driveways consisting of concrete or gravel runners with a grassy median are typical in the residential historic districts.*



*A planting island densely planted with trees visually subdivides this parking area and helps minimize the impact of the large paved area.*