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City of Los Angeles
Guidelines for Landscape Improvements Within the Street Right-of-Way

The following is a partial list of some of the guidelines and policies that apply to landscape related improvements within the public right-of-way. Some of these are mandatory and covered by existing ordinances and codes, while others are departmental policies developed over the course of time and enforced by City technical staff. Please note that this is not a complete and comprehensive list of all landscape/streetscape guidelines currently in effect. Both mandatory and departmental polices are enforced to provide the greatest public benefit while limit/minimizing associated liabilities and supporting the City's maintenance practices. All policies/guidelines apply to landscape/streetscape improvements within the public right-of-way and should be followed to the greatest extent possible.

Definitions:

Median or Median Island: An elongated traffic island typically running down the middle of the street. It can be a raised traffic island with curbs all around it, an unimproved, longitudinal section of the roadway absent of pavement or curbing between opposing lanes of traffic, or an implied median island that is indicated with yellow/gold colored traffic lane striping. Median islands are used to provide a physical separation between vehicular traffic running in opposite directions on the same street. Median islands are typically improved with some form of landscaping; they can have a paved surface or an unimproved (dirt) surface.

Sidewalk: This is the area that exists between the curb and adjacent property line, and can consist of nothing more than sidewalks, but more often than not are a combination of both sidewalk and a parkway or parking strip (planted areas typically between the curb and sidewalk) within the street right-of-way. On unimproved streets that do not have any curbing or sidewalks, this area is defined as the part of the street that exists between the edge of street pavement or street line, and the adjacent property line. Items one typically finds within sidewalk areas include sidewalks, driveway aprons, access ramps, traffic signage, traffic signals, street lights, fire hydrants, utility poles, utility boxes, street trees, planting areas, under sidewalk drain lines from adjacent buildings, and storm drains. In more urbanized areas, you might also find transit shelters, bus benches, trash receptacles, and public art placed within the sidewalk area.

Service Road Island or Frontage Road Island: This is typically an elongated raised island that separates a major thoroughfare from a narrower, parallel section of roadway that

typically allows access to either residential properties or smaller commercial/businesses. These are different from median islands in that they are off to the side of the major thoroughfare and not in the middle of the street. The term “service road” and “frontage road” are often used interchangeably. These elongated islands are sometimes landscaped, but are typically either covered with pavement or left undeveloped.

Traffic Circle: This is typically a specialized raised traffic island that is intentionally placed in the middle of an intersection to direct traffic in a one-way motion around it. Traffic circles can either be landscaped or paved; because they’re in the middle of an intersection, all improvements are usually kept fairly low for visibility purposes.

Traffic island: This is usually a smaller, raised island one might find off to the side of an intersection that is often triangular in shape. In one sense, it also refers to median islands but for the sake of streetscaping, we should keep the definition to any raised or painted traffic island that is not an elongated median island, service/frontage road island, traffic circle, or parkway.

General:

1. Street medians or other traffic islands that are 5' in width (measured from curb face to curb face) or less shall be landscaped with a decorative/enhanced form of paving. This especially applies to median islands with tapered noses, and median island areas adjacent to left-hand turn stacking lanes. Exceptions to this requirement to accommodate alternative landscape improvements (plantings) for these areas can be made only if corresponding maintenance provisions are included/provided by the permittee/developer and agreed upon by the Bureau of Street Services.

2. Similarly, where high vehicular/pedestrian traffic exists, provide/install decorative/enhanced paved surfaces on the first 10' (longitudinally) of a median island (& across its entire width). This is a minimum area; more paving may be applied as the traffic and pedestrian related conditions warrant.

3. In smaller, irregularly shaped median islands (less than 1000 s.f. excluding pedestrian walkway areas), regular landscape maintenance is difficult to provide for City crews. All attempts should be made to provide a long lasting, decorative/enhanced, non-living ground cover. Acceptable examples include decomposed granite, cobblestones set in mortar, interlocking pavers, certain tile/pavers (clay, concrete, asphalt) set in mortar, patterned colored asphalt, patterned colored concrete, etc. As in Note 1 above, alternative landscape improvements may be used only with the provision of alternative maintenance contingencies.

4. In general, any permanent fixed object (sign, monument, artwork, raised fountain, etc.) located within 50 feet of the nose of a traffic island should be designed and constructed to break away from its anchoring foundation when struck by a vehicle. It is further recommended that other fixed objects located on interior sections of median islands be installed with a similar break-away design. Standard, fixed (non break away) footings/anchoring devices may be required as determined by the City Engineer based upon the overall size, height, and weight (mass) of the proposed improvement.

5. Any fixed object within a median shall be designed in a manner that will not cause cars to possibly flip over or become airborne (i.e. ramp shaped items are to be

avoided).

Planting:

6. All plantings within the "45' Visibility Triangle" at intersections need to be 36" or less in height (measured from the finished surface of the adjoining roadway) at full maturity; trees, dense shrubs, or street furniture are not to be installed within this area. Exceptions to the aforementioned restrictions may be granted on a case by case basis at intersections controlled by traffic signals or traffic control devices. Streetscape plantings shall be designed to eliminate and prevent pedestrian/vehicular accidents, and/or vehicular accidents.

7. Trees on streets designated as secondary collectors or larger with posted speed limits between 35 and 40 miles per hour are to be sited (per National and local codes) to provide a minimum viewing distance of 325' for vehicular drivers to all traffic signal heads or control signage at intersections. Other sightline distance clearances are required based upon roadway width, classification, and designated speed limits.

8. Tree spacing is species dependent. Trees should not be planted/installed at intervals closer than those indicated on the Bureau of Street Service's Street Tree Selection Guide. In situations where the Guide does not provide spacing requirements for a particular species of tree or the tree species selected is not listed, the Bureau of Street Services Urban Forestry Division should be contacted and requested to provide a minimum/maximum tree spacing interval.

9. Where ever possible, plant materials selected and used shall be drought tolerant with the ability to survive on naturally occurring rainfall within 3 years of their initial installation. Plant materials should also be selected with a minimum natural life span of twenty to twenty five years. Annuals and/or perennials with a natural life span of 3 to 7 years or less are to be avoided unless a special maintenance district or on-going maintenance provisions by the permittee/developer are established to replace these plants on a regular basis.

10. In general, plant materials shall not be noxious, invasive, poisonous, or have exposed thorns and spines. Allowances may be made a case by case basis for some plant materials that might otherwise be excluded by such characteristics, depending upon their application within a given location, surrounding site factors, project needs/intent, and associated liabilities.

Irrigation:

11. All planting areas, especially within medians, traffic islands, or traffic circles, must be equipped with an automated irrigation system. Irrigation systems should be designed to utilize both potable and non-potable (reclaimed) water to enable systems to be switched to a non-potable water source in the future when/if it becomes available.

    Some of the typical irrigation components/materials accepted/required by the City are listed below:

    a. Water meter – each median island or contiguous parkway within a given block must be equipped with its own water meter/point of connection for any irrigation system installed. Continuously pressurized irrigation main-lines shall

not be installed beneath roadway pavement; irrigation main-lines that might connect multiple median/traffic islands, median/traffic islands and parkways, and/or parkways on separate blocks of the same street will not be allowed.

b. LA-DWP/County Health Dept. approved reduced pressure type back-flow device
c. The City typically uses a solar powered irrigation controller to avoid the necessity of an electrical service connection.
d. Steel, vandal resistant enclosures for above grade irrigation components is highly recommended. Stainless steel finish is preferred; painted green or dark green finish is acceptable.
e. All valves, both automatic and manually operated valves, shall be of brass or bronze bodied construction.
f. All remote control valves (RCV's) shall be identified with permanent, plastic identification tag affixed to the valve itself, noting the station/circuit/valve g. All valve boxes shall be made of pre-cast concrete with lockable, cast-iron, traffic rated lids. The lids shall have 1 ½" high cast/embossed lettering identifying the valve box contents (i.e. RCV, GV, METER, ELECTRICAL, etc.)
g. Remote control wiring shall be direct burial type, minimum 14 gauge
h. All sub-grade electrical connections shall be done with water-proof connectors; regular twist on wire nuts and/or electrical tape covered connections are not acceptable.
i. Continuously pressured main lines and all plastic threaded fittings shall be of Schedule 80 PVC; Lateral irrigation lines shall be of Schedule 40 PVC; Above grade pipe servicing the back-flow device shall be of brass or bronze. Sleeves shall be of Sch. 40 PVC twice the diameter of the pipe being carried by the sleeve.
j. Micro-spray, drip, or subgrade irrigation systems are preferred irrigation devices for watering planted areas within the Public Right-of-ways. Irrigation systems that may be maintained by the City of Los Angeles will be reviewed and accepted on a case by case basis. Overhead spray systems may be allowed for large landscaped areas but are not preferred due to their inefficiency.
k. Check valves shall be provided as required to prevent low-head drainage

Other applicable polices, standards or codes that are used by the City of Los Angeles include the State of Califonrnia Streets and Highways Code, City of Los Angeles Municipal Code, the Standard Specifications for Public Works Construction (BNI Publications Inc.) aka "the Greenbook", City of Los Angeles Department of Public Works Standard Plans (available on-line at ***http://eng.lacity.org/techdocs/stdplans/index.htm***), American Association of State Highway Transportation Officials (AASHTO) Guidelines, and Work Area Traffic Control Handbook (BNI Publications). These are several of the more prominent documents that have a direct bearing on streetscape development/design. Other City Department policies and standards as well as other State/County codes and statutes may also be applicable depending on the location and proposed improvements

As initially mentioned, this is a partial list of the guidelines that affect streetscape design. Should you have any questions, please contact the Bureau of Street Services – Landscape/Streetscape Development Section at (213) 847-0881.