

The Olmsted City

The Olmsted Parks Conservancy & Parkway System

Design Guidelines



For new construction and landscape features adjoining & within the view shed of the Olmsted parks, parkways & historic streetscapes of Buffalo, New York.

Prepared by:
The Buffalo Olmsted Parks Conservancy
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The Conservancy is working toward the preservation and enhancement of the parks, parkways, avenues and circles and their historic settings in an effort to present the parks in an authentic and attractive manner.



Design Guidelines

Foreword

These Design Guidelines are intended to inform the Conservancy and those interested in preserving the integrity of the historic landmarks of the Olmsted parks, parkways, and streetscapes and the urban context which frames them, of ways to design new structures which will be compatible with the parks, parkways and streetscapes, thus protecting them from inappropriate development in the parkland view shed. Development proposals will be scrutinized through a clear and transparent process of presentation and discussion, allowing the Conservancy to comment and make suggestions for improvements to the planned developments.

The remarkable imprint of American 19th Century landscape architect, Frederick Law Olmsted is unmistakable and extensive. From the “crown jewel” Delaware Park to petite Day’s Park in the Allentown neighborhood, this park system, the nation’s first, frames the way Buffalo is experienced and perceived. Beginning in 1868 and lasting until the 1920’s Olmsted and his firm designed and augmented a system of interconnected parks, linking these open spaces with “sylvan walks” along leafy, tree lined streetscapes; expansive parkways, and shady avenues punctuated by landmark traffic circles. Olmsted’s goal was revolutionary for the 19th century and remains too rare today, to create a “city within a park,” as he so aptly described it.

Over the years and decades Buffalo’s Olmsted system has eroded, losing some key elements of the original design and seeing the construction of some unfortunate modern buildings “conveniently” located in irreplaceable park lands. However, a remarkable and unique public/private partnership between the city of Buffalo and the nonprofit advocacy group, the Buffalo Olmsted Parks Conservancy,

has allowed for a renaissance in the care, management and restoration of the city’s 19th century masterpiece parks and parkways. The impact on the city has been profound. The efficient maintenance of these landscapes has allowed the city to enjoy an aesthetic attraction and enhanced appearance that is strengthening property values and quality of life throughout the city. The Olmsted Parks and Parkway were added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1982, recognizing the unique and singularly important quality of this masterwork of the nation’s greatest landscape architect and his successors. Much of the original housing and commercial structures associated with the Olmsted legacy in Buffalo remain intact, where other areas in the city that date from the same era are suffering from massive abandonment and decline. Olmsted himself theorized that the impact on real estate values from parkland would be significant, tracking property values adjacent to Central Park for many years. Other more recent studies have borne him out. As the parks have slowly regained greater historic integrity through the restoration of basic Olmsted designed landscape patterns, real estate values have stabilized and in some cases increased dramatically since the Conservancy assumed operations of the parks. Development pressure is looming and proposals for new construction are being contemplated. The Conservancy is working toward the preservation and enhancement of the parks, parkways, avenues and circles and their historic settings in an effort to present the parks in an authentic and attractive manner. The goal is not to obstruct, but rather to instruct and ultimately to develop new construction that complements and enhances Buffalo’s remarkable 19th century landscape legacy, an inheritance from our past which the Conservancy will work to improve and leave as an urban jewel for future citizens and visitors to our Olmsted Community.

Thomas Herrera-Mishler 10/11/10

Design Guidelines



Amherst Street at Parkside Avenue

Executive Summary

In the Buffalo Olmsted Parks Conservancy's ongoing efforts to restore and preserve the historic character of the Olmsted Parks and Parkway System in the City of Buffalo, preserving the character of adjacent structures and landscapes as the setting for the park is a critical component. The repair to existing structures as well as new construction in the form of additions and new buildings creates an ongoing potential opportunity to enhance the character of the existing historic resources, as well as a significant potential threat to their preservation. Clear guidelines for new construction are an important part of the preservation of the Olmsted landscapes and communities.

Any new construction that takes place within the park system itself is regulated by a stricter process through adherence to the Conservancy's master plan, The Plan for the 21st Century, and by the Secretary of the Interior's Standards, including the Standards for Preservation Planning and the Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties. However, the guidelines set out below will also be used to review the design for any new construction to take place within the park system.

The Guidelines for New Construction Adjoining the Olmsted Park and Parkway System are broken down into two sections: New Construction and Landscape Features. The key component of preserving the character of these places is compatibility. Compatibility is based on a thorough understanding of the architectural design principles and analyses of the character defining features of the existing historic resources (in this case a park and parkway system and the historic neighborhoods surrounding it) representing the period of significance for a place, a street, or a community.

For new buildings, the design principles that collectively provide the basis for compatibility of a new structure are set out below. Definitions for the various terms can be found in the glossary appended at the end of the guidelines.

Design Guidelines

- **Setbacks** – Appropriate setbacks from all property lines, including those required by zoning.
- **Orientation** – Structures should be oriented toward the street or center of the circle it faces, although an entry may be on the side of the structure, as found in a number of historic buildings surrounding the parks.
- **Scale** – The relative or apparent size of a building and its elements should be similar to the other buildings in the historic context.
- **Proportion** – The relationship of the dimensions of building elements to each other and to the overall structure should be similar to the other buildings in the historic context.
- **Rhythm** – The spacing of repetitive façade elements as well as the spacing between structures and heights of roofs, cornices, towers and other roof projections establishes the rhythm of a street and should be similar to the other buildings in the historic context.
- **Massing** – The arrangement of the elements of a building's plan and façade and their proportions, including such elements as bays, porches, wings, towers and steps, etc. should be similar to the other buildings in the historic context.
- **Height** – Compatibility in height is based on the variety of existing structure heights on the block. If the range is narrow it should not exceed any other structure by more than one story. If the range is broad a new building should not exceed the average height of a majority of the structures in the neighborhood by more than one story.
- **Materials** – Compatibility in materials is based on the variety of the existing structures' materials on the block. If the range is narrow, new construction is limited to the variability of build materials of existing structures. If the range is broad, new construction would be compatible with any of the variety of existing building materials. New materials may be considered when they are compatible in color, texture, and surface finish.
- **Color** – Generally, the number of colors used on a new building should not exceed the number typically found in the neighborhood.
- **Roof Shape** – The shape of the roof should be compatible with the other buildings in the historic context.
- **Detail and Ornamentation** – many historic buildings in Buffalo contain elaborate detail and ornamentation; new construction could consider similar or contemporary interpretations of these elements as possible elements to assist in determining compatibility.

- Compatibility of a new structure is achieved by respecting the existing character of the neighboring structures and the street, and using that as a basis for the design principles upon which the new design is based. In the same way, landscape features significantly contribute to the character of a historic building and its neighborhood. For landscape features, compatibility generally relates to the period of significance of the park and neighborhood's development and the corresponding garden style of the time.

The era of the Buffalo Olmsted Park's development covers two trends in garden design. During the latter half of the nineteenth century the Victorian garden romantic landscape style was prevalent, with natural forms, exotic, picturesque, and ornamental planting

displays. The early part of the twentieth century was marked with a shift towards Colonial Revival Style with more formal, symmetrical and understated planting plans. It is appropriate for landscapes associated with new construction to be developed so as to be compatible with the design style of the time during the neighborhood's development.



Design Guidelines

- **Front Yard** -The front landscape, that being the side facing the primary street, is one of the most important character defining features of a historic building by establishing the context for a building and helping to relate it to its neighbors through the use of common design and plant material. In this way landscape features such as sidewalks, pathways, driveways, curb cuts, fences, retaining walls, decks and patios, when located in the front yard, contribute to the property and neighborhood. Parking lots located adjacent to public streets were not a part of the historic landscape and are incompatible today.

Materials, alignments, and scale should be consistent with the design style and neighboring landscapes. Design and material can often times be based on existing features within the neighborhood, or on documentary or photographic evidence. Elimination of the front yard landscape for hardscape, parking, or alteration for utilitarian uses generally found in the backyard are inappropriate.

- **Secondary Structures** - such as garages, sheds or carriage houses are generally located in the rear of the property and may or may not be considered contributing structures. Consultation with the Buffalo Preservation Board is recommended prior to removing or altering an existing secondary contributing structure. Rear landscapes out of public view are of lesser concern under these guidelines, however, it is recommended that all zoning code regulations relating to scale and height of landscape features be reviewed prior to construction or major renovations.

- **Sustainability** – New construction should be as energy efficient and sustainable as possible without compromising the other design principles outlined here.

For new building construction, additions and landscapes for properties adjoining the Olmsted Park and Parkway System, compatibility is the general guideline for preserving the character of the Olmsted community. Presented within this document are the key elements on which compatibility can be achieved. Consultation and review with the Buffalo Olmsted Parks Conservancy for any new construction or alterations to existing structures or landscape within the primary view shed of the parks and parkways is strongly encouraged.



Riverside Park

Structures located across the street from one of the Olmsted parks benefit greatly from their location. It is hoped that all new structures built adjacent to the parks, parkways and historic streetscapes will likewise enhance their settings.

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Design Guidelines

I. New Construction

The design of a new building within the park's view sheds can be critical to preserving the character of the Olmsted Park and Parkway System. The new building should contribute to that character by respecting the location, design, materials and other character-defining elements of adjoining historic buildings, as well as respecting the character of the landscape and other important features of the Olmsted Park and Parkway System. It is not suggested here that a single building type or architectural style be used for new construction. Instead, it is recommended that a thorough review of the area surrounding the project site be made by the designer to influence and direct the proposed design. In subsequently reviewing new construction, quality and excellence of design that relates to the project's historic context will be one of the chief factors that is looked for, and which will allow for the building of future landmarks in the city of Buffalo.

Larger projects, involving multiple buildings and large land areas, will likely require a more in-depth review, and may have additional areas where compatibility must be assessed that are not included below.

A new building in a historic district or adjacent to the parks must also conform to Buffalo's zoning and building codes.

The key to the design of a new building that enhances the existing environment is its compatibility with neighboring buildings. A new building should be compatible with the existing environment without necessarily duplicating existing or historic buildings. Perhaps the best way to think about a compatible new building is that it should be a good neighbor, enhancing the character of the district and respecting the context, rather than being an exact clone or disregarding or disrespecting its neighbors. The existing historic buildings bordering the parks and parkways range from the palatial to the humble. They all form part of the historic context and each building type and grouping must be respected. New construction can be in a similar, or different, style to the buildings in its context. Styles cannot be strictly assigned to a unique origin in a specific time or context, as they may be found to recur in repeated revivals within different periods and contexts. Therefore

a variation of styles can be tolerated and accepted for any period, including the present. At the same time, a unity of composition can be maintained, through principles of compatibility, and does not require a unity of style.

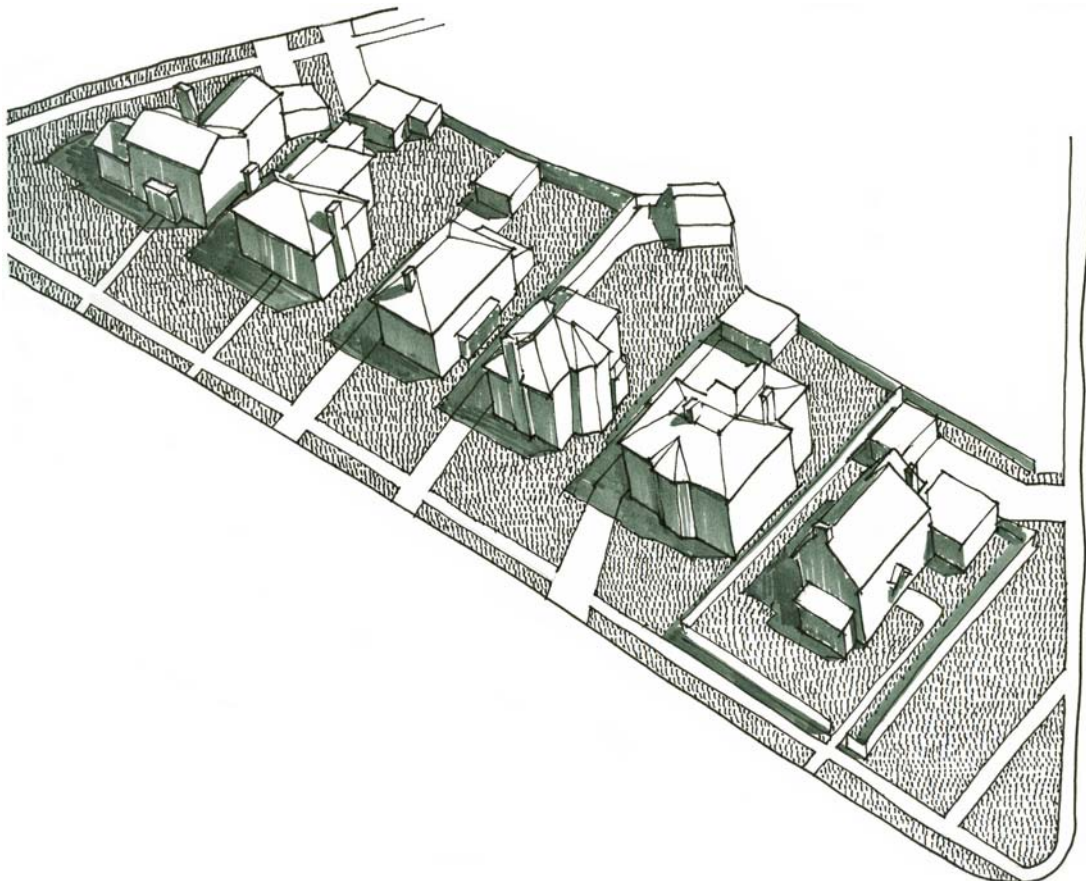
Compatibility is based on a thorough understanding of the design principles of existing buildings, as well as those used to design landscape features and secondary buildings on the site. Compatibility should also involve analysis of how these design principles are used in the neighborhood and how they can be interpreted using today's materials and construction techniques. Compatibility does not necessarily mean exact compliance with each principal delineated below, but the combination of all the principals as developed in the new design must be harmonious with its neighbors.

Designing a new building that contributes to, rather than detracts from, the character of a historic landscape begins with an analysis of the character defining features of the existing historic buildings, streets and landscapes, and then studying the design principles which have produced that character, finally applying them to the new design.

I. Setback

In addition to complying with the legal setback requirements, a new building should respect the setbacks established by the buildings on a street. For example, the front of a new building should not extend beyond the line created by the fronts of existing buildings, even if allowed to do so by code. In streets with contiguous front facades, such as many of the streets in Buffalo, whether there are single-family, multi-family or row houses or commercial blocks, it is very important that the facade of a new building align with the facades of its neighbors. On the other hand, respecting the alignment of rear facades is not generally as critical because they usually cannot be seen from a public street and thus are not part of an overall, publicly perceived composition.

The aerial view below is of one block of Chapin Parkway that illustrates several principles. In this block all the houses have similar setbacks, thus while built at different times they all respected the setbacks of their neighbors. While some of the houses have entries on the sides, and others facing the street, they all present finished elevations to the street, or in the case of the house all the way on the right, it is oriented towards Gates Circle and faces that direction. All the houses have a similar scale, and they each are placed to compliment the rhythm of the streetscape. The massing of each house is similar, and their roof shapes, while varied, are harmonious with one another.



2. Orientation

Most historic buildings squarely face a street, with their principal facade and entrance in full view. A number of historic buildings have their entries on the side, although they still remain oriented squarely to the street, while others are oriented to a side yard. In some cases in Buffalo where the lot lines are not perpendicular to the street they face, historic buildings have been oriented parallel to the lot lines instead of perpendicular to the street. In any case, new buildings should respect the primary orientation of their neighbors.

The previous aerial view of one block of Chapin Parkway illustrates several principles. In this block all the houses have similar setbacks, thus while built at different times they all respected the setbacks of their neighbors. While some of the houses have entries on the sides, and others facing the street, they all present finished elevations to the street, or in the case of the house all the way on the right, it is oriented towards Gates Circle and faces that direction. All the houses have a similar scale, and they each are placed to compliment the rhythm of the streetscape. The massing of each house is similar, and their roof shapes, while varied, are harmonious with one another.

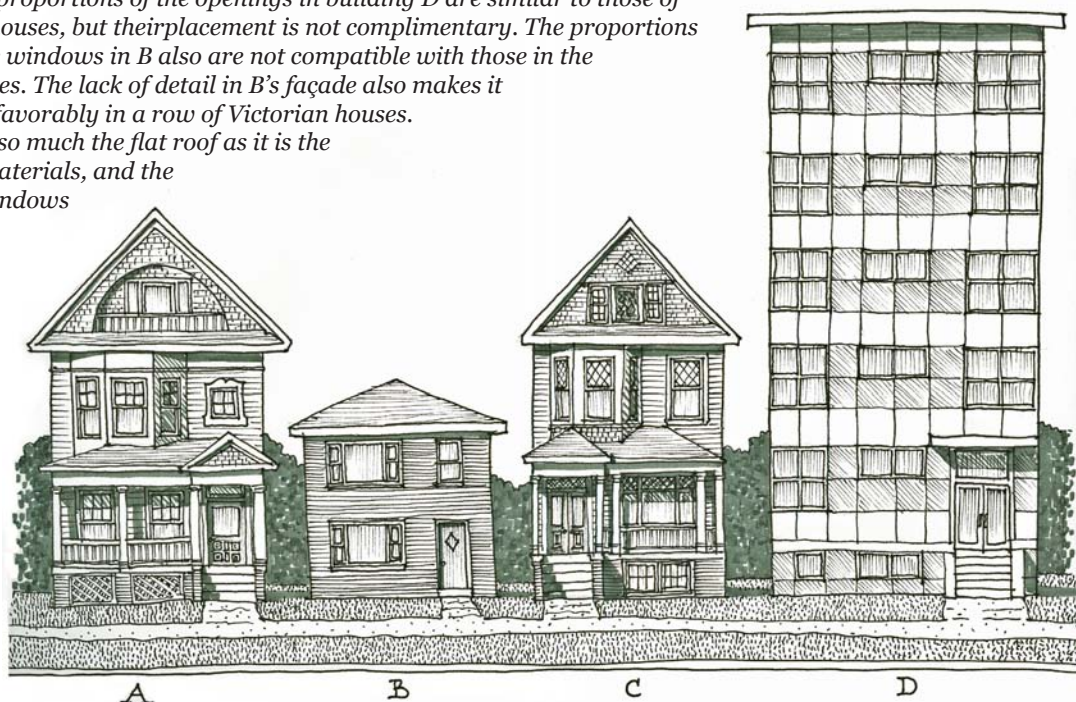
Those houses located on Olmsted Park System Circles should be oriented toward the center of the circle, or in circles that have square boundaries, to the edge they face. Refer to The Olmsted City, Buffalo's Olmsted Parks Plan for the 21st Century for planned and proposed circles.

3. Scale

Most buildings are designed to relate to human scale, that is, they are designed to relate to the size of an average human being. Typically, residential buildings are designed to have human scale. Other buildings are designed to be of monumental, or larger than human scale. This is usually done to give a building prominence or symbolic importance. Typically, monumental scale is associated with governmental and religious buildings.

Scale can be achieved in many ways. For example, windows, doors, cornices and other elements can be enlarged to impart a sense of monumentality or they can be human in scale. Facades can be heavily rusticated, contributing to a sense of monumentality, or of plain materials and treatments, making the building appear human in scale. The scale of a new building should usually respect the prevailing scale of its neighbors.

Several points are illustrated in the drawing below, with buildings A and C being existing historic houses, building B recently constructed, and D, a new apartment house. Buildings like A and C have established the rhythm of the streetscape, and the new buildings B and D have adhered to that rhythm, however D has not respected the height by being too high, and B has not respected the height of the existing houses by being slab-on-grade with low ceiling heights, thus too low. The proportions of the openings in building D are similar to those of the existing houses, but their placement is not complimentary. The proportions of the picture windows in B also are not compatible with those in the existing houses. The lack of detail in B's façade also makes it stand out unfavorably in a row of Victorian houses. In D it is not so much the flat roof as it is the height, the materials, and the pattern of windows that are not compatible.



4. Proportion

Proportions in an architectural composition are found in the relationship of the dimensions of building elements, including larger elements such as bays, porches, and towers, and smaller elements such as windows and doors. The relationships to each other and to the overall elevation make up the proportional system of a building. Often, proportions are expressed as mathematical ratios, particularly for buildings based on Greek, Roman and Renaissance architecture. For example, many historic buildings designed in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries use mathematical proportions to locate and size windows, doors, columns, cornices and other building elements.

The pattern of windows and doors on a façade makes up part of the proportional system, and the pattern in a new building should be similar to that of existing historic buildings in its context. For instance, large expanses of glass, or of solid wall, would not be compatible in a streetscape with traditional door and window proportions and sizes. Also, window orientation should relate to the historic patterns, thus a horizontal picture window in a street of Victorian houses with vertically oriented windows would be incompatible.

The design of a new building should respect and relate to, but not necessarily exactly duplicate, the existing proportions of neighboring buildings.

5. Rhythm

The spacing of repetitive facade elements, such as projecting bays, storefronts, windows, doors, belt courses and the like, give an elevation its rhythm. The space between freestanding buildings, their width, and the height of roofs, cornices, towers and other roof projections establish the rhythm of a street. A new building should respect the rhythm of its neighbors as well as that of the street.

6. Massing

Massing involves the arrangement of a building's facade and its elements in relation to the building height and plan through the use of facade projections such as bays, porches, wings, towers and steps, and the arrangement of gables and roofs to complete the overall composition. A building's massing significantly contributes to the character of a street, and thus new buildings should respect and relate to the massing of neighboring historic buildings. Porches are a nearly ubiquitous feature of houses in Buffalo, and as such are an important massing element to consider utilizing in a new design in order to enhance the compatibility of the design.

7. Height

The height of walls, cornices and roofs, as well as the height of bays, chimneys and towers, contributes to the character of existing buildings and districts.

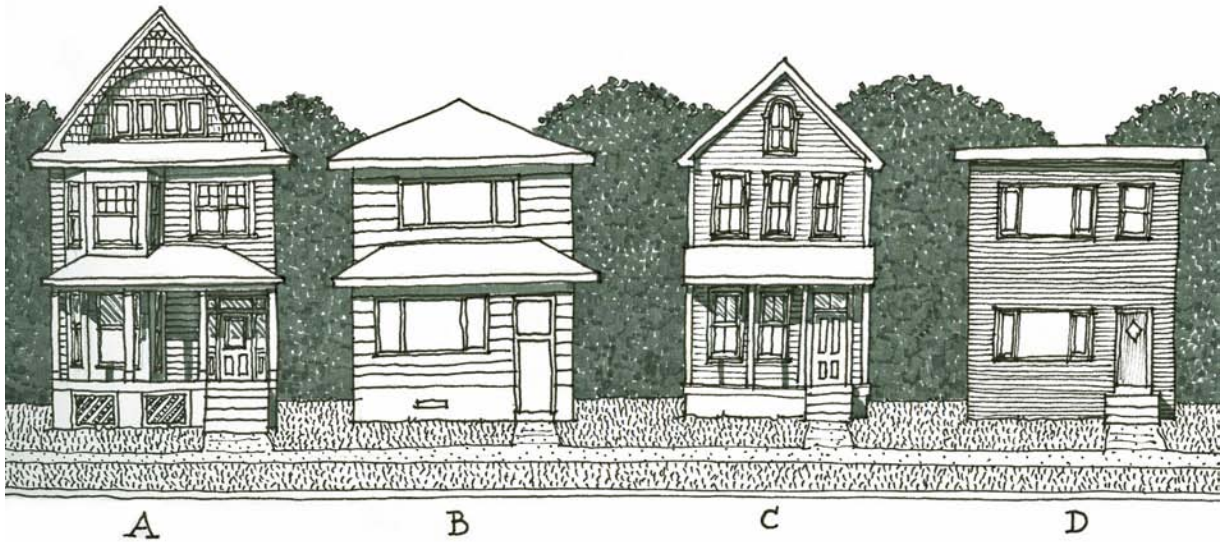
While a new building does not necessarily need to be exactly the same height as its neighbors to be compatible, it should be designed to respect existing building heights. For example, a new five story building in a block of two- and three-story buildings typically detracts from the character of the street. Similarly, a new one-story building in a block of four- or five-story buildings will be out of character.

In like manner, a two-story slab on grade structure with minimal floor to floor heights would be incompatible with a block of two-story houses built on high basements with 12' ceilings.

Typically, if a new building is more than one story higher or lower than existing buildings that are all the same height, it will be out of character. On the other hand, a new building built in a street of existing buildings of varied heights may be more than one story higher or lower than its immediate neighbors and still be compatible. If there are unusually tall buildings close by (that is, well above the average height of the majority of structures in the neighborhood), that should not be taken as license to build something equally tall, but rather, the new building should match the height range found in the majority of buildings in the neighborhood, not exceeding it by more than one story, as mentioned above. The height of each floor is a consideration, as a major difference in story height can also lead to incompatibility. New buildings should be a minimum of two stories in height, unless a one-story building's scale and height gives it a similar massing to other buildings on the street, thus making it compatible .

Variety is a key ingredient in Buffalo neighborhoods, but it is variety within a framework of the use of similar design principles. In this illustration houses A & C date from the mid to late 19th century, while B could be a renovated house from the early 20th century, or it could be later. D likely dates from the mid-20th century. While brick is a common building material in historic Buffalo, the use of brick in D is different than what was usually done historically, and with the lack of added detail and with the flat

roof, this house looks decidedly out of place. House B has been re-sided with aluminum or asbestos with a much larger dimension of lap than the usual historic siding, and thus is incompatible. The enclosed porch here uses a window which is not complimentary to the historic houses on the street. The flat roof on house D stands in stark contrast with the pitched roofs of the other houses and thus is uncomfortable and incompatible, as is the window fenestration pattern.



8. Materials

The materials used for walls, windows, sloping roofs, details and other visible elements of historic buildings should be respected in the design of a new building. In some districts, where most or all of the buildings on a street use the same exterior materials, the new building should normally use those or similar materials. In streets where the existing buildings use diverse exterior materials, a compatible new building may choose from a range of exterior materials. Variety is a key ingredient in Buffalo neighborhoods, but it is variety within a framework of the use of similar design principles. In this illustration houses A & C date from the mid to late 19th century, while B could be a renovated house from the early 20th century, or it could be later. D likely dates from the mid-20th century. While brick is a common building material in historic Buffalo, the use of brick in D is different than what was usually done historically, and with the lack of added detail and with the flat roof, this house looks decidedly out of place. House B has been re-sided with aluminum or asbestos with a much larger dimension of lap than the usual historic siding, and thus is incompatible. The enclosed porch here uses a window which is not complimentary to the historic houses on the street. The flat roof on house D stands in stark contrast with the pitched roofs of the other houses and

thus is uncomfortable and incompatible, as is the window fenestration pattern. The size, texture, color, surface finish and other defining characteristics of exterior materials are as important as the type of material itself. For example, in a street of tooled granite facades, a new building constructed of smooth polished black marble may not be compatible even though both are built of stone. Similarly, a new building constructed of glazed brick in a street of historic buildings built of unglazed brick may not be compatible. On the other hand, given proper design treatment of the other principles described here, a contrasting material may be used in a new building, and yet the building may remain compatible, as long as the other principles are handled in a compatible manner and the overall design is respectful to its context.

The use of modern materials such as glass may be acceptable on upper stories or side or rear facades so long as the building conforms to the other design principles outlined here, and through the use of other construction materials on the building.

9. Color

A building's colors are derived from the materials used in its construction. For example, brick, stone, terra cotta, slate, asphalt shingle, copper, lead and other materials that are typically left unpainted give color to a building. Color is also applied to materials such as wood, stucco, some metals and sometimes concrete.

The colors of a new building should complement those of surrounding buildings. This is particularly important for a new building located in a neighborhood of colorfully painted Victorian houses, for instance, or a different neighborhood of more subtly colored buildings. The number of colors used on a new building should be consistent with the number of colors used on a majority of buildings in the contiguous streetscape.



Typical Buffalo roof shapes, Lafayette Street within sight of Gates Circle. Gable and hip roofs predominate in historic Buffalo.

10. Roof Shape

The roof shape of a new building should respect those of its neighbors. For example, on a parkway where gable roofs predominate, a new building with a flat roof would probably not be compatible. Most streets have several roof types present, typically gable and hip roofs, with some gambrel roofs. Flat roofs can be found as well, and they may be compatible when the other design features are in harmony with the surrounding buildings.



A flat roof, as used here on Symphony Circle, can be compatible when other design principles are similar to the existing context.

11. Details and Ornamentation

Some historic buildings in Buffalo contain elaborate details and ornamentation while others are relatively plain. A new building should consider the amount, location and elaborateness of details and ornamentation on existing neighboring buildings in its design. Existing details and ornamentation may be used as the basis for those on a new building, and may be copied or adapted in a new way, respecting the proportional relationships of details of existing historic buildings. A contemporary interpretation of historic details and ornamentation can be a good way to relate new construction to the existing historic context. Using the typical stylistic details of historic styles can be another approach in relating a new building to its neighbors, but they must be used in a consistent and historically appropriate manner in order to be compatible.

The details of porches play a great role in enhancing Buffalo's streetscapes and should be given a high priority as an important element in new design as well. Originally the porches were usually open, and the light and shadow this created enliven the facades along the street. Enclosing these porches often distorts the proportions of the buildings and should only be done with much care and consideration for the original design of the porch and especially how any new fenestration alters that.

12. Secondary Buildings

Secondary buildings such as garages and sheds are important character defining elements in some historic districts. They give scale and texture to the environment, sometimes providing a pleasing contrast to the primary buildings.

On a street where secondary buildings contribute to the character of the site and street, a new building's site should, if appropriate, contain similar secondary buildings. And such secondary buildings should follow the same design guidelines as outlined above for primary buildings.

13. Sustainability

Green design is more than welcome in areas adjacent to the parks; in fact, it is of one purpose with the environmental consciousness which is core to the mission of the park system. Whether a new building is built to the standards of the LEED certification system or other sustainability standards, that does not mean that the above principals must be compromised. Green design and compatibility with historic architecture are not mutually exclusive, and with a creative design approach a new green building can be very compatible.

Certain green features, however, may not be compatible, such as a south facing glass wall, or deep aluminum sunscreens. Sun-screening has always been a concern, of course, and in the past awnings, which can be taken down in the winter, or shutters have played this role, and can do so just as well in the 21st century as in the 19th. Large windows set in a wall can be designed to meet the design principals outlined above, while in most cases a full glass wall would be incompatible. Other green features that figure prominently in views from the street will need to be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Environmental issues that the building and site design may impact, such as noise, air pollution, light pollution, shadows, runoff, etc. must also be considered.

14. Landscape

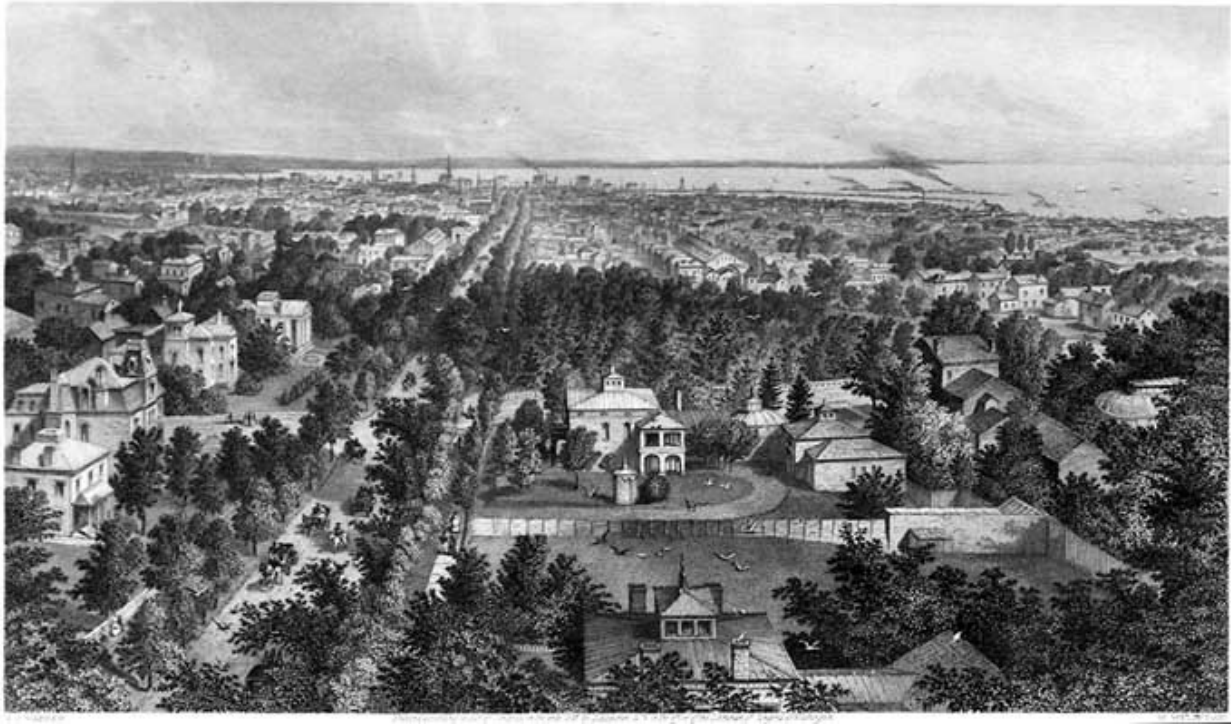
Plants, trees, fences, retaining walls, sidewalks, driveways and other landscaping and landscape features are important character defining elements of buildings adjoining the Olmsted Park and Parkway System.

It should be a priority to retain and protect existing historic plant materials, such as mature trees and shrubs when a new building is built. If this is not possible, new landscaping that complements the new building and the neighboring buildings and landscaping should be installed.

Similarly, important existing landscape features, such as retaining walls or iron fences, should be retained. If this is not possible, new compatible features should be constructed along with the new building.

A landscape protection plan is an important part of any new construction project adjoining the Olmsted Park and Parkway System. In the same way care is taken as to not damage the existing/remaining structures during new construction, protection of plant material and tree root zones from contractor staging and access should be well thought out prior to the beginning of construction.

See Section II for a detailed description of the guidelines for landscape design.



II. LANDSCAPE FEATURES

1. Introduction

Adjoining the Olmsted Park and Parkway System, trees, shrubs, flowers and lawns, and landscape design elements such as paths, decks, patios, driveways, walls, fences and the like often significantly contribute to the character of a historic building and its neighborhood.

Traditionally, landscaping, landscape features, and secondary buildings were designed as part of an ensemble along with the main building. This was particularly true of large freestanding residential buildings on large lots. Sometimes the landscape and its features were used to enhance a particular view to or from the main building, or to screen the main building from view.

2. History

In the latter half of the nineteenth and early part of the twentieth century during the conception and construction of the Olmsted Park and Parkway System, the Victorian Garden romantic landscape style became popular. It emphasized informal or picturesque natural forms and groupings of plant materials. In some cases, the front yard was separated from the street and public sidewalk by low stone or brick walls or by decorative cast iron fences. Shrubs, trees and flower beds ran along side boundary lines. Cast stone, concrete and cast iron lawn ornaments and statues were popular features in yards. Shrubs and densely planted flower beds were planted close to the house to hide building foundations.

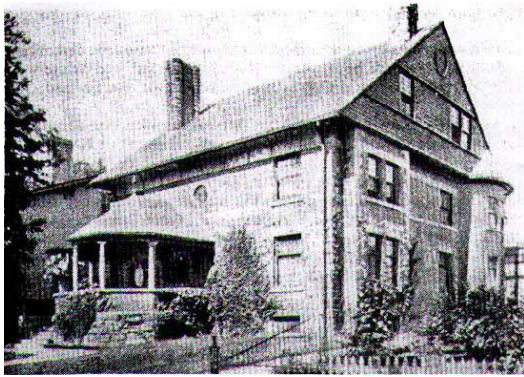
In contrast to the almost exclusive use of native plants prior to the 1850s, the Victorian Garden often contained exotic plant materials imported from Europe, Asia, South America, and other regions of the United States.

During the second half of the nineteenth century, the design of rear yards was usually far more utilitarian than the design of front yards. Shrubs, trees, flowers or fences were used to separate neighboring yards. A carriage house or stable may have been located at the rear of the property. The largest portion of the rear yard was devoted to an open area to dry clothes or other utilitarian functions.

Early twentieth century residential landscapes often consisted of isolated trees and foundation plantings of flowers and shrubs. Concrete sidewalks led directly from the street or public sidewalk to the front door of the house. Low shrubs, wooden fences, or brick or stone retaining walls separated the front yard from the sidewalk and street. Rear yards were often enclosed with wood fences and sometimes contained garages.

The design of early twentieth century landscapes was influenced by the design of the main building. For example, freestanding buildings designed in the Colonial Revival style often featured front yards with boxwood lined path and symmetrically placed trees. Rear yards sometimes featured small-scale formal gardens inspired by Colonial period design.

Landscaping associated with modest buildings during the early twentieth century was usually designed to be simple and utilitarian. Front yards were often planted with grass and some foundation plantings. The front yard may have been separated from the public sidewalk by a cast iron fence or low retaining wall of stone.



Metcalf House (demolished), an example of a Colonial Revival Landscape

3. Altering the Landscape

There are a number of design issues related to historic landscaping, landscape features and secondary buildings. Existing landscaping and landscape features in front and rear yards such as sidewalks and paths, driveways and curb cuts, walls and fences, or patios and decks, may have been altered or removed; new landscaping and landscape features may have been added. Similarly, existing secondary buildings such as garages and sheds may have been altered, removed or added.

Any proposed changes to historic landscapes, landscape features and secondary buildings should consider the effect of the change on the character of the existing main building, its property, the neighborhood and the adjoining Olmsted Park and Parkway System.

4. Landscapes in Front Yards

The design of front yards is one of the most important character-defining features of historic buildings, particularly freestanding residential buildings. The front yard establishes the context for a building and helps to relate it to its neighbors and the Olmsted Park and Parkway System through the use of common design and plant materials.

Typically, the landscaping should be compatible with the design of the main building and any secondary buildings on the property that can be seen from the street, as well as with the design of surrounding properties. Ornamental open fencing and hedges under 4 feet high are appropriate; utilitarian vegetable gardens, and substantial paving of green space for parking are not appropriate.

The design of front yards, their materials and features, establishes the immediate context for the main building and often relates the building and its property to the neighborhood. If a property owner determines that it is appropriate or necessary to alter the existing landscaping, he or she should consider the effect that removing existing or adding new plantings will have on the character of the main building, neighborhood and Olmsted Park and Parkway System.

5. Landscape Design Elements

Sidewalks, paths, driveways, curb cuts, fences, retaining walls, decks and patios are some of the more common landscape design elements found on properties adjoining the Olmsted Park and Parkway System. When located in front yards or other areas that can be seen from public right-of-way, their design often contributes to the character of the property and neighborhood.

5.a. Sidewalks and Paths

The design and location of sidewalks and paths located in front yards help to define the character of the landscape, the neighborhood and the adjoining Olmsted Park and Parkway System. Historically they were constructed of flagstone or concrete, although other materials can be found. Often sidewalks and paths were constructed at the same time as the main building.

Existing sidewalks and paths should be maintained and, if necessary, repaired or replaced in-kind. This is particularly important for sidewalks and paths located in front yards or in areas that can be seen from a public street. If new sidewalks or paths are added, they should be located and constructed of materials that are compatible with the historic building, its property and the Olmsted Park and Parkway System. Exposed aggregate concrete is the Olmsted standard for new sidewalk construction and would be considered generally compatible for new construction.

5.b. Driveways, Parking Lots and Curb Cuts

The design, materials and placement of driveways contribute to the character of a property, its neighborhood and the adjoining Olmsted Park and Parkway System. Existing driveways may be paved in a variety of materials, such as asphalt, smooth concrete, and in certain areas, gravel. In some cases, cobblestone, brick, stone, patterned or textured concrete and the like, were used. Where permitted in front yards, driveways typically lead straight from the street to a garage in the rear yard; or they are semicircular in design, leading to the front door of a building. Typically, the latter design is associated with large freestanding residential buildings.

Parking lots were not a feature of the historic landscapes or streetscapes and must be concealed to the greatest extent possible. In no cases should parking lots front directly on public streets within the view shed of the Olmsted parks, parkways, or historic streetscapes. Any other large paved areas should be avoided as well.

The placement, width, design and materials of curbs cuts are regulated by code. Altering a historic curb cut with a new driveway or parking area to a front yard or area of the property that can be seen from a public right-of way is rarely appropriate, and should not be undertaken unless there is no other feasible alternative to accomplish the purpose intended, as it will significantly alter the setting of the main building and the streetscape.

5.c. Fences and Retaining Walls

Fences in front yards are used to define property lines and create a sense of enclosure, as well as contribute to the character of landscapes, neighborhoods, and adjoining Olmsted Park and Parkway system. Any changes to existing fences or the addition of new fences require a building permit.



Inappropriate 6' high stockade fence on corner property

Fences in rear yards are used to define property lines and, in most cases, to provide privacy. Thus they are typically solid and higher than fences located in front yards. The design, materials and height (7'-0" maximum) of fences located in rear yards are also regulated by Buffalo's building codes.

Existing fences and retaining walls that contribute to the appearance of historic buildings, their landscapes and neighborhoods should be maintained and if necessary, repaired or replaced in-kind. If a fence or retaining wall has been removed, it is recommended that any replacement fence be selected using documentary, photographic or other evidence. If none is available, a neighboring property with existing original fences or walls may be used as the basis for the design of the replacement.

New or replacement fences and walls must comply with City of Buffalo building codes related to their location, height, openness and other design attributes. In front yards, metal picket-type fences found in a number of styles are often appropriate in historic districts. On the other hand, chain link, split rail, stockade and other similarly designed fences are not appropriate. In rear yards, vertical board, board-on-board and board-and-batten fences are appropriate.

The design and materials of replacement retaining walls should be based on existing walls on the property, in the neighborhood or on documentary or photographic evidence. Particular attention should be paid to the coursing and to the profile and width of mortar joints. New retaining walls should be compatible with the design of the main building, the property's landscaping and the neighborhood.



Appropriate 4' high iron fence on corner property



Inappropriate Front Deck ▲
Inappropriate New Garage in Front Yard ►



5.d. Decks and Patios

Most decks and patios located adjoining the Olmsted Park and Parkway System are not original. Rather, they were added after World War II when outdoor living became popular. In most cases they are located in rear yards, although some can be found in side yards of freestanding residential buildings. Rarely do existing decks or patios contribute to the character of a property or its neighborhood. In many cases their design and materials are not compatible with the existing building and the design of the landscape. Thus, changes to existing decks and patios are almost always appropriate so long as the design of the alteration is compatible with the historic building and landscape.

If a new deck or patio is to be added it should be located in the rear yard and designed to be compatible with the building and landscaping if it can be seen from the public street or alley.

5.e. Garages, Sheds, and Other Secondary Buildings

The most common historic secondary buildings in Buffalo are garages, sheds and carriage houses. Often located in rear yards, existing garages were designed to be compatible with the main building, although usually employing less ornate detailing and architectural features.

Removing an original secondary building or one that was added at a later date should only be done after careful consideration and consultation with the Buffalo Preservation Board. This is particularly true of secondary buildings that can be seen from streets. Altering an existing garage or shed that contributes to the character of the main building or landscape should only be done if the proposed alteration is compatible with the design, materials and other character defining attributes of the secondary building, main building and landscaping.



Some common landscape plants from the period of significance for the Olmsted Park and Parkway system include Privet Hedge, Common Lilac, Panicle Hydrangea & Antique Rose

5.f. Plant Materials

In selecting new plant materials, consideration should be given to the effect of both the new and mature plantings on the property. Consultation with the Buffalo Olmsted Parks Conservancy, as well as local landscape architects or nurseries, should always be considered for alterations to the existing landscapes and appropriate plant materials.

Maintaining the landscape is important to retaining the character of historic properties and districts. Engaging in regular maintenance activities, such as pruning trees, trimming hedges, replanting annuals, raking, weeding and cutting the lawn helps to insure that the setting of the building is preserved.

A. Definitions of Design Principles

Color – The color of the building, which can be derived from the materials used in construction, or subsequently applied paint and/or stain colors.

Detail and Ornamentation – The decorative details of a building can range from the simple, door and window surrounds and an overhanging eaves, to the highly ornate, such as carved or sawn brackets, railings, cornices, etc.

Height – The vertical measurement of a building from the ground plane, in two forms, actual dimensions, and number of stories.

Landscape Features – Those features which exist outside the structure on a given site, including paving, water features, and vegetative materials.

Massing – The arrangement of the elements of a building, including its plan and façade and their proportions.

Materials – The materials which a building is constructed of, including varieties of texture, surface finish, color, etc.

Orientation – The direction a structure faces.

Proportion – The relationship of the dimensions of building elements to each other and to the overall structure

Rhythm – The spacing of repetitive façade elements as well as the spacing between structures and heights of roofs, cornices, towers, and other roof projections.

Roof Shape – Various roof shapes are found throughout the city, including gable roofs (the most numerous), hip roofs, flat roofs, gambrel (Dutch or barn) roofs, and other minor, less usual types.

Scale – The relative or apparent size of a building and its elements in relation to each other, to other buildings, and to human beings.

Secondary Buildings – Smaller structures usually located to the side or rear of the principal structure on a lot, including garages, carriage houses, sheds, gazebos, etc.

Setbacks – The distance the front of a structure is from the sidewalk, front property line, or public space in front of it. Side and rear setbacks are the distance of a structure from the side or rear property lines or adjacent streets.

Sustainability and Environmental Issues – Sustainability refers to a structure's use of natural and man-made products, limiting the amount of energy expended in the creation, transportation, and installation of the materials in the structure. Sustainability also refers to the longevity of given materials. In this sense, any old house is more sustainable than new construction because the bulk of the material already exists, and no additional energy has to be expended in constructing the building, only in replacing smaller pieces of it as needed.



Parkside Avenue, at Florence Street, facing Delaware Park

B. Definitions of other Technical Terms

Context – The context for any particular project consists of the buildings and landscapes found in the immediate area where the project is located. Of special interest are the sites within the same block (both sides of the street) as the subject project, although the surrounding blocks also give the area its character and can be visible from the subject project as well. The context along a street is sometimes described in the above text as the contiguous streetscape, giving the same meaning as the context of a site.

Façade – The face of a building, consisting of the wall facing a certain direction (e.g., the main façade facing the street) and the elements that make up that side of a building. A drawing of a façade is known as an elevation, a term which is sometimes used interchangeably with façade when discussing a building's appearance.

Fenestration – The pattern of windows on a façade.

Streetscape – Those areas fronting on a street, and which make up the visual environment as one travels along that street. In the case of the Olmsted system, the term “streetscapes” or “historic streetscapes” refers to the streets other than the parkways and circles that Olmsted identified and included in his design for the park system, such as, for example, Richmond Avenue and Porter Street.

View shed – Those areas from which the parks and parkways can be seen or which can be seen from the parks, parkways and historic streetscapes, but not limited to land or structures fronting on the parks, parkways and streetscapes, but also those that are visible from them.



Symphony Circle

Approval Process for New Construction projects adjoining the Olmsted Parks, Parkways and Historic Streetscapes

The following flow chart outlines the approval process for New Construction projects adjoining and within the view shed of the Olmsted Parks, Parkways, and Historic Streetscapes of Buffalo, NY. The flow chart outlines the general process that the Buffalo Olmsted Parks Conservancy will ask property owners and consultants to follow as projects arise adjacent to and within the view shed of the Buffalo Olmsted Parks System. The key to the success of the approval process is early and clear communication between the property owner and the Conservancy. It is also imperative that the property owner consult with the Conservancy early in the project design phase so that proper input and guidance can be relayed without causing a delay in the project's design schedule. The process is not meant to hinder construction within these limits, only to work with the property owner to ensure that potential projects meet the owner's needs while maintaining the historic character of the Olmsted Parks System. The flow chart is meant only as a guide and may vary depending on a particular project's scope and time line.

APPROVAL PROCESS

