

# STREETSCAPE LAYOUT AND DESIGN

As used in this document, streetscape refers to the design character of a particular street and the surrounding environment, including the street, the buildings along the street, facades at street level, sidewalks, street plantings, signs, and site furnishings. The streetscape determines the visual quality of the area and the manner in which both pedestrian and vehicular traffic travels through the space. All or some of the planning techniques discussed in this section can apply to downtown areas and business districts, as well as residential areas. An overarching goal of creating a good street environment is making it pedestrian friendly.

Typical design objectives include:

- promoting sidewalk activity,
- reinforcing community character,
- creating a safe environment with adequate lighting,
- providing for all modes of transportation,
- integrating civic and public art elements, and
- creating a connection to the natural environment.

In order for a streetscape design to be successful, it must address the underlying economic needs of the area. If, for example, a downtown or business area is not currently attracting enough shoppers to support the retail businesses, this is not likely to change simply by adding streetscape amenities, such as trees, benches, and lighting.

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## KEEPING IT CONNECTED

It is important to address walkability issues, particularly pedestrian safety, in conjunction with streetscape planning. Remember that aesthetic issues such as lighting and signage, and congestion management and pedestrian safety are also important components of streetscape planning within your community.

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## Planning and Regulatory Considerations

A Downtown Development Authority (DDA) is a public/private entity created to plan and finance the redevelopment and revitalization of a central business district. DDAs are an excellent tool communities can use to prevent the deterioration of downtowns. Typically, a DDA finances infrastructure and public facility improvements. DDAs also promote urban redevelopment and create a mechanism for municipalities to compete more effectively with outlying shopping areas and newer commercial districts. Successful DDAs

stimulate creation of jobs, preserve historic sites, and support the overall economic base of the district. DDAs are established and controlled under local ordinances and are enabled by the Downtown Development Authority Act (Act 197, Public Acts of Michigan of 1975).

Streetscape improvement funds are available through the Michigan Department of Transportation's Transportation Enhancement Program. The Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA) established a fund for transportation enhancement activities. The Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21) of 1998 continues this program through 2003. Specific streetscape enhancement activities included in this program are:

- Providing facilities for pedestrians and bicycles.
- Landscaping and other scenic beautification.
- Controlling and removing of outdoor advertising.

## Tools for Streetscape Layout and Design

To be successful, a streetscape improvement plan and regulations should be adopted and incorporated into a community's master planning efforts.



*The City of Plymouth's use of attractive, pedestrian-scale streetscape furniture, signage, and lighting enhances the vitality of its downtown commercial center.*

This chapter discusses the following tools:

- Develop a streetscape plan.
- Scale street design and character to human use.
- Involve the public in the streetscape planning process.

Streetscape planning can be one of the key elements in strengthening the commercial cores of communities. Other significant advantages are:

- securing a consensus and cooperation among the groups that are involved in developing and maintaining the core,
- promoting the core area to customers, investors, existing businesses, and potential new businesses, and
- strengthening the economy of the commercial core by helping businesses to expand, recruiting new businesses, and increasing the use of underutilized buildings.

Streetscape improvements also affect attitudes about commercial cores simply through physical changes.

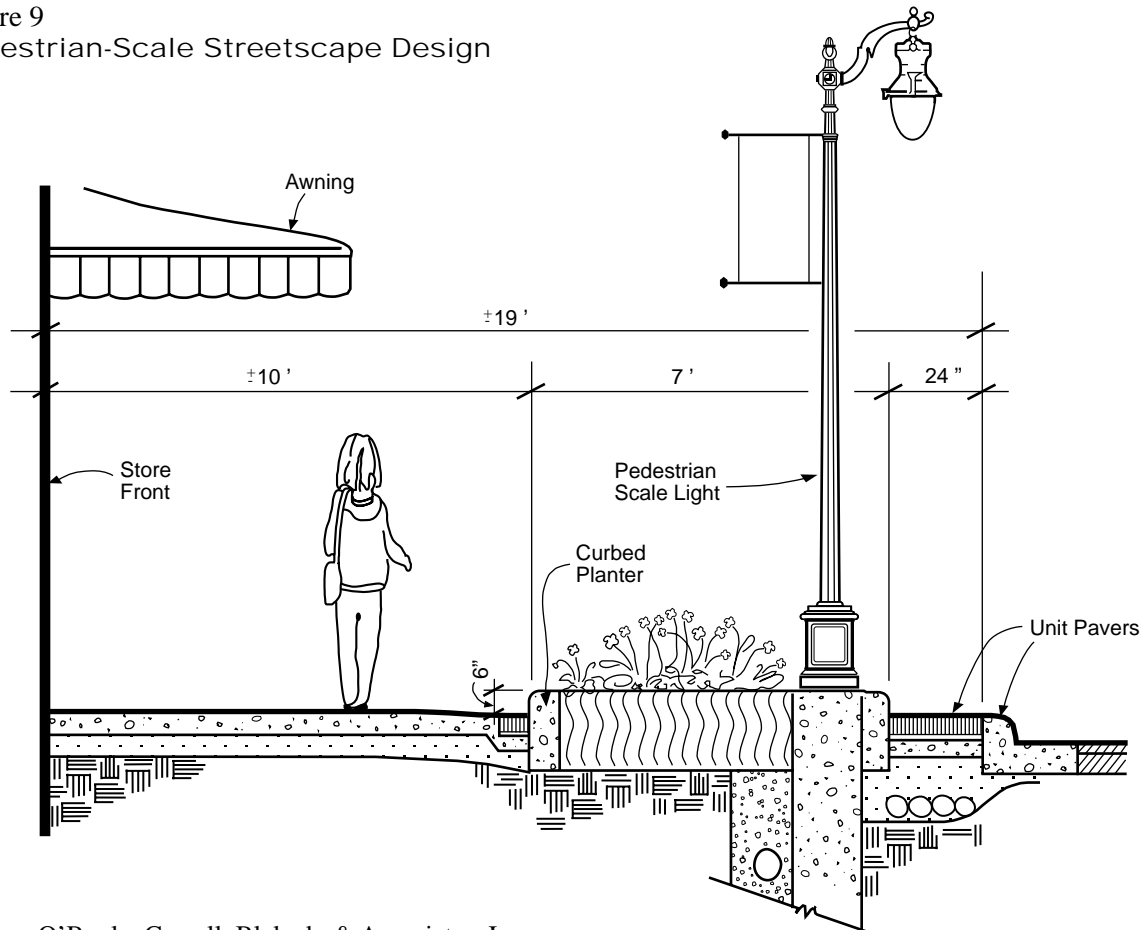
### Develop a streetscape plan

A first step in streetscape layout and design is conducting a survey of the area to identify real issues and determine the appropriate types of streetscape improvements. The study should also examine the existing businesses and how they function and include recommendations for beautification and aesthetic improvements.

A comprehensive streetscape plan should include a variety of specific elements within the general areas of environment, street design, and character, as well as involving the public in the streetscape planning process.

The issues of safety, in particular traffic calming and buffering, should also be addressed.

Figure 9  
Pedestrian-Scale Streetscape Design



Source: O'Boyle, Cowell, Blalock, & Associates, Inc.

*A community is more livable when the public spaces are scaled to human use rather than to automobile use or as large, out-of-scale spaces. Human-scale or pedestrian-oriented spaces are obtained by:*

- Enclosure by building walls, fences, plantings, overhead trees, trellises, and canopies.
- Architectural details such as recessed entries, bay windows, balconies, and windows with smaller panes of glass.

## Scale street design and character to human use

A community is more livable when the public spaces are scaled to human use rather than to automobile use or as large, out-of-scale spaces.

- Streetscape improvements should be pedestrian oriented (safe and walkable) to create a more pleasant downtown environment for people to enjoy.
- Physical improvements, such as trees, lighting, paving, signs, and street furniture should be designed to complement downtown businesses and create a consistent character; for example, ensure that street furnishings (benches, waste receptacles, gratings, bicycle racks, kiosks, bus shelters, newspaper-machine enclosures) are consistent color, style, and material.
- Sidewalks should be of adequate width to accommodate window shoppers and through foot traffic.
- When considering outdoor sidewalk cafes, ensure that adequate enclosure is provided and that there is at least six feet of clear sidewalk passage for pedestrians.
- It is imperative that storefronts are not obscured by the placement of the streetscape amenities.
- Placement of streetscape amenities should be based on the manner in which people use the street, not on arbitrary equal spacing of benches, etc.
- Lighting can be utilized for several purposes and should be an integral part of the streetscape design. Lighting should be focused on the sidewalk as much as on the roadway environment.
- Encourage burying existing and future utility and telephone lines.
- Open lots and undesirable structures can be replaced with infill development or green space.

The following additional guidelines can assist communities in creating a safe and aesthetically pleasing atmosphere for pedestrians:

### Vegetation

- Provide a list of urban-tolerant plant materials (e.g., pollution, salt, and drought tolerant), with minimum size and health standards.
- Street trees should be placed to provide shade but not obscure the storefronts, signs, or lighting. Pedestrian safety with regard to placement of shrubs and trees should also be considered. Current and future size of trees should be considered.
- Plant material can be used in concentrated “green zones,” perhaps relating to sidewalk or café display areas or at intersections with green linkage streets.

### Solar

- Awnings and canopies can mitigate glare and provide for interesting transition areas from the interior to the sidewalk amenities.
- These shading elements should provide stronger shading in the summer and allow sunlight penetration in the winter.
- Plastic awnings that are back-lit or awnings that are utilized primarily as signage should be avoided unless they are well integrated into the total design theme of the streetscape.

### Involve the public in the streetscape planning process

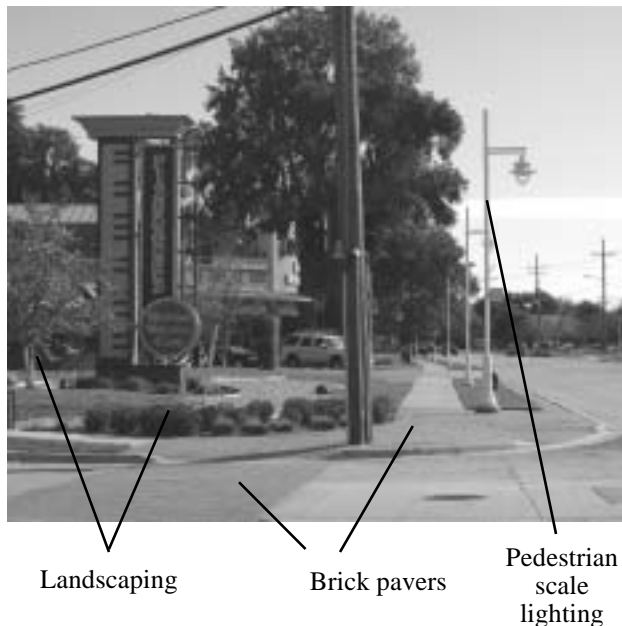
It is important to involve interested members of the community in the planning process for streetscape improvements, the level of which will be determined by local officials, planning staff, and planning consultants.

- Hold one or a series of public meetings in which community members, business owners, officials, planners, and stakeholders generate specific streetscape design ideas in a collaborative workgroup setting.
- Hold public meetings to communicate streetscape plan options to the community and garner plan support. This exercise requires less in-depth involvement than the above mentioned meetings, while still involving the views and ideas of the public.



*This outdoor, sidewalk statue adds additional character to the streetscape improvements made in Mt. Clemens.*

Figure 10  
Various Types  
of Streetscape Improvements



*Streetscape improvements at Nine Mile Road and Jefferson Avenue in St. Clair Shores include brick pavers, landscaping, attractive lighting, and a sign marking the Nautical Mile area.*

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## CASE EXAMPLE

### Streetscape Master Plan

**Community:** Trenton

**Contact:** John Iacoangelli, (734) 663-2622

Trenton is a Downtown Development Authority contracted with Beckett and Raeder Inc. in order to create a Streetscape Master Plan. The project included the inventory and analysis of existing conditions, DDA Board and Streetscape Committee involvement, development of design options, and conceptual designs.

Design considerations include improved pedestrian access, street trees and seasonal plantings, updates lighting fixtures, street furniture including benches, trash receptacles, bike parking hoops, and flower pots, as well as seasonal outdoor decorations.

The main objective of the master plan was to define the older portion of the Trenton community and create as many connecting and overlapping linkages between the various land uses and neighborhoods. Over time this will enhance the integrity of residential neighborhoods and strengthen the business district.

The final report submitted by Beckett and Raeder Inc. included conceptual designs, design considerations, estimates of construction costs, and agency involvement needed for the implementation of the Streetscape Master Plan.

## Additional Resources

Duerksen, Christopher J., and Goebel, R. Matthew. *Aesthetics, Community Character and the Law*. Planning Advisory Service Report, 489/490. Chicago, IL: American Planning Association, 1999.

Gibbons, Johanna, Oberholzer, Bernard, and Milne, Terry. *Urban Streetscapes: A Workbook for Designers*. Wiley, John & Sons, Inc. 1992.

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Pegler, Martin M. *Streetscapes: Facades, Entrances, Storefronts*. New York: Retail Reporting Corporation, Inc. 1998.

Planning and Zoning Center, Inc. "Notebook for Improving Community Appearance." *Planning and Zoning News*, 1994.

Rubenstein, Harvey M. *Pedestrian Malls, Streetscapes, and Urban Spaces*. Wiley, John & Sons, Inc. 1992.