

## GUIDELINES FOR STREETSCAPES



**STREETSCAPE:** The visual character of the street including, but not limited to, the architecture, building setbacks and height, fences, storefronts, signs, lighting, parking areas, materials, sidewalks, curbing, and landscape.

A historic district's architectural, cultural, and historic significance is due not only to its historic properties individually, but to the area as a whole. The street grid and the scale and relationship of the buildings to neighboring buildings, structures, streets, public spaces, street furnishing, and general landscaping form an important part of the historic environment.

These streetscape guidelines make advisory recommendations related to public improvements and streetscape issues in or near Landmark Districts and Landmarks. These guidelines encourage public improvements that continue and enhance the inviting human scale of Closter's historic districts and removes visual clutter that competes with the districts' overall character. They provide guidelines to protect and enhance the rhythm of spaces (relationship of buildings to open space and to neighboring buildings) and the continuity of wall (setback) in historic districts.

Recommendations for private actions that impact streetscapes are found elsewhere, particularly in the chapters with guidelines for accessory buildings, landscaping, and outdoor mechanicals and for new additions and new construction.

A Certificate of Appropriateness (C/A) is not required for public improvements impacting Landmark properties and Landmark Districts. Instead the Closter Historic Preservation Commission advises governmental officials and agencies about the impact of proposed public

improvements on historic resources and makes recommendations to encourage the enhancement of historic properties and districts.

### GUIDELINES

*Consider any change in context of the streetscape for its appropriateness to not only with the property on which it is located, but also to the larger historic environment.*

*Retain the established streetscape patterns to maintain the visual character and identity of Landmarks and Landmark Districts.*

*Enhance the identity of Landmarks and Landmark Districts through to use of informational signs, historical plaques, street furniture, streetlights, and other public amenities that are specific to Landmarks and Landmark Districts.*

*Design and place new public amenities necessary for modern functions in a manner appropriate to the historic character of the Landmark Districts and nearby Landmarks so that they are as unobtrusive as possible and maintain the pedestrian scale.*

*Design public outdoor spaces to be both functional and to enhance the character of the Landmark District or nearby Landmarks.*

*Remove visual clutter that competes with the overall character of Landmark Districts.*

*Review for appropriateness any feature placed on the sidewalk of a Landmark property or in a Landmark District.*



*This early-20<sup>th</sup>-century photograph of the area along Demarest Street just west of Durie Avenue illustrates how the concrete sidewalks, the width of the street, the street trees, and the houses combine to create a streetscape with special character.*

### Street Pattern, Street Paving, and Sidewalks

The existing street patterns - with variety within a limited range of layouts for streets and sidewalks and of lot sizes and building setbacks - are features vital to the character of the Closter's historic districts. Promotional literature of 1903 advertised that all streets in Closter were macadamized, a type of road construction with three layers of stone. By the 1920's local streets probably began to be paved with asphaltic concrete.

Photographs of the residential areas near the railroad station taken the late 19<sup>th</sup> and the early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries show streets with the widths they retain today and sidewalks separated from the curb by grassy strips. The commercial areas had sidewalks extending from the street curb to the buildings. This pattern continues today in the historic areas, although not all residential streets in these areas have sidewalks. While some early sidewalks were bluestone, it probable that concrete was used for sidewalks early in the 20th century.

#### **FOR LANDMARK DISTRICTS**

##### **RECOMMENDED**

- Maintain the existing setbacks of buildings.
- Preserve the existing street layout, sidewalk widths, and placement.

- Use unobtrusive street paving such as asphalt and sidewalk treatments such as poured concrete.
- Retain, maintain, repair, and replace *in-kind*\* the sidewalks with grassy strips in the areas where they were historically present and sidewalks without grassy strips in the commercial areas.
- Retain, maintain, and repair any surviving bluestone sidewalks.
- For new sidewalks, use poured Portland cement concrete scored into 3'-to-4' rectangles. Consider having the section where driveways cross the sidewalk scored into smaller rectangles.

##### **NOT RECOMMENDED**

- Closing existing streets.
- Paving streets with Belgian blocks, bricks, or other special paving. Such treatments might be considered only if there is physical evidence of their historic use.
- Paving public sidewalks with brick or simulated bricks because brick was not a historic public sidewalk material in Closter.

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\* Words and phrases followed by \* are defined in "Definitions and Abbreviations" in the *Appendix*

## Parking

Open surface parking lots interrupt the rhythm of historic streetscapes and intrude on the setting and character of Landmarks and Landmark Districts. Closter's historic downtown had angled street parking for automobiles by the 1930s so that on-street parking is compatible with the historic character here.

### **FOR LANDMARKS AND LANDMARK DISTRICTS**

#### RECOMMENDED

- Continue on-street parking in the historic commercial areas.
- Limit expansion of surface parking lots where the parking lot is visible from the public view, especially when it interrupts the spatial enclosure of the streetscape.
- Locate parking behind or at the side of buildings.
- Screen any parking lots with plantings or appropriate fences or walls. In large parking lots, include islands with plantings to break up the paved area.
- Use unobtrusive, pedestrian-scaled lighting in parking lots.
- Include retail space on the first floor of any parking structure that fronts streets.



## Informational, Directional, and Legal Signs and Historic Plaques

Informational signs with street names (i.e., Closter Dock Road), directional signs (i.e., arrows), and legal signs (No Parking, No Turns) are installed by the Borough. Historical plaques are attached to historic buildings and provide information such as the historic name and the date of construction of the building. They increase public awareness of and education about Landmarks and Landmark Districts.

### **FOR LANDMARKS AND LANDMARK DISTRICTS**

#### RECOMMENDED

- Whenever possible, consolidate informational, directional, and legal signs on one pole to avoid visual clutter.
- Avoid placing a sign in the middle of an important view within a Landmark District or so that it intrudes on a view of a Landmark.
- Develop unique designs and specifications for informational signs with appropriate letter fonts and frames.
- Develop designs and specifications for historic plaques appropriate for Landmarks and Key Contributing and Contributing Buildings in Landmark Districts.

#### **RESOURCES FOR PLAQUES**

National Trust for Historic Preservation, *Plaques for Historic Buildings*,  
<http://www.nationaltrust.org/help/Plaques.pdf>

*To a large degree, Closter's downtown retains the scale and spatial enclosure it had in 1954 when this photograph was taken. The pedestrian "Main Street" character is enhanced by broad sidewalks and abutting buildings with storefronts at the street level.*

## Street Furniture

Including, but not limited to street lighting, benches, street trash receptacles, bicycle racks, planters, parking meters, and utility poles.

### FOR LANDMARK DISTRICTS

#### RECOMMENDED

- In the historic downtown, retain and maintain the existing cast-iron streetlights poles and consider replacing the existing lamps (tops) with ones that more closely resemble those present in the downtown about 1930. Add new streetlights that convey the visual appearance of the historic streetlights.
- Use only street furniture compatible with the historic architecture. It may be of low-key modern design.
- Consider using benches, street trash receptacles, bicycle racks, planters, and other public amenities specific to the Landmark Districts.
- In placement of street furniture, consider issues related to visual clutter

#### NOT RECOMMENDED

- Using benches, trash receptacles, bicycle racks, and planters that are massive, made of incompatible materials such as unpainted wood or shiny plastic, or are otherwise intrusive.
- Putting features on public sidewalks that hide important architectural features.

## Public Landscaping and Parks

### FOR LANDMARKS AND LANDMARK DISTRICTS

#### RECOMMENDED

- Landscaping, street trees, and parks to enhance the pedestrian experience, complement architectural features, and/or screen utility areas.

- Install new public landscaping, street trees, seasonal plantings, and parks that are compatible with the historic character of the area.

#### NOT RECOMMENDED

- Installing public landscaping and street trees that hide important historic buildings and features.



**Recommended:** Add new streetlights that convey the visual appearance of Closter's historic streetlights, such as those shown in these historic photographs.