



### III. GUIDELINES FOR SITE DESIGN





## A. Introduction

Site design is the relationship between a historic building and its site features, such as landscaping, outbuildings, and other elements within the property boundary. These site features help define the historic character of the property and may be considered an important part of any project reviewed by the Historic Preservation Commission. As you plan your project you will need to consult the Zoning Ordinance for detailed requirements on many of the site features discussed in this chapter.

Truxtun's historic site character is defined by the uniformity of the district's small front yards and close spacing of houses next door to one another. As can be seen from historic images of the district, there was little original landscaping due to the small lot sizes. Over time, modifications have been made to many of the lots including fenced backyards, concrete driveways and plantings.



This block view shows many elements typical of the site character in the Truxtun Historic District including small front yards with mature plantings.



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Typically, the walkways and concrete “ribbon” strips of the drive are parallel to one another in the Truxtun Historic District.



A resurfaced or repaired walkway shown here illustrates the contrast between the warm tones and rough texture of the old concrete and the new gray smooth concrete lacking aggregate.



Due to the narrow spacing between houses, many neighboring houses share driveways.

#### B. Walkways and Driveways

A walkway usually connects the sidewalk to the front porch of a Truxtun house. A driveway often leads to the rear of a lot where it may terminate at a garage or shed.

#### ⊘ Inappropriate Treatments

- 1 Do not place paved areas for parking in the front yard.
- 2 Avoid using large expanses of bright white or gray concrete surfaces or asphalt in visible areas. Historic concrete has a warmer, brownish appearance with some exposed aggregate. New surfaces should be formulated to match.
- 3 Do not demolish contributing historic buildings for parking.

#### ✓ Guidelines

- 1 Retain existing historic ribbon concrete driveways.
- 2 Retain existing historic concrete walkways.
- 3 Replace damaged areas with materials that match the original paving in color, size, texture, and finish.
- 4 Locate shared driveways between houses according to historic examples.
- 5 Ensure that new paving material is compatible with the character of the district. The most historically appropriate material for walkways and driveways in Truxtun is concrete.
- 6 Use the same materials in both walkways and driveways to provide a uniform appearance and continuity of design.



A shed repeats the colors and materials of the main structure and even the exposed rafter detail.



The outbuildings on this corner lot have been placed near the rear lot line and are painted to coordinate with the main house.



This shared driveway leads to a garage at the rear of the lot.

### C. Sheds and Garages

Due to the time period in which Truxtun was developed, outbuildings were not part of the original plan. It was envisioned that a streetcar line would provide service to the naval yard and that individual transportation would not be necessary.

Through time small garages and sheds have been added near the rear lot lines, connected to the street most often by shared ribbon concrete driveways that occupy the entire side yard of the lot.

#### Inappropriate Treatments

- 1 Do not tear down existing historic outbuildings.
- 2 Do not place prefabricated outbuildings where they are visible from the street.
- 3 Do not construct new outbuildings that are out-of-scale with the lot and house.

#### Guidelines

- 1 Retain and repair historic outbuildings following the *Guidelines for Existing Structures* found in *Chapter IV*.
- 2 Place new outbuildings to the rear of lots that are large enough to accommodate them, following the applicable zoning requirements as found in *Chapter II*.
- 3 Design new outbuildings to be compatible with the style and character of the primary building on the site, especially in scale, materials, and roof slope. For more information on appropriate new construction see *Chapter V*.



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Most of the houses in Truxtun now have a variety of foundation plantings surrounding their front porches.



Mature street and site trees are accentuated by consistent foundation plantings in this illustration of a Truxtun street view.

#### D. Plantings and Trees

Like the placement of a structure on its site, the character of the landscape and accompanying plantings contribute to the identity of the historic district. By virtue of its original compact design, Truxtun lots allow very little room for ornamental plantings in either the front or side yards. However, over the years, a number of houses in the district have added a variety of foundation plantings.

Street trees in planting strips, between the front of the house lots and the street, originally provided a unified planting scheme for the Truxtun neighborhood. Over time, due to factors such as the realignment of sidewalks, many of those trees have been lost. A number of crepe myrtles have been planted to serve a similar purpose.

#### ⊘ Inappropriate Treatments

- 1 Avoid planting large trees or large planting areas in the small front yard section of the lot.
- 2 Do not allow foundation plantings to grow out of scale with existing front porches.
- 3 Do not park vehicles in the front yard area.
- 4 Do not replace grass in front yards with paving or gravel.

#### ✓ Guidelines

- 1 Retain existing trees and plants that help define the district's character. Mature trees and other plantings can also help to shade the house or protect it from wind.
- 2 Replace diseased or dead plants and trees with indigenous species.
- 3 Repeat the dominant landscape design (plant, size, and species) found in Truxtun when installing new plantings.
- 4 Use new plants that, when mature, will not be too large for the small lots of Truxtun. Many common plants are available in dwarf varieties that may be more appropriate to the lot size than their full-size counterparts.
- 5 Identify and take care to protect significant existing trees and other plantings when constructing new buildings.



## E. Fences

Historically, Truxtun house lots did not have fencing. This is still the predominant condition and, in particular, fenced front yards are not appropriate in the district. Many rear yards have been fenced with either chain link or wooden fencing. In general, fence materials should relate to the original materials used on the structures and those styles available at the time the houses in the district were constructed.

### Inappropriate Treatments

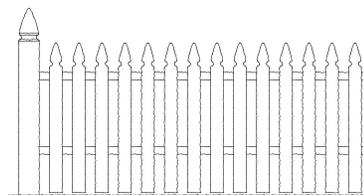
- 1 Do not exceed the average height of other fences and walls of surrounding properties with the height of the new fence or wall. Fences should also conform to zoning regulations.
- 2 Do not use chain link, vinyl, split rail fences or concrete block walls where visible from public rights-of-way.
- 3 Do not use solid masonry walls that visually enclose the property from surrounding more open neighboring sites.
- 4 Do not use unpainted wood fences in the historic district.
- 5 Do not fence front yards.

### Guidelines

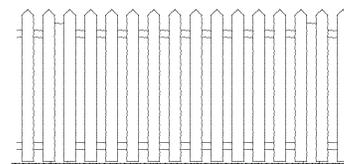
- 1 Retain any existing historic fences. Wood fences, especially picket fences, are the most appropriate fences for the historic district.
- 2 Repair existing historic fences and walls by salvaging original parts or materials for a prominent location from a less prominent location, when possible.
- 3 Replace existing historic fences by matching the material, height, and detail. If this is not possible, use a simplified design of similar materials and height.
- 4 Relate fence materials to those used elsewhere on the property and on the structure. Painted wood picket fences are the most appropriate choice in Truxtun.
- 5 Relate the scale and detail of the design of any new fences to the scale and detail of the historic building. Simpler and smaller designs are most appropriate in Truxtun.



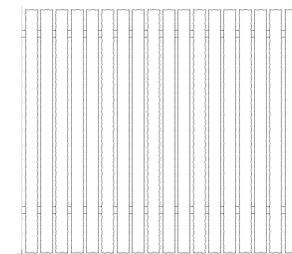
The open appearance of connecting grass front lawns should be maintained by not fencing front yards.



Picket - Decorative



Picket - Plain



Privacy Fence

These fence types are appropriate as rear yard enclosures for Truxtun.



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Small surface mounted or ceiling mounted exterior lights located within the porch area are the most appropriate fixtures for Truxtun.

#### F. Lighting

While Truxtun houses were advertised as electrified, exterior lighting appears to be minimal. Currently small fixtures are attached to either the wall adjacent to the front door or on the porch ceiling to provide illumination for the entry.

#### Inappropriate Treatment

Pole-mounted light fixtures and series of small fixtures lining the walkway or driveway are not appropriate.

#### Guidelines

- 1** Retain historic light fixtures.
- 2** Repair and refurbish historic light fixtures when possible.
- 3** Replace a historic light fixture only when parts for the existing fixture can no longer be found or replicated.
- 4** Use fixtures that are compatible with the character of the historic building and the surrounding area. Appropriate fixture styles for Truxtun include those from the Colonial Revival and Craftsman eras.
- 5** Choose light levels that provide for adequate safety but do not overly emphasize the residential site or building. Often, existing porch lights may be sufficient.



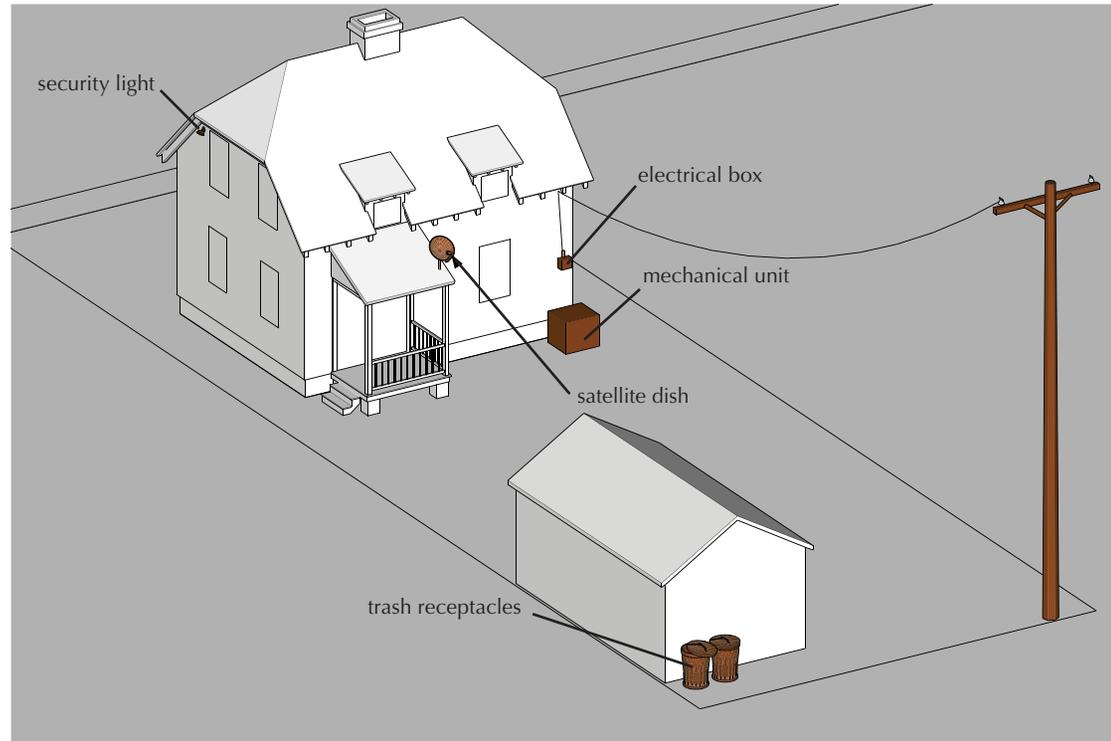
### G. Mechanical and Utilities Screening

Site appurtenances, such as overhead wires, fuel tanks, utility poles and meters, antennae and satellite dishes, exterior mechanical units, and trash containers are a necessary part of contemporary life. The placement of these items can either have a neutral impact on the character of the site and structure or detract from its historic appearance.

Site features fall into two categories; those features that can be controlled by the property owner – antennae, satellite dishes, mechanical units, trash containers, etc.; and those that cannot – overhead wires, utility poles, etc.

#### Inappropriate Treatments

- 1 Avoid placing satellite dishes on roof areas or on porch roofs visible from public rights-of-way.
- 2 Avoid placing miscellaneous site objects, such as trash containers, in front yard locations.



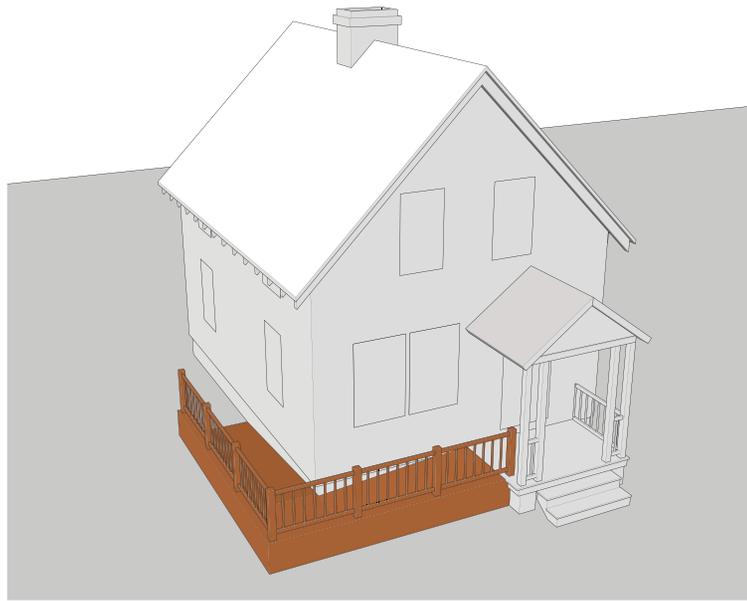
By placing as many appurtenances as possible out of sight, the historic appearance of the site and the district is maintained.

#### Guidelines

- 1 Place site appurtenances, such as certain mechanical units, in inconspicuous areas on the rear of the building and screen with appropriate plantings or fencing. Allow for appropriate air-flow to these units.
- 2 Consider placing overhead utilities underground wherever possible.
- 3 Place antennae and satellite dishes on inconspicuous rooftop locations.
- 4 Store trash containers in locations not visible from public rights-of-way.



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Historic porch designs of Truxtun can be altered to accommodate accessible ramps.

#### H. Accessibility

Access ramps are sometimes a necessity for residents of an older house that does not have an at-grade entrance. These ramps can often be added to historic buildings in a design that relates well to a historic porch and without substantially altering historic significant features of the historic building.

Prior to construction of a ramp, you should seek advice from the Planning Staff in the Department of Planning. This office may be able to direct you to professionals that have experience in designing accessibility solutions.

These guidelines are simply recommendations. The City of Portsmouth is prohibited from reviewing wheelchair ramps for the purpose of design/historic preservation by the Code of Virginia.

#### ✓ Guidelines

- 1 Locate access at a well-defined entrance to the building and where providing that access will not cause permanent damage to character-defining features of the building.
- 2 Design wheelchair ramps to have the least visual effect on the building and setting.
- 3 Construct ramps using materials compatible with existing materials on the building.
- 4 Ensure that any solution is reversible; that it may be built, used, and removed without permanent damage to the historic features of the building.
- 5 Retain and preserve historic elements, such as porch railings, so that these original features may be restored to the structure when a ramp is removed.