

Chicago Landscape Ordinance FAQ's:

1. WHAT DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS ARE EXEMPT FROM LANDSCAPING REQUIREMENTS?

- Construction, repair or rehabilitation of any one, two or three-family dwelling. For these homes, parkway trees will be planted by the City.
- Restoration of any building or portion thereof damaged by fire, explosion, flood, casualty or other calamity.
- Construction, repair or rehabilitation of any accessory (e.g., garage, fence, etc.) buildings or structures.
- No parkway trees are required where the parkway is less than nine (9) feet in width. (This exemption only applies in terms of requirements for parkway trees.)
- No screening is required for construction of a parking, loading or other vehicular use are smaller than 1,200 square feet (SF).
- No interior landscaping is required for construction of a parking, loading or other vehicular use area smaller than 3,000 SF.

2. WHAT TYPES OF DEVELOPMENT ARE REQUIRED TO INSTALL LANDSCAPING?

A. PARKWAY TREE PLANTING IS REQUIRED FOR:

- The construction of any principal building (i.e., the main building or use as opposed to accessory structures).
- Additions to a building in excess of 1,500 SF of floor area.
- Repair or rehabilitation of a building if the cost exceeds \$10,000 or 50% of the building's replacement cost, whichever is greater.
- The construction or installation of any parking area containing more than 4 parking spaces.
- The repair, rehabilitation or expansion of any existing surface parking area containing more than 4 parking spaces, if such repair, rehabilitation or expansion would increase the number of existing parking spaces by more than 25% or 4 spaces.

B. THE INSTALLATION OF THE SCREENING OF VEHICULAR USE AREAS IS REQUIRED FOR:

- The construction of any vehicular use are of 1,200 SF or more that is visible from a public right of way.
- The construction of any vehicular use area larger than 1,200 SF or more contiguous to a Residence District or existing institution (e.g., schools, hospitals or churches).
- The repair, rehabilitation or expansion of any existing vehicular use area, if such repair, rehabilitation or expansion would increase the number of existing parking spaces by more than 25% or 4 spaces, whichever is less.

C. THE INSTALLATION OF INTERNAL LANDSCAPING FOR VEHICULAR USE AREAS IS REQUIRED FOR:

- Construction of vehicular use areas of 3,000 SF or more.

3. WHAT KINDS AND AMOUNTS OF LANDSCAPING ARE REQUIRED?

THREE KINDS OF LANDSCAPING ARE REQUIRED:

- Parkway Trees: The Ordinance requires the planting of one shade tree, at least 2" in caliper, for every 25 feet of frontage.
- Screening for Vehicular Use Areas: The builders of parking lots must plant hedges 2' to 4' high within a 5' landscaped setback in order to screen surface parking lots from the streets. The required setback is 15' to 20' if the parking lot is located in a residential district. Screening along side or rear lot lines by a wall, fence or hedge of not less than 5' nor more than 7' in height.
- Internal Planting for Vehicular Use Area: The Landscape Ordinance requires shade trees, at least 2" in caliper, to be planted in landscape islands (minimum 165 SF). The total landscape area must equal 5% of the vehicular use area. One tree must be planted for every 250 SF of interior landscaped area.

4. IS A SPECIAL PERMIT NECESSARY FOR THE INSTALLATION OF REQUIRED LANDSCAPING?

- No separate landscape permit is required. Landscaping permits are a part of the normal processing of building and zoning permit applications. If you are required to apply for building or zoning permits, you may be required to submit landscaping plans. You should first determine whether the project is subject to the requirements of these guidelines; determine the exact requirements; prepare a landscape plan; and then submit the plan to the Department of Zoning (Room 800, City Hall, 121 North LaSalle Street) as part of the building permit application.
- The Department of Zoning will review and approve or disapprove the landscape plan. If it is not approved, specific recommendations to bring the landscape plan into conformance with these guidelines will be noted on a correction sheet.

5. WHAT INFORMATION MUST BE SUBMITTED?

THE LANDSCAPE PLAN MUST BE A SCALE DRAWING OF THE SITE THAT INCLUDES:

- Notation of scale (no smaller than 1" = 40'0")
- Indicate estimated time of planting
- Drawing scale
- Drawing orientation (indicated by conventional north arrow)
- Property lines, easements and right-of-way frontage with dimensions shown.
- Sight triangles at intersections and at alley driveway curb cuts.
- Total vehicular use area calculation
- Location and dimensions of all landscaped areas including perimeter screening, parkway plantings and interior landscaping; location, botanical name and size of all plant material and ground cover; and the location of other pertinent landscape features. Location of existing and proposed street lights and fire hydrants in public rights-of-way
- Size and location of all existing and proposed public and private utility improvements within the public rights-of-way.

- Proposed layout of vehicular use areas including the location, dimensions of parking spaces, curb islands, interior plantings, pedestrian walkways and maneuvering aisles.
- Location of all existing mature trees on site that the applicant proposes to remove; the location of all trees with caliper greater than 2" which are to be retained and counted towards the minimum requirements.
- The location, design, height and building material of all proposed walls, planter boxes and fences.
- Indicate street traffic direction using two-way or one-way arrows.
- A certified statement, signed by the owner(s) committing to the maintenance of required landscaping.

6. HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE TO GET A PERMIT?

- A simple landscape plan will require no more time than is required for normal processing of building and zoning applications. In some cases you may receive conditional approval of your zoning permit pending the Bureau of Forestry's review of the proposed parkway trees. The Bureau of Forestry will process parkway tree plans within 7 working days.

7. WHAT TYPES OF TREES ARE ACCEPTABLE?

- High quality, nursery-grown trees must be planted because of potential damage by pollutants (e.g., salts and carbon monoxide common to city streets). To prevent the planting of trees that become hazards or serious maintenance problems, consult the recommended species list on page 41 of the Ordinance.

8. CAN THE LANDSCAPING REQUIREMENTS BE WAIVED UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES?

- The screening or landscape requirements may be waived or modified provided that the Zoning Administrator finds that (1) the strict application of the requirements would deprive the applicant of reasonable use of the land or would otherwise impose an unreasonable hardship, and (2) the conditions and circumstances upon which the waiver or modification is sought are not caused by the applicant. Furthermore, the Zoning Administrator may permit an architectural or urban design solution to the screening of parking areas provided the alternative meets the requirements of Subsection 11.7A-3 (10) of the Chicago Zoning Ordinance.

9. WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE MAINTENANCE OF REQUIRED LANDSCAPING?

- All required landscaping must be maintained by the property owner in good condition. Any damaged or dead trees, shrubs or ground cover must be promptly replaced. Maintenance of landscaped areas includes weeding, mowing, trimming, pruning, edging, cultivation, seeding, fertilizing, watering, pest control and anything else necessary to ensure healthy, vigorous plant growth.

- The landscaping code requires property owners to maintain the parkway trees for a minimum period of 5 years following their initial planting. After this 5 year period, the City's Bureau of Forestry will assume responsibility for the maintenance of parkway trees. Landscaping planted on private property must be maintained during all times the property remains in use.
- Landscape permit drawings must contain the following statement:
The undersigned acknowledges that the landscape planting shown on the landscape plan(s) for the property at (fill in street address), Chicago, IL (fill in zip code) has, to the best of the undersigned applicant's knowledge, been designed and will be installed, maintained and replaced as required by the current and subsequent owners in accordance with the requirements of the Landscape Ordinance of the City of Chicago and of this publication, "Guide to the Chicago Landscape Ordinance."

10. HOW WILL THE LANDSCAPING REQUIREMENTS BE ENFORCED?

- Personnel from the Bureau of Forestry and the Department of Zoning will inspect project sites to ensure that the required landscaping has been installed. A Certificate of Occupancy will not be issued until inspectors have visited the site and determined that the required landscaping has been installed. Surface parking lots and other vehicular use areas require a Certificate of Occupancy.
- If weather prevents the installation of required landscaping, the Zoning Administrator may accept a performance bond to insure that within a reasonable time period (up to six months) the required landscaping will be installed. Following the installation of required landscaping and inspection by City personnel, the performance bond will be released.

NOTE: This summary has been published only as an introductory guide to requirements of Chicago's Landscape Ordinance. For any specific project, the actual language of the Ordinance should be consulted.

For more information contact:

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