



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.

Port Norfolk's historic site character reflects the planned nature of this streetcar suburb. A grid layout of rectangular blocks was divided into small lots. Within an easy walk of the streetcar line, the neighborhood provided a welcomed alternative for those that could afford to move from the overcrowded downtown areas of Portsmouth.

Port Norfolk's tree-lined streets and extensive network of sidewalks made it a pedestrian-friendly neighborhood. Each house connected to this network of sidewalks with a concrete front walk. The popularity of streetcars waned with the introduction and affordability of the automobile.



This illustration of a street shows the close spacing and consistent setback of the houses in Port Norfolk. Mature trees, foundation plantings, and well-kept lawns are character-defining site features in the district.

Few Port Norfolk homeowners were able to add driveways to these narrow lots; however, rear alleys allowed for placement of garages accessible from the rear of the parcel. Lot widths of less than 30 feet and modest setbacks allowed for minimal plantings in the front yards of these residences.



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Early driveways were often designed as two strips, or ribbons, of concrete. New driveways installed in this manner increase proper drainage and reduce heat gain when compared to solid paving. This driveway leads under a porte-cochere, which often were designed to shelter a side entry. The concrete front walk appears to date from the same era as the driveway and matches its color and texture.

B. Walkways and Driveways

A walkway usually connects the sidewalk to the front porch of a Port Norfolk house. A driveway occasionally 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 Port Norfolk is concrete.
- 6 Use the same materials in both walkways and driveways to provide a uniform appearance and continuity of design.



C. Sheds and Garages

A streetcar line originally provided service from Port Norfolk to downtown Portsmouth and a variety of workplaces and made individual transportation unnecessary.

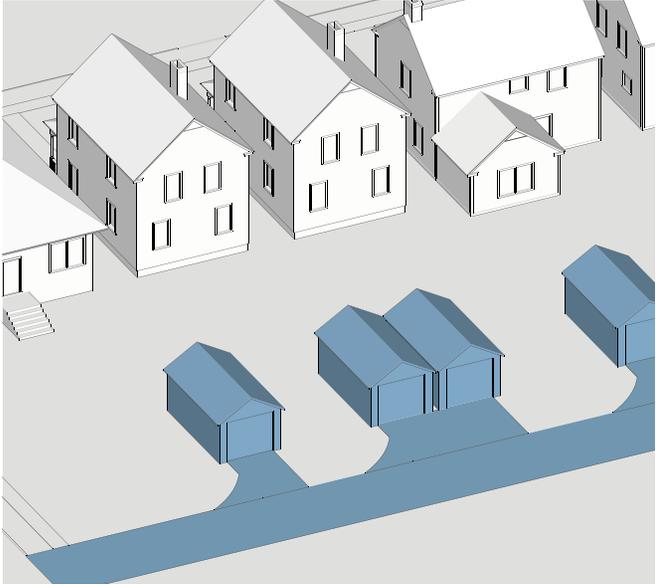
To provide access to sheds and other outbuildings, the neighborhood was designed with rear alleys. Many of the outbuildings that line these alleys have been modified over time to accommodate the automobile.

⊘ Inappropriate Treatments

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

✓ Guidelines

- ❶ Retain and repair historic outbuildings following the *Guidelines for Existing Structures* found in *Chapter IV*.
- ❷ 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*.
- ❸ 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*.



Garages in Port Norfolk are accessible from rear alleys rather than from the main avenues of the district.



This view down one of Port Norfolk's alleys shows a variety of garages and sheds located at the rear lot line.



A board-and-batten clad garage with matching hinged doors and capped by a painted 5V crimp metal roof is located on this corner lot.



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Crepe myrtle street trees frame this facade in Port Norfolk, and are repeated on the site. Additional evergreen and deciduous plantings accent the foundation and concrete walkway.



Symmetrical plantings accent the foundation and walkway of this Colonial Revival design.



The asymmetrical facade of this vernacular Victorian house is accented by balanced plantings at the porch corners and an accent tree on the larger side of the yard.

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 plan, many Port Norfolk lots allow 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 plantings.

Street trees in planting strips, between the front of the house lots and the street, provide a unified planting scheme for the Port Norfolk neighborhood.

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 Port Norfolk when installing new plantings.
- 4 Use new plants that, when mature, will not be too large for the narrow lots of Port Norfolk. 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.



The Port Norfolk Civic League awarded this colorful bed its "Yard of the Month."

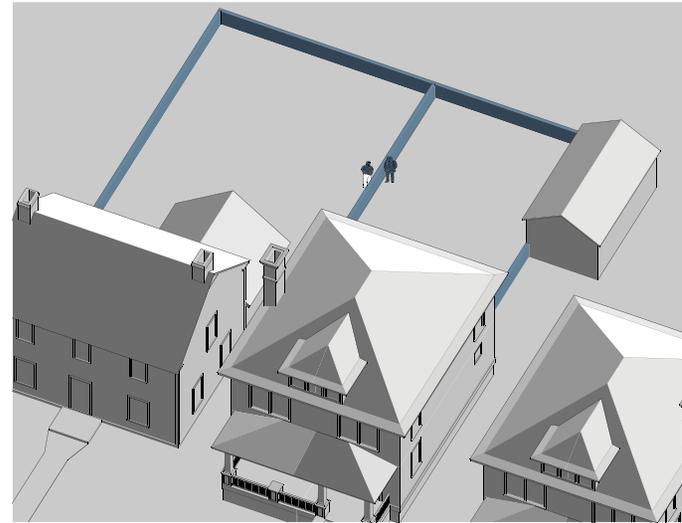


E. Fences

Historically, most Port Norfolk house lots did not have fencing. This is still the predominant condition and 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.



This white painted picket fence and arbor-covered gate are appropriate to the Victorian style of the dwelling. Locating a fence near the rear corner of the house is appropriate placement.



When fencing a backyard in the historic district, it is appropriate to align the fence with the rear wall of the house.

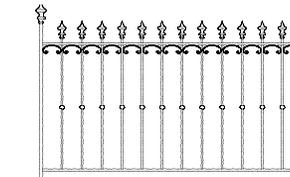
⊘ Inappropriate Treatments

- 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.

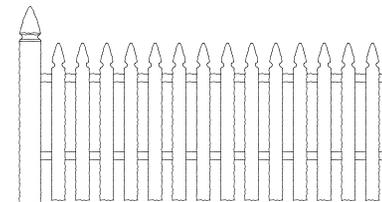


A corner lot uses a simple, classically detailed, low privacy fence to provide a sense of enclosure. The style of the fence complements the Colonial Revival porch columns.

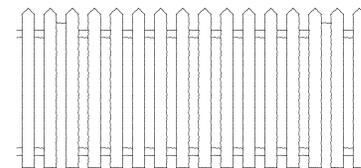
Wrought iron fences may be appropriate for higher style Queen Anne houses in the district. Designs should be based on historic examples.



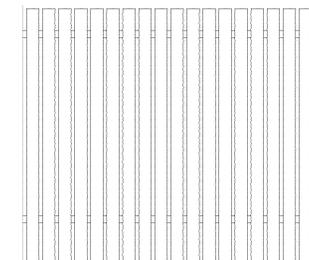
Wrought Iron - Decorative



Picket - Decorative



Picket - Plain



Privacy Fence

Wood fences were prevalent during Port Norfolk's era of construction. Designs should be simple and relate to the architectural character of the dwelling.



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Simple carved pickets and posts enclose this yard.



A gently curved privacy fence has been stained to coordinate with the color scheme of the house.

E. Fences *continued*

✓ 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 Port Norfolk.
- 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 Port Norfolk due to the small lot sizes.



F. Lighting

While Port Norfolk houses were advertised as electrified, exterior site 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 Port Norfolk include those from the Victorian, 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.



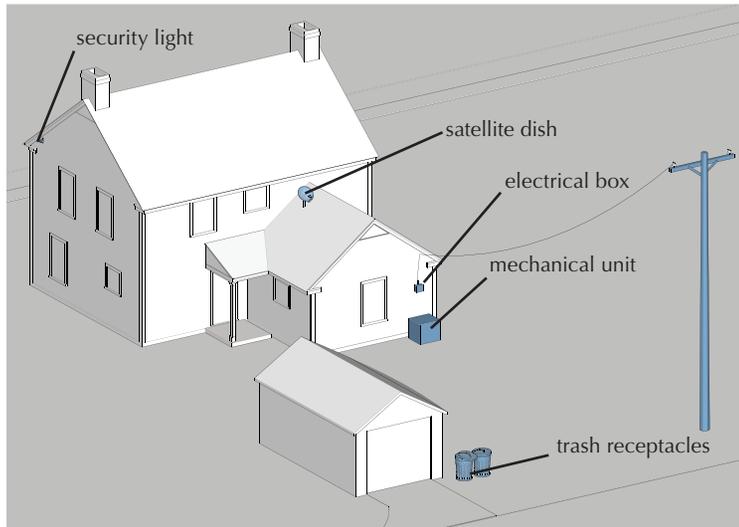
A single light placed to the side of the front door is appropriate for more asymmetrical facade arrangements.



Small fixtures flank either side of the front door, a treatment most appropriate for symmetrical facades.



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

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 their 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.

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.



H. Accessibility

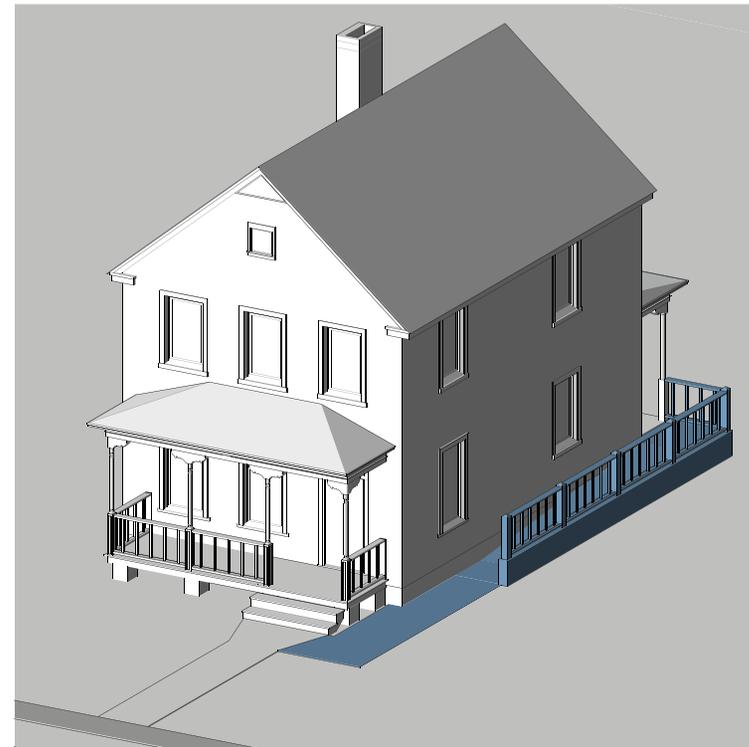
Access ramps are sometimes a necessity for residents of an older house that does not have an at-grade entrance. These ramps can often be added to historic buildings in a design that relates well to a historic porch and without substantially altering significant features of the historic building.

Prior to construction of a ramp, you should seek advice from the 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.



Historic porch designs in Port Norfolk can be altered to accommodate accessible ramps.



This temporary metal access ramp follows the line of the front walkway and can be easily removed without damage to the building's historic materials.