

Chapter 1. Site Features

Context & Character

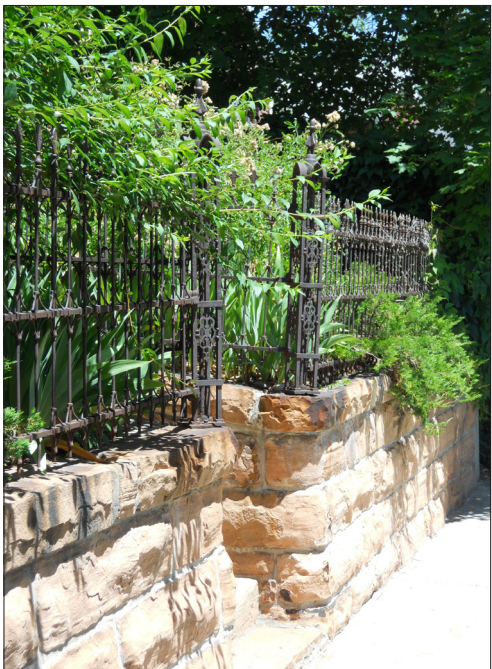
A variety of site features are characteristic of early Salt Lake City residential neighborhoods. A house is usually appreciated in its immediate street setting. Individual sites and gardens may share common characteristics which help to define community character.

Fences were popular and often defined property boundaries; masonry walls were used to retain steep hillsides and various paving materials, particularly concrete and sandstone, were used for walkways. A variety of plantings, including trees, lawns and shrubbery also were seen. In a few cases, distinctive lawn ornaments or sculpture were introduced, or an irrigation ditch ran across a site. Each of these elements contributes to the historic character of a neighborhood. They also help to add the variety of scale, texture and materials associated with the streetscape, enriching community experience. Collectively these elements often help to establish the historic and architectural context.



Enriching community experience.

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Historic fences, often of wrought and cast iron, and original retaining walls provide visual richness and a sense of time in the streetscape.



Most residential properties have a progression of spaces leading from the public realm of the street, transitioning into a semi-public/semi-private area of the front yard, to perhaps a semi-private porch and ending with the building entry, and the private realm of the house. This progression may be extensive, and include a sidewalk area and then a yard with a walkway that leads to a porch. Or, it may be more compressed, with a small stoop near the street edge. Nonetheless, there is in each case a sense of progression from the public to the private realm, and a visual continuity is apparent, contributing to the character of the street scene and context.



Early fencing defined the lot, and added decorative detail, while maintaining the visual relationship between private and public space.

There is often a demarcation of the front yard with a low fence, often in wood picket form or decorative wrought and/or cast iron, which helps to maintain the visual continuity between the house and the street. Where a fence is higher and/or less “transparent”, it will disrupt this relationship. Shrubs may also have been planted to define a fence line, sometimes in the form of a hedge. Again these tend to be more compatible where they retain some of the visual continuity between the street and the house.

Design Objective

Historic site features that survive should be retained, preserved or repaired when feasible. New site features should be compatible with the historic context and the character of the neighborhood.

General

1.1 Historically significant site features should be preserved.

- These may include historic retaining walls, irrigation ditches, gardens, driveways and walkways.
- Fences and street trees are also examples of original site features that should be retained whenever feasible.
- Civic maintenance and improvements should identify, recognize and retain important streetscape features such as sidewalks, parkways, planting strips, street trees and street lighting.

Historic Fences

Originally, painted wood picket fences were used to enclose many front yards. The vertical slats were set apart, with spaces between, and the overall height of the fence was generally less than three feet. This combination of low height and semi-transparency helped to both identify individual sites and property, while retaining the visual relationship between gardens and the streetscape.

Wrought iron and wire fences were also used in early domestic landscapes. Early cast iron and wrought iron frequently add decorative detail and a sense of maturity to the design character of a neighborhood.

Where such fences survive, they should be retained. Often, however, original fences are missing. Replacement with a fence similar in character to that used historically is appropriate in such conditions.



Low fences, retaining walls and landscape design help to define the identity and richness of parts of an established neighborhood.



The street lighting on South Temple contributes significantly to the character and grandeur of the street.



A low height and the sense of transparency created by this wall and fence help to retain views to the building and along the street.



A progression of spaces and landscaping from the street to the building helps to establish the character of the street.

Note

All fences will require a Building Permit and all fences in a historic district will require a Certificate of Appropriateness approval.

Historic photographs portray fence heights at a much lower level than we are used to seeing today. Consider using a lower fence height to enclose a front yard, in keeping with historic patterns and to retain a sense of continuity along the street frontage.

1.2 An original fence should be retained

- Replace only those portions that are deteriorated beyond repair.

1.3 Use materials that appear similar to that of the original for a replacement fence.

- A painted wood picket fence is an appropriate replacement in many locations.
- A simple metal fence, similar to traditional “wrought iron” or wire, may also be considered.
- Review early examples nearby to identify appropriate design options.
- Fence components should be similar in scale to those seen historically in the neighborhood.

1.4 Design a replacement fence with a “transparent” quality, allowing views into the yard from the street.

- Avoid using a solid fence, with no spacing between the boards.
- Chain link and vinyl fencing are inappropriate as fence materials where they would be visible from the street.

1.5 Consider “transparency” in the design of higher privacy fencing for the side yard of a corner property.

- This helps to maintain a sense of visual continuity.
- Locate a higher street-facing side fence behind the front facade.

Historic Grading

In some areas, steep topography dictated that building sites be sloped. Portions of the Capitol Hill, University and Avenues Historic Districts are examples. Yards typically incline steeply in these locations, reflecting the original topography. Elsewhere, in the Avenues and South Temple for example, the grading is often more gentle and provides a unifying visual coherence to the streetscape. This historic grading pattern is an important characteristic that should be retained.

Modifying this historic slope, as it is seen from the street, can negatively affect the historic character of an individual site and also its context. For example, excavating a hillside to create a flat building site, or cutting it into a series of stepped terraces would detract from the historic character. However, in some parts of the city, this has occurred in the back yard. Because altering the historic slope in the back yard has less impact on the historic character of the site, more flexibility may be appropriate for modifying back yards.

1.6 The historic grading pattern and design of the site should be preserved.

- In general altering the overall appearance of the historic grading is inappropriate.
- Where change is considered, it should be subordinate to the overall historic grading character.
- Avoid leveling front gardens and introducing retaining walls where this disrupts the established pattern.



The low retaining wall supporting an ornate historic iron fence contributes significantly to the character of the streetscene.



The form, construction, detailing and materials of a retaining wall may complement both the architectural setting and character of the neighborhood.

Maintenance tip

Many historic masonry retaining walls are damaged by water pressure that builds up behind the wall. This may result from watering a lawn or from natural site drainage. This pressure can erode mortar and it can cause movement of stones.

Water pressure can be reduced by improving the drainage uphill of the wall. Small weep holes or drains also may be created in the wall to allow moisture to pass through.



With steeper topography, a retaining wall often becomes a significant element framing the public realm and defining the boundary and form of the site.

Masonry Retaining Walls

Sandstone and cobblestone retaining walls were often used in neighborhoods where steep slopes occurred. Many of these walls survive and often are important character-defining features for individual properties and for the districts in which they are found. Some early concrete retaining walls also exist. These should be preserved. As retaining walls frequently align along the edges of sidewalks, they help establish a sense of visual continuity in the neighborhood.

These walls also may have distinct stone coursing and mortar characteristics. Some joints are deeply raked, with the mortar recessed, creating strong shadow lines. Others have mortar that is flush with the stone surface, while some have a bead that projects beyond the stone face. The bond, color and finish of the stone, as well as its mortar style, are distinctive features that contribute to the historic character of a neighborhood.

In some cases, the mortar may have eroded from the retaining wall. Such walls should be repointed, using a soft mortar mix that is similar in color, texture and design to the original (see also Ch.2, Building Materials and Finishes). On occasion, some stones are badly deteriorated or may even be missing. New replacement stones should match the original as closely as possible when this occurs.

A new retaining wall will affect the character of the streetscape. This should be considered in its immediate and then broader context. Where a new retaining wall interrupts an established pattern of gradual grading of front lawns it will be less visually and historically appropriate.

1.7 The historic height of a retaining wall wherever possible should be maintained.

- Increasing the height of a wall to create a privacy screen is inappropriate.
- If a fence is needed for security, consider using a transparent wrought iron or wood picket design that is mounted on or just behind the top of the wall. This will preserve the wall, allow views into the yard and minimize the overall visual impact of the new fence.

1.8 The historic finish of a masonry retaining wall should be retained.

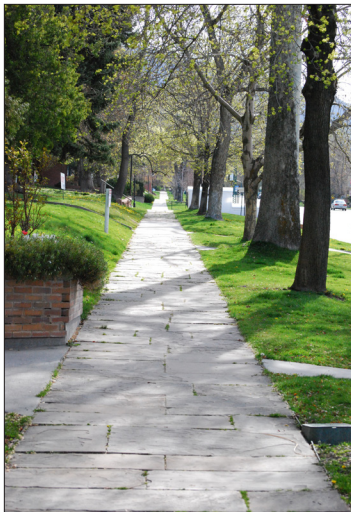
- If repointing is necessary, use a mortar mix that is similar to that used historically.
- Repoint using a joint profile that matches the original.
- Painting a historic masonry retaining wall, or covering it with stucco or other cementitious coating, is usually inappropriate.

1.9 Retain and preserve the materials and construction pattern of a historic masonry retaining wall wherever possible.

- If portions of the wall are deteriorated, replace only those portions that are beyond repair.
- Replacement material should match the original in color, texture and finish, including the color of historic concrete.
- Masonry units of a size similar to that used historically should be employed.
- Respect the original bond and construction pattern of the stonework.



Retaining walls, fences and steps may jointly contribute to the definition and character of the immediate setting and the district. The variety of materials often complements those of the building.



Mature natural stone paving and landscaping enrich the streetscape.



A shared pattern of walkways and steps can help to create a sense of rhythm along a streetscape.

1.10 Consider a new retaining wall in the context of its immediate setting and the established relationship of landscaping within the streetscape.

- A new retaining wall should be avoided where it would disrupt a shared gentle grading between buildings and the street.
- Limit wall height to that defined as characteristic of the setting.
- Design a wall to reflect those found traditionally.
- Use materials that define the character within the immediate and broader setting.

Walkways & Sidewalks

Walkways often contribute a sense of visual continuity on a block and convey a “progression” of walking experiences along the street. This progression, comprised of spaces between the street and the house, begins with a walkway that leads from the sidewalk; this is often in turn punctuated by a series of steps. Because many of the neighborhoods in Salt Lake City were plotted on a grid, this progression of spaces, coupled with landscape features such as fences and walls, is a common feature and greatly enhances the streetscape.

Often this common pattern creates a shared rhythm of walkways and steps, helping to unify varied building scales and styles. New site work that alters the historic pattern of the block can negatively affect its visual continuity and coherence. The use of appropriate materials is a key factor in preserving the historic character and the relationship between a historic building, its neighbors and its context.

Historic sidewalks may have a variety of features which establish the age and character of a neighborhood, and which in turn enrich the experience of living there. Natural sandstone paving for example weathers to exhibit the bedding plane ‘figuring’ of the stone, enhancing the sense of time and maturity in the neighborhood.

1.11 Respect a common historic walkway pattern in form, design and materials wherever possible.

- Review the prevailing patterns in the immediate neighborhood.
- Design alterations or a new walkway to complement a traditional pattern.

1.12 Historic paving materials should be retained where these still occur.

- Early sandstone flags should be retained, and carefully relaid if uneven.
- Replace any broken stones with matching material.
- Where it has been a tradition, consider the use of natural stone paving where streetscape improvements are considered.
- Stamped concrete is not a historic material or design in sidewalks and driveways.



Drive strips can help to integrate a driveway with the landscaping.

Driveways

Historic driveways are characteristic of many neighborhoods in the city, frequently dating to the original construction of the house and landscaping of the site. These often retain their original paving materials, and may demarcate the original two wheel ‘drive strips’ in a different material. A historic driveway, both its design and materials, can contribute to the character of the immediate setting of the house and its wider context, adding to the sense of maturity of the neighborhood. Repair of a historic driveway is preferred to its complete replacement, wherever possible. If a new driveway is proposed, the use of drive strips may help to integrate this within its context, especially where it would replace existing grass.

A historic driveway should be retained and repaired wherever possible.

- The driveway layout in original materials should provide a basis from which to repair or replace.
- The ‘drive strips’ should be retained where these are a historic feature.
- A new driveway should be designed to avoid or minimize the loss of grass, established landscaping and mature trees.



Historic paving will include both natural stone and concrete.



A park strip is often experienced as an extension of the front yard, integrating private and public spaces, and enhancing the established character of the neighborhood.

Park Strips

In many historic neighborhoods in Salt Lake City, the streetscape contains park strips, the band of grass between the curb and the public sidewalk. These may contain rows of street trees if the park strip is wide enough to support the root systems. This coupling of planting strips and street trees provides a rhythm along the block, as well as shade for pedestrians, and should be preserved. Often these spaces are creatively landscaped to reflect the adjacent yard, adding a sense of seasonal variety and landscape maturity to the streetscape.

Only if the park strip is less than 24" wide are impervious materials such as brick pavers, concrete pavers and concrete allowed. Refer to Chapter 21A.48 of the Salt Lake City Zoning Ordinance for information on the landscaping of park strips.

Landscaped Medians or Parkways

Parkway are large grassed or treed medians that line the center of a street, such as along 600 East in Central City, and on 1200 East and 200 South in the University district. They provide a unique historical landscape amenity and are often used as recreational or leisure spaces. They markedly enhance and unify the character of both the street and that part of the district. Where they are found, parkways add a unique character to the streetscape, and consequently should remain. Where they have been removed, consider their reinstatement.

Planting Designs & Materials

While most historic plant materials have been replaced over time, some specimens do survive, and in other situations, the traditional planting pattern has been retained even if new plants have been installed. In the South Temple district, for example, mature street trees are an important historic element of this street. The trees create a border between the street and the buildings and are a character-defining feature of the boulevard and the district. If possible, these historic trees should be retained; if their removal is necessary then replacement trees should conform to the planting pattern of the existing trees.

1.13 Historically significant planting designs should be preserved.

- Preserve a row of street trees which is an established historic feature.
- Maintain existing trees in such a setting that are in good condition.
- Replant with a species that is similar in character to that used historically if removal can't be avoided.
- Replacement and pruning of street trees requires approval of the City's Urban Forester. <http://www.slcgov.com/forestry>
- Retain historic planting beds and landscape features as part of the established character of a neighborhood wherever possible.
- Utah has a Heritage Tree List, administered by the Sovereign Lands and Forestry Division of the Utah State Natural Resources Department. Owners interested in finding out if a historic tree is located on their property or who are interested in listing a tree, should contact this agency.



Planting design can make a significant contribution.



Mature trees are often a character defining feature of the streetscape and the neighborhood.



Trees in the front yard area may complement those nearby in the park strips and lining the street.

Street Lighting

When new street lights are to be installed, they should be designed to be compatible with the neighborhood and with other elements of the streetscape. The design for street lighting should be subtle and unobtrusive. Often, photographic archives can provide inspiration for the design of a new street lighting system.

1.14 Historic street lighting contributes to the character of the district and should be retained.

- Adaptation to meet current standards of lighting and energy efficiency can often be achieved.

1.15 Design new street lighting as a subtle complement to the streetscape.

- Consider appearance and impact during both daytime and nighttime hours.
- Avoid damage to established features such as early stone paving.



Street lights can quietly contribute to the character and interest of the street scene.

Site Lighting

Lighting in the historic districts can affect the manner in which historic resources are interpreted at night. Lighting is a design feature therefore that is important in site planning; the approach to a lighting scheme should consider lighting intensity, spillover into adjacent properties and fixture design. It should also consider the appreciation of the street at night as a visual composition, and the effect that excessive lighting of an individual building might have in this composition.

1.16 Minimize the visual impacts of site lighting.

- Shield site lighting to avoid glare and spillover onto adjacent properties.
- Focus lighting on walks and entries, rather than up trees and facade planes.
- Lighting intensity and design should not draw undue attention to a particular property at the expense of the appreciation of the street composition.



Lighting the building or the site can also complement the architectural setting and character of the street.