RIDGEFIELD PARK Design Guidelines for Main Street



RIDGEFIELD PARK Design Guidelines for Main Street

A guide to renovation and rehabilitation for the business district.

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Introduction PAR

P The Reawakening of Main Street

Once the social and commercial center of American life, downtowns and neighborhood business districts across the United States fell by the wayside, neglected and forgotten in our rush to newly created shopping centers and regional malls. In trying to compete, some downtowns hung garish signs and hid grand old buildings behind modern facades. Others simply gave up and let time take its toll.

Breathing new economic life into an old commercial district presents a special challenge.

"Simply put, to give an aging downtown a prosperous new lease on life, a community must direct its time, energy and resources to the challenge of discovering the area's unique assets and rebuilding it step-by-step into a vibrant and viable commercial district."

This is Ridgefield Park's challenge. By the blending of common sense with sound planning, historic preservation, a coordinated design approach and the enthusiasm of the community, the business core can flourish.

The reawakening is already underway, most apparent in the new sidewalks along Main Street. State grants and the merchants themselves have supplemented Village funding to install sidewalks, street paving and tree planting. These guidelines are meant to insure that the upgrading continues through incremental property redevelopment and routine maintenance by the Department of Public Works.





The Traditional Ridgefield Park Baby Parade, 1910

Facing page: An early photo of the Business Section of Main Street in Ridgefield Park

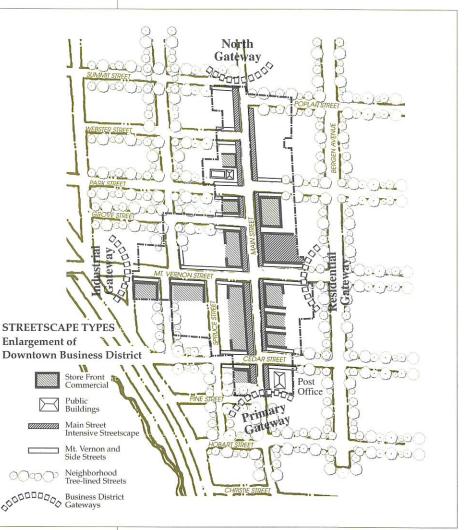
Project Area and Description

The Village of Ridgefield Park has a strong sense of community that is physically evident in the tree lined streets and the well defined Main Street. The fine texture of the narrow streets, low rise architecture, and the variety of shops and services along Main Street is in sharp contrast to the surrounding highways, commercial and industrial parks. (Shops serve everyday needs from the Post Office and the bakery to the video store.)

The Fourth of July marks the height of community pride, having over 100 years of consecutive parades. This event also defines the Village of Ridgefield Park as a regional "Main Street" drawing participants and fans from around the county, state and the country.

The small town flavor of the Village juxtaposed against the skyline of New York City has slowly changed over time to keep pace with the changing generations of people, shop owners and developers. (Some of the facades have been altered dramatically though the original facade remains below). Other buildings have been replaced with updated architectural styles. But the structure of Main Street is constant - the one and two story buildings, the narrow street, busy sidewalks, the Post Office, Banks, Theater and Municipal Offices. This is a traditional hometown shopping district distinctly different from the hurried efficiency of the shopping mall, or the chaotic continuum of the commercial strip.

This set of Guidelines focuses on the heart of the Village: Main Street. The broader fabric of Ridgefield Park is also briefly discussed as the Gateway and setting for Main Street.



- 2. Develop a consistent method of approach to architectural restoration and design.
- 3. Specify a cohesive palette of landscape elements that strengthen the image of Main Street.

The Village of Ridgefield Park has identified the need to develop a unified image for Main Street. To achieve this, specific guidelines were developed to guide the use of color, materials, form, finish of structures, landscaping, etc. The individual design elements discussed in the design guidelines provide the bases for establishing an overall appearance to the downtown area.

Design Principles

The following design principles were used in the development of these design guidelines.

- •Use standard lighting, bus shelters, street tree placement, paving and other site elements to provide an organized appearance and to establish an overall design character that is balanced and consistent.
- •Use landscape materials consistently to reinforce the character found along the street.
- Respect historical design of individual buildings.
- Highlight, through design, entrances into the community as "gateways".
- Take advantage of existing features to provide a pleasant and attractive element of visual interest.
- •Promote a design theme that is appropriate and consistently applied throughout.

History of Ridgefield Park

^P The Village of Ridgefield Park is situated on a crest of land called Teaneck Ridge rising between the eastern banks of the Hackensack River and the western and southern reaches of Overpeck Creek. Known to the Indians as "Hachi Saki" or "good ground", the ridge was the first, high and dry land encountered along the Hackensack River upstream from Newark Bay and the Hudson River.

In 1667, Oratam, Sachem of the Hackensack Indians, gave more than 2,000 acres of land (where the Overpeck Creek and Hackensack River meet) to Sara Kierstedt of New York, the wife of a surgeon in the employ of the Dutch West Indian Company. The land was thought to have been given to her, personally, as compensation for her acting as Chief Oratams' interpreter between the Indians and the Dutch. She received a patent for this land from Governor Carteret in 1669. Within ten years the southern part of the Kierstedt Patent was known as Old Hackensack and had been purchased by a small group of Dutch settlers. In 1685, one of these settlers, Hendrik Joresse Brinkerhoff, established his home on the Hackensack River, in an area west of what is now the Elks Club. In 1693 an Act of the General Assembly created Hackensack Township; the territory embracing all land between the Hackensack and Hudson Rivers, including the area known as old Hackensack.

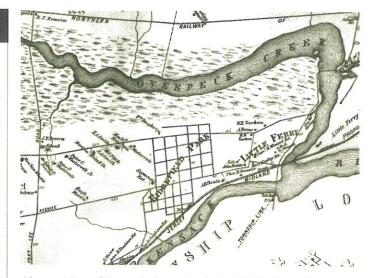
The area remained a sparsely populated farming community scattered along the area's few thoroughfares. The first road in the area was the Queen Anne Road. Known later as Hackensack Road, it followed the route of present day Main Street. Even with the construction of the Bergen Turnpike and its toll bridges over the Overpeck Creek and Hackensack River in 1804, little change occured until 1859.

In that year the Northern Railroad of New Jersey began running from Jersey City



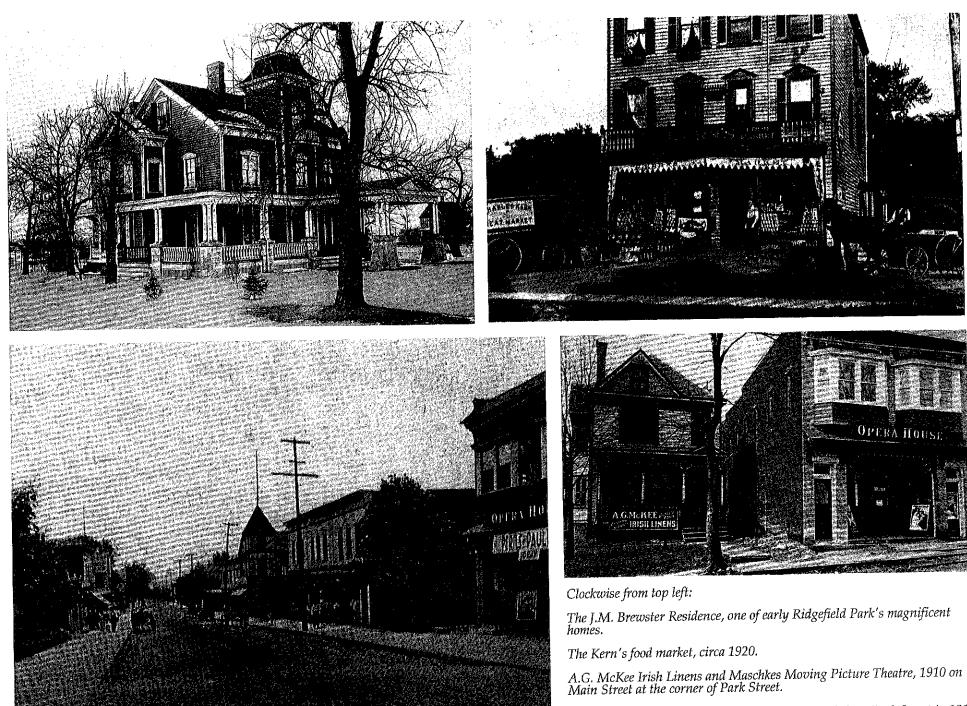
Residences on Central Avenue

to Piermont, New York on the eastern side of Overpeck Creek. Sunday excursionists would be transported across the Creek to the "Park", so named because of its woods and rolling greens which ran to the water's edge along the Hackensack River.

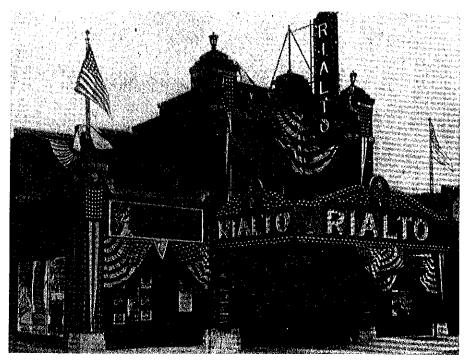


Above: Map of the early homesteads in old Hackensack, later Ridgefield Park.

Facing page: Engraving of John R. Paulison Homestead, one of the earliest residences of Ridgefield Park.



Hackensack Road, now Main Street, looking South from Park Street in 1912.





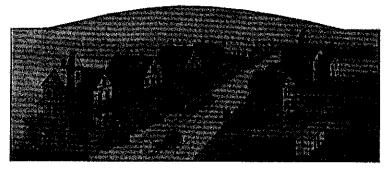
Clockwise from top left:

The Rialto Theater, decorated for the 4th of July, 1926, on Main Street at the corner of Cedar.

A view of Main Street from the bank taken during the 1940's.

The Sunday Visitor's Train at the station, the conveyance of choice for those taking a Sunday holiday in Ridgefield Park.

Residences on Sixth Street, West view. This is a detail of a map in the collection of the Ridgefield Park Library.





Building Design Issues

The blocks that compose Ridgefield Park's downtown business district contain a varied and expressive architecture, offering a comprehensive summary of the city's past. The majority of these buildings date from the turn of the century to the 1930's. When originally constructed, the downtown buildings shared a consistency in design and proportion that was key to creating a strong visual image. The consistency was, and is still, important in conveying how the downtown is perceived by the customer who is seeking goods and services here. A visually uniform downtown can go a long way towards attracting people to the area, as well as, to the individual shops and businesses that are located there.

Design Principals for Individual Facades

The basic element, in the downtown, is the building facade. Each individual facade has its own architectural character, scale, and style. Aligned along a city block, these facades collectively establish a unified pattern by repeating forms, colors, textures and rhythms of doors and windows, lintels and piers, cornices and eaves and fenestrations and pilasters.

The traditional facade for an individual building in Ridgefield Park generally consists of three parts: a storefront with an entrance and large display windows, an upper facade with regularly spaced windows or bays, and a decorative cornice that caps the building.

Traditional Storefront

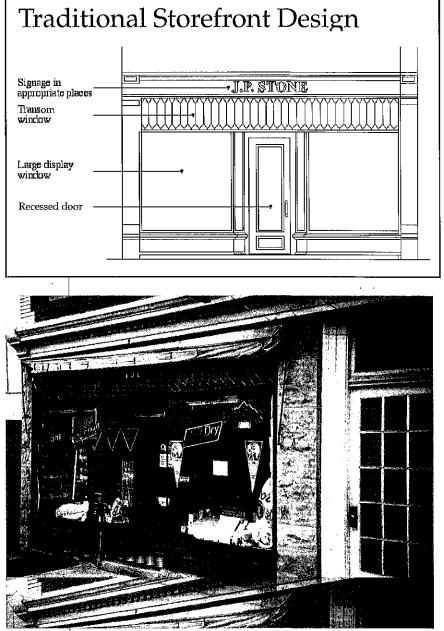
The storefront is the most important architectural feature of many historic commercial buildings. It also plays a crucial role in a store's advertising and merchandising strategy to draw customers and increase business. Not surprisingly, then, the storefront has become the feature most commonly altered in a historic commercial building. In the process, these alterations may have completely changed or destroyed a building's distinguishing architectural features that make up its historic character. The sensitive rehabilitation of historic storefronts will not only enhance the architectural character of the overall building but will contribute to a rejuvenation of a business district as well.

The traditional storefront in Ridgefield Park consisted of single or double doors flanked by display windows. The entrance was frequently recessed, not only to protect the customer from inclement weather but to increase the amount of space in which to display merchandise. In some cases an additional side door provided access to the upper floors. Thin structural members of cast iron or wood, rather than masonry piers, usually framed the storefront. The windows themselves were raised off the ground by wood, cast iron or pressed metal panels or bulkheads; frequently, a transom or series of transoms (consisting of single or multiple panes of glass) were placed above each window and door. The signboard above the storefront (the fascia covering the structural beam) became a prominent part of the building. Canvas awnings often shaded storefronts.

Rehabilitating Existing Storefronts

Wherever possible, significant storefronts (be they original or later alterations), including windows, sash, doors, transoms, signs and decorative features, should be repaired in order to retain the building's historic character.

- Retain and repair the decorative and functional features of the historic storefront design. These should include entrances, display windows, transoms, kickplates and cornices.
- Become familiar with the style of your building and the role of the storefront in the overall design. Don't "early up" a front. Avoid stock "lumber yard colonial" detailing such as coach lanterns, mansard overhangings, wood shakes, non-operable shutters, and small paned windows except where they existed historically.
- Maintain the shape, size, spacing patterns and alignment of openings on the facade and relate the storefront design to the composition, materials, style and detailing of the upper floors.
- •Remove materials inappropriate to the original upper portions. Open up covered transoms or restore the area as much as possible to the original condition.



An example of an appropriate storefront renovation:

•Windows: The storefront generally should be as transparent as possible. Use of glass in doors, transoms, and display areas allows for visibility into and out of the store. The storefront shall be composed of a minimum of seventy-five percent (75%) glass. Glass may not be covered or painted, except with lettering for the purpose of secondary signage, and this is limited to ten percent (10%) of the total glass area.

• Secondary Design Elements: Keep the treatment of secondary design elements such as graphics and awnings as simple as possible in order to avoid visual clutter to the building and its streetscape.

Window Displays

Visually creative and properly lighted window displays are encouraged. Lighting should be limited to, mostly, concealed incandescent sources, which provide the best color range and quality of light. Specialty and sales signage may appear in window displays but must be behind the glass storefront and is limited to a maximum of 15% of the total glass area. Any specialty and sales signage exceeding 15% of the total glass area may be placed on the interior of the storefront, no less than 12 inches from the inside face of the glass, to a maximum of 40% of the total glass area. No lighted graphics or signage may be placed within 10 feet of inside face of the storefront glass.

Security Grates and Roll Down Grilles

Exposed security grates and grilles are not allowed on the exterior of buildings' facades and storefronts as seen from a public way or other public area. If roll down grilles or security grates are required for a storefront, they must be located within the interior of the space and set back a minimum of 4'0" from the interior face of the glass. This is to encourage at least a minimal window display after store closings.

Doors

Like windows, doors and entrances greatly affect the style of the facade. Ground level doors should be proportionate to windows, and positioned to align with openings in upper floors. Many facades are designed symmetrically, with the entry in the center

the openings and decorations to the overall facade. Do not remove or cover up architectural trim and details.

- Do not apply paint or other coatings such as stucco to historically unpainted or uncoated masonry walls.
- •Clean masonry only when necessary to halt deterioration or to remove heavy soiling. Consult with a professional before cleaning a surface and use the gentlest method possible such as low pressure brushing. High-pressured water cleaning, caustic solutions, and sandblasting should be avoided. These methods erode the surface of the material and accelerate deterioration.
- •Repair masonry walls and other masonry features by repointing the mortar joints where there is evidence of deterioration such as disintegrating mortar, cracks in mortar joints, loose bricks or moisture in the walls. Duplicate old mortar in strength, composition, color, width, profile and texture.

Windows

W indows are one of the most character defining features of a facade. The height and width of a window, in relationship to one another, establish a familiar proportion and a decorative relationship. Similarly, the relationship of windows to walls in a facade establishes a proportion of void and solid. Specific proportions are repeated frequently along the street and give a sense of familiarity and order to many of the individual buildings. Any renovations or improvements of a building should respect these proportions. If the original windows are removed and replaced with incompatible, modern windows, the basic character of the building will be altered substantially.

The first step is to identify the basic proportions of the facade. Repeat these when possible. Even the size of the panes in a window can be a substantial expression of a style. Avoid mixing styles of differing proportions within the same facade. Horizontal windows-are generally inappropriate in a wall composed of windows with vertical proportions – a common feature of late 19th century storefronts. When frames of windows must be replaced, take care to replace them with matching materials or substitutes that are similar in proportion.

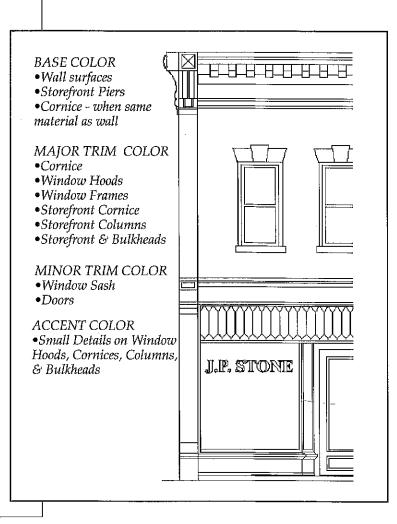
•Retain and preserve the important, original, window features such as frames,

- •Repair and retain decorative and trim elements wherever possible.
- Replace deteriorated architectural features, where necessary, with material similar in size, shape, composition, texture and color.

Colors

Choose colors for the entire building facade as a single composition Matching the colors of adjacent storefronts can help to tie them together visually. This is a powerful technique to use when several businesses occupy adjoining storefronts in the same building.

- •Use colors appropriate to the period of the building if it has a distinct style.
- •Refer questions of period colors to a qualified professional. Even if only one shop front is to be renovated, the shop colors should be coordinated with the whole building.
- •Use tones that relate well to the prevailing colors on the street.
- •Whenever possible, use the natural colorings of the building materials themselves.
- Paint over brick and stone only when their surfaces are so worn that they must be covered to retard erosion. Use latex paint over brick to avoid peeling.
- •Limit the number of colors used on a building. In most cases there should be one base color and one or two trim colors. Additional colors should be used sparingly for accent.
- •When choosing base and trim colors, remember that the base color is most important and will have the greatest impact on the viewer.
- •Color charts are available from the Historic Preservation Commission and shall be referred to and used whenever possible in determining the paint color to be applied to the outside structure.



difficult for the passing pedestrian or motorist to absorb the essential message.

Letters may be individually mounted or painted directly on the sign board. Letters on the primary sign should not be less than 8" nor more than 18" high. Lettering should account for at least fifty percent and no more than sixty-five percent of a signboard.

There are numerous styles and types of lettering. A visit to a graphic arts supply store, with stock catalogs of lettering types, will give an indication of the range of possible choices. A sign manufacturer will also be able to advise on the range and style of lettering available.

The primary business name should be written in English using the standard English alphabet so that it can be read by emergency personnel, such as members of the Village Police and the Fire Departments. Lettering consisting of any non-English alphabet may not be larger than the primary lettering height.

Colors

Colors should be limited in number and should complement the colors used on the rest of the facade and in adjacent structures. Avoid glossy backgrounds as they reflect glare and cut down legibility. Light letters on a dark background make for easier reading.

Illumination

Signs including individual letters and numbers with interior or backlit illumination are prohibited because they shed light on the facade and overpower merchandising displays within the storefront windows. Indirect lighting systems, which focus light onto the face of the sign and draw attention to the surrounding facade, are encouraged. This technique helps to tie the sign and the building together. Use only incandescent light sources for their truer color retention. All incandescent lights shall be shielded from the public view. No lighted display or sign is permitted within three (3) feet of the exterior face of the building. Any sign within two (2) feet of the exterior face of the building shall be considered as part of the building. Signs, logos, and lettering in neon are not permitted.

New Construction

The commercial streets in Ridgefield Park have the standard components of an urban environment consisting of rows of buildings on both sides of the street, sidewalks, traffic and parking lanes and a scattering of street furnishings. The most commanding portion of the scene is the block of commercial structures. They form a wall or edge that defines the limits of the street. That wall is a composite of solids and voids, of structures and openings. There is a pattern of windows and doors on the street and the strength of the visual continuity of the street is increased or diminished by the strength of this pattern. It is possible to maintain the identity of each building and business while reinforcing this continuity.

Proportion

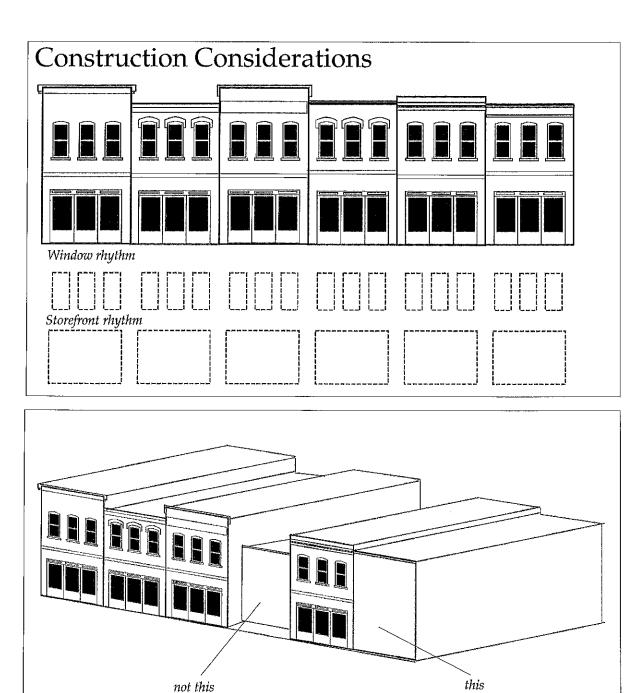
Respect proportions of existing facades. When window proportions match on sets of buildings, they create a rhythm that extends the full length of the block. When the proportions of many facades (the ratio of height to width on the building faces) are similar, they establish a second rhythm of repeated forms. New construction and storefront renovations should join the established pattern of facade proportions on the street.

Orientation

Traditionally in Ridgefield Park, the main facade and entrances of a commercial building are orientated along the main thoroughfare. New buildings should maintain this orientation and should not locate main facades or entrances to the side yard.

Setback

Maintain average setback of building. The street spaces are created by the continuous row of building facades. The strength of this edge is determined by the consistency of the building's setbacks.



New facades are built flush with the existing storefronts

Streetscape Design Issues

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RIDGEFIE series of streetscape components have been selected, coordinated, and developed to enhance the character of the shops and businesses for the pedestrians along Main Street and the Central Business District. This area consists of about 15 blocks clustered at the intersection of Mt. Vernon Street and Main Street. Within this zone, there exist several distinct sidewalk conditions which reflect the history and use patterns of the adjacent property. This hierarchy of streets and street treatments is as follows:

- •Main Street: Very narrow, busy with shoppers, parking, and bus stops.
- Mt. Vernon: Much broader, through road with commercial uses extending to the old train station.
- Park Street & other side streets: Which tie into residential uses within one block.

Through the combination of streetscape elements a specific treatment has been developed for each of the three street types. The repetition of the elements in different combinations will help to unify the very different conditions that occur in this relatively small area.

The single most important addition is the Street Tree. The magnificent specimen trees and the allée of trunks and canopies seen in places throughout the Village are a perfect example of the effect trees can have on a community. These beauties have become a part of the daily experience of Ridgefield Park that establish it as a community of nearly 150 years.

Trees have traditionally been a prominent element in Ridgefield Park Streetscapes, as witnessed in this view of Hackensack Road looking North in this turn-of-thecentury photo.

Tree Planting

^R Ature and healthy trees have the capacity to unify the myriad of changing architectural styles. In order to establish trees in an existing community, it requires replacing aging trees, careful design to ensure a healthy start for the trees, and a major investment of funding and energy.

The tree planting methods vary depending on the street type and the specific conditions found at the site of installation.

- *Main Street:* Very restrictive space due to narrow sidewalks and high pedestrian volumes. High possibility of conflicts with utilities. Low tolerance for sidewalk upheaval due to root growth, because of tight constraints of trees. The trees occur at 45-60' intervals.
- *Mt. Vernon*: Wide sidewalks, architecture set backs and uses vary. The street is less well defined by architecture. Trees can be planted in large pavement cutouts and at more regular intervals, 40-44' on center. Avoid surface root plants, eliminate root barrier product.
- *Park Street and other side streets*: Conditions vary, due to adjacent uses and utilities. Trees should be located to reinforce existing pattern on each individual street and to avoid utilities. Pits should be large, and if possible, continuous. Root barriers used where necessary to protect utilities and sidewalks. (Cedar, Grove, Park, Poplar & Summit Streets)



Tree Grates

The design and use of tree grates and other street furniture along Main Street is critical to the functioning of the street for daily use by neighbors arriving by car and foot.

Within the narrow sidewalks of Main Street, which vary from nine to twelve feet, the street trees and site furniture have been located within a continuous band at the back of the curb. Street trees, lights, benches, trash receptacles and planters, as well as Bus Shelters are located in this narrow zone. The width of this zone varies from two feet for street lights to about six feet for the bus shelter. The use of concrete tree grates with minimal openings, serve to maximize the walkable area around the trees in this zone and to give the tree roots added protection from foot traffic.

The precast concrete tree grates along Main Street were custom designed to match exactly the color of the precast concrete pavers. This selection was made to simplify the palette of materials in this very narrow space.

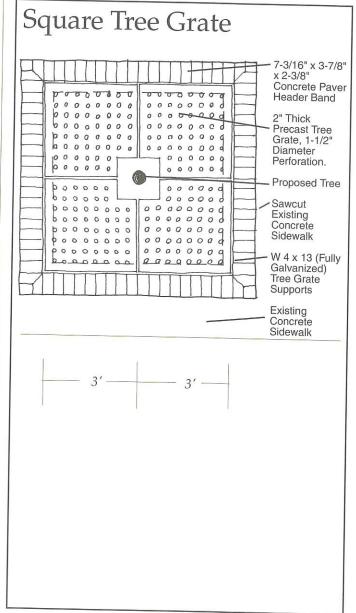
The planting soil for each tree is maximized by extending the area of the tree pit back to the Right of Way line at the face of the building. This area of planting soil is covered by large concrete panels which span the width of the planter thus avoiding additional compaction of the planting soil.

There are three configurations of tree grates for Main Street which serve all the various conditions:

- The 6 x 6' Square; used in large open areas of sidewalk where pedestrian movement is largely unrestricted.
- The 6 x 6' Half Round; used where bump-outs in curb occur.
- The 4 x 6' Rectangular; used in areas where sidewalk is consistently less than twelve feet.

The rectangular tree grate is most common given the narrow conditions throughout the Main Street area. The use of other tree grates should be considered carefully, given the surrounding patterns of sidewalk and other tree grates. A clear pattern should be developed for the overall use of two or more types of tree grates.

Tree Grates



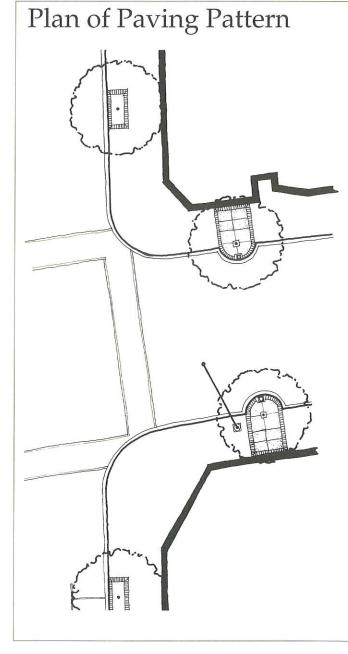
Sidewalks & Paving Patterns

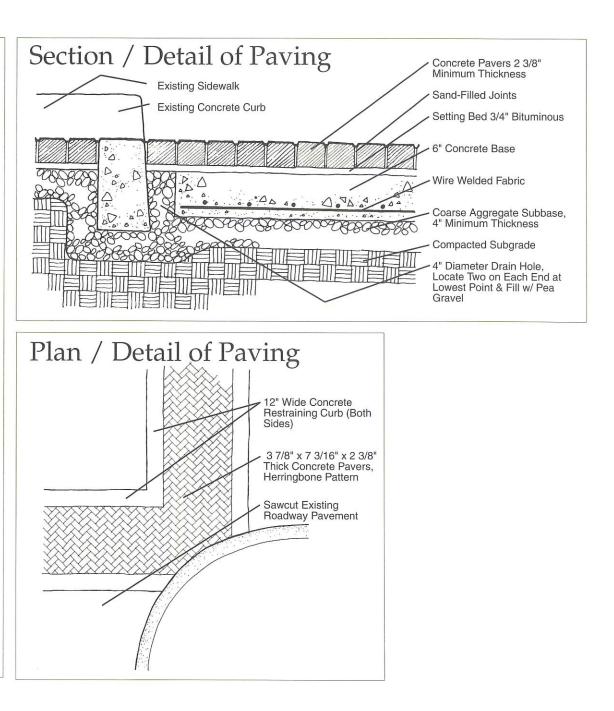
The use of a carefully selected family of paving materials throughout the Main Street core serves to reinforce the existing use by pedestrians, and strengthens the connection to the adjacent residential areas. Customized tree grates compliment the precast pavers and further unify the sidewalk treatment.

The basis of the Sidewalk Paving Pattern is established on Main Street itself with a continuous field of red/gray concrete pavers and matching accents.

- *Main Street:* Sidewalks shall be installed as a continuous field of herringbone paving from curb to building face. Paving patterns shall be consistent with the paving patterns of adjacent sidewalk. Concrete sidewalks are not allowed. The red/gray field pavers are bordered by charcoal gray band pavers surrounding the tree grates at the back of the curb and against sawcut concrete sidewalks. The red concrete tree grates continue the color and texture of the pavers across the tree pit openings from curb to building.
- *Mt. Vernon:* The Mt. Vernon Street sidewalks are much wider than those on Main Street and carry much less pedestrian traffic. Therefore the large canopy trees are set into expanded and open tree pits. The red/gray concrete pavers from Main Street are used on Mt. Vernon as an accent material to the standard concrete sidewalks. These pavers edge the tree pit and planting areas. The size of the planting areas correspond to the standard four foot by four foot score pattern of the poured-in-place concrete sidewalks.
- *Park Street and other side streets*: On the residential streets that are perpendicular to Main Street the streetscape treatment primarily consists of the addition of street trees. The sidewalk and right of ways are generally small and the sidewalks are quickly reduced to four feet. Trees are planted in tree pits or in planting strips. The paver edging used on Mt. Vernon Street would be used only where trees are planted in tree pits of a minimum dimension of four feet by four feet.

Crosswalk Paving



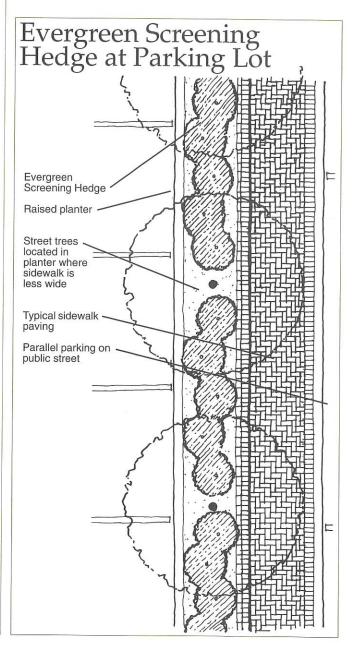


Site Details

he purpose of the Design Guidelines is to address the repetitive elements of the Streetscape in order to establish an overall coordinated appearance for the community. Within the area of the commercial core there are a number of variations which are not covered by the previous sections on paving and tree grates. Several of those unusual areas are addressed below and in the illustrations.

- Flush Edge at Tree Pits or Planters: Use at tree pits along Mt. Vernon St. or at the planting areas along Main Street.
- Raised Planter Edge or Retaining Wall: Use at raised planter beds or changes in grade along Main Street.
- Evergreen Screening Hedge at Parking Lot: Use along edge of Right of Way where parking lots abut Main Street.

These site details illustrate, at a conceptual level, a design approach for using the materials and design intent put forth in the paving pattern and tree grates to address the unique challenges that will need to be addressed throughout the commercial core area. These details are diagrams for an approach to the resolution of various design questions that will arise in the renovation of the Main Street area.



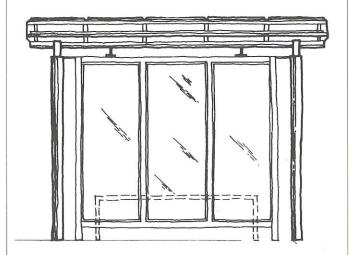
Street Furniture

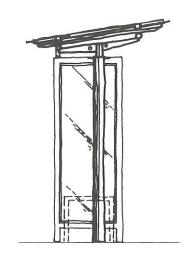
The Street Furniture for Ridgefield Park has been selected to complement the palette of materials and provide a very unified look to the wide range of the street's created conditions.

Given the varied character of the buildings along Main Street, the character of other furniture which has recently been selected for the town and the existing lights, a series of black metal furniture, poles, and bus shelters have been selected for its appearance, cost and maintenance record. This palette of materials gives a very unified look to the wide range of street furniture along this highly animated space.

- Main Street lights, bollards and traffic signal poles: Cambridge and Princeton pole series by Spring City Electrical Mfg. Co., Spring City, Pennsylvania. Poles will be fitted with banner attachments and electrical outlets. Provided by Village of Ridgefield Park.
- Park lighting: Victorian Globe with black fluted pole by Hadco, Littlestown, Pennsylvania.
- Main Street benches, planters, trash receptacles and tree guards: Bethesda and Ribbon Series, strap steel with black publicote finish, by Victor Stanley, Maryland.
- Bus Shelters: black metal and glass, provided by Village of Ridgefield Park.
- Pavers and tree grates: red and gray precast concrete by Hanover Architectural Products, Inc., Hanover, Pennsylvania. Match to "Village" Specifications.

Bus Shelter





Appendix

PARK

۳[°] The Secretary of the Interior's "Standards for Rehabilitation"

The following standards were initially developed for determining the appropriateness of proposed work on National Register properties within federallyfunded historic preservation programs. The standards are now used by all levels of government and many historic preservation and planning commissions in the United States have adopted them for their own use. The following standards are to be applied to specific rehabilitations:

- 1. A property shall be used for its historic purpose or be placed in a new use that requires minimal change to the defining characteristics of the building and its site and environment.
- 2. The historic character of a property shall be retained and preserved. The removal of historic materials or alteration of features and spaces that characterize a property shall be avoided.
- 3. Each property shall be recognized as a physical record of its time, place, and use. Changes that create a false sense of historical development, such as adding conjectural features or architectural elements from other buildings, shall not be undertaken.
- 4. Most properties change over time; those changes that have acquired historic significance in their own right shall be retained and preserved.
- 5. Distinctive features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize an historic property shall be preserved.
- 6. Deteriorated historic features shall be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature shall match the old in design, color, texture, and other visual qualities and, where possible, materials. Replacement of missing features shall be substantiated by documentary, physical, or pictoral evidence.

Facing page: Main Street 1916 - Jos. Lande Tinsmith