

# ***PUBLIC FACILITIES: GENERAL AESTHETIC GUIDELINES***

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*June, 2000*



# City of Virginia Beach

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**DATE:** July 19, 2000

**TO:** Distribution

**FROM:** James K. Spore, City Manager

**SUBJECT:** *Public Facilities: General Aesthetic Guidelines*

The attached guidelines, entitled *Public Facilities: General Aesthetic Guidelines*, provide guidance on the site design and building design components for all public projects. Please ensure these guidelines are provided to all consultants selected to plan and design public facility projects.

The Facilities and Land Commons Policy Team identified this item last year as one of its work program initiatives. After much discussion by the Team and related subcommittees on the issue of community appearance, a set of general design guidelines focusing specifically on CIP projects was subsequently developed by the Staff Committee on Community Appearance, a subcommittee of the Quality Physical Environment Strategic Issue Team.

The purpose for the guidelines is to provide to the consultant community a common set of aesthetic-based provisions to consider during the planning and design phases of CIP projects. The suggested aesthetic design guidelines will not change the requirements stated in the *Virginia Beach Department of Public Works Engineering Specifications and Standards* document.

City departments with project management responsibility (and departments with project ownership responsibility) shall ensure adherence with the *Public Facilities: General Aesthetic Guidelines* to the maximum practical extent, both physically and fiscally. Departments with project management responsibility shall also ensure coordination with other City departments as necessary.

The Planning Department will be responsible for processing, tracking amendments to the public facilities aesthetic guidelines, and distributing revisions to all applicable departments.

Distribution

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July 19, 2000

Should you have questions or require additional information, please feel free to call either Clarence Warnstaff, Chairman of QPESIT at 427-8035 or David Grochmal, Chairman of the FLCPT at 427-4567.

Thank you.

tga/cp

Attachment

Distribution: See Attached List

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# *Public Facilities: General Aesthetic Guidelines*

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## **I. Purpose**

The purpose and intent of these general guidelines is to provide additional direction on achieving functional, orderly, harmonious and attractive public facilities throughout the City. These general guidelines are intended to provide city agencies with guidance affecting the appearance of all public projects and, by doing so, improve their relationship to the surrounding land use, transportation system, landscaping and general design considerations. In addition it is the intent of these guidelines to support and comply with city zoning and other regulatory ordinances.

These guidelines seek to improve community appearance, help stabilize neighborhoods, increase economic prosperity, enhance the quality of life, assure safety and create a strong positive image of the City in the region, state and nation. Good design and aesthetics play a tremendous role in determining how successful a City becomes and remains.

## **II. Background**

Virginia Beach comprises a rich abundance of natural resources, diverse land uses and characteristics, as well as clearly distinct urban and rural areas. With such composition, an effort is needed to ensure that the design elements and themes of public infrastructure projects are compatible with the surrounding areas to the greatest extent practical. This document provides guidelines for general site and building design of public facilities.

Public facilities are defined as any project included in the City's Capital Improvement Program or other capital construction projects undertaken by a City agency. (Ex., a public facility would include a storm water management pond, pump station or public building such as a library or school).

Therefore, the general guidelines in this document supplement the pre-design review process of City projects to help set budget and time lines and influence the design of the facilities.

### **III. Site Design Guidelines**

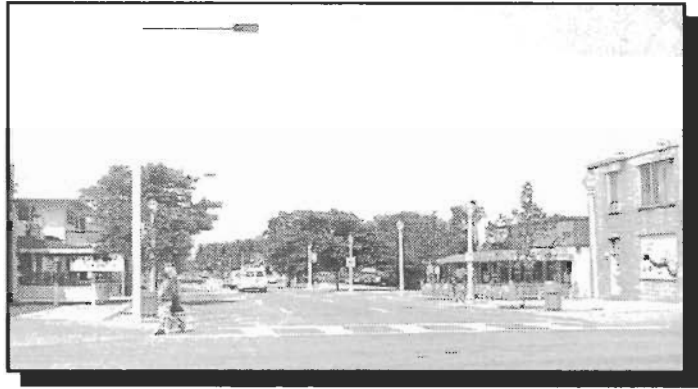
#### **A. Natural Features**

1. During the design process, existing natural characteristics of a site should be identified. These natural site features and landform should then be considered during the design phase of a public facility. Natural site amenities may consist of a significant stand of trees, unusual topographic conditions or natural drainage patterns. These features should be preserved to the greatest degree possible. Natural features create a sense of place on undeveloped sites that can be expanded on during the development process.
2. Significant views both on and from a site should be maintained and enhanced where possible. Significant waterbody views should also be maintained when and where possible.

#### **B. Access and Circulation**

1. The provision of clear and convenient vehicular and non vehicular access to all new developments is and should remain high priorities during the development process. Vehicular and pedestrian access should be distinct and clearly separated, when possible.
2. To minimize traffic conflicts, the number of entrances and exits should be consolidated and located a sufficient distance away from street intersections. A safe and efficient internal circulation system should be utilized to provide access to uses within the site. Access from the internal circulation system to surrounding neighborhoods should be provided when such adjoining public uses are compatible with residential uses.
3. Entrances and driveways should permit safe and convenient pedestrian crossing where they intersect sidewalk and other pedestrian access. A change in paving material to make the driver aware of pedestrian crossing is encouraged.
4. Pedestrian access ways at least eight to ten feet wide should be provided where sufficient area is available with a landscaped strip alongside facing the street to include trees and some lighting. These access ways should link with adjacent bikeways as identified in the City's Master Transportation Plan or other related documents that may apply.

5. When pedestrian circulation crosses a vehicular route, either a change in grade, paving material, texture or color should be used to emphasize the conflict points. (See photo at right).



6. All elements of site design should accommodate access requirements of emergency vehicles and services.

### C. Parking Areas

The visual appearance of new parking lots is controlled in part by adopted ordinances for parking lot landscaping. Additional location and circulation characteristics that can further improve the appearance and function of lots include:

1. Most of the parking area should be located toward the rear of the site, while locating the buildings toward the front. To avoid large expanses of asphalt parking area or the “sea of asphalt” appearance, large parking areas should be broken up into subareas. This can be accomplished by siting buildings as described in the *Setback and Building Location* section herein.
2. Landscaping for the parking area should be strategically located to provide visual relief, shading of the lot, green areas, and screening from neighboring residential or commercial properties while insuring that lines-of-sight is maintained, both at the time of planting and when the plants have matured.
3. Access between parking areas on separate lots should be accomplished through the use of shared-access easements which join the lots. Individual curb cuts for each parking area fronting an abutting highway are discouraged. Internal circulation roads on a parcel should be designed

with stubs to adjoining undeveloped parcels that will provide this future shared access.

4. A special area for parking bicycles should be provided on site with ready access to the pedestrian/bicycle pathway system.

#### **D. Landscaping**

1. Public facilities that adjoin areas planned for residential use are required to provide an effective screen or buffer. Screening of ground-level mechanical equipment, cooling towers, etc., should also be provided. All service areas such as loading docks or delivery areas should be located out of site as far as possible. A landscape plant material buffer should be provided as an effective means to screen such uses in accordance with ordinance requirements.
2. Screening may include walls, berms, hedgerows and massing of plants. All enclosures should be designed with durable materials, or be of a selection of hardy native plants. If walls are used, they should be similar in material and color as that used in the building. Design continuity should be maintained between the building, trash enclosure area, and the wall plane used for screening. Height and placement of the walls should comply with City Zoning Ordinance requirements.
3. Safe lines-of-sight for motorists that meet or exceed development standards should always be considered when selecting the type, size and location of landscaping at critical areas such as intersections, parking lot crossways and driveways. Size of the plants at installation and at maturity should be considered. Additionally, an inspection and maintenance schedule should be developed and adhered to insure that lines-of-sight is adequate at all times.
4. An electrical transformer or substation installed as part of a new public facility should be located to the rear of the site or underground, if possible. The above ground structure should be heavily landscaped and not visible from the street.
5. Existing electrical transformers located at the front of the site should be heavily landscaped or enclosed by an architectural barrier that is consistent with the material used in the building.



## E. Bridges

During the pre-design phase of a bridge, thought should be given toward creating opportunities for pedestrian and bicycle access, scenic views/scenic overlook, canoe launch, and a pull-off area for access to the waterway, wherever physically and fiscally practical. Materials used during construction should not only be high quality and low maintenance but also reflect the character of the surrounding area. All bridges should conform to City and VDOT requirements.

## F. Storm Water Management Facilities

1. Whenever possible, storm water retention and detention systems are encouraged to be designed as open space or landscape amenities.

Grass swales should be used to accommodate surface drainage when possible. *(See photo at right).*



2. When structural systems are provided, plant material should be used to soften the appearance. The design of the system should blend in with the natural site features and become a design element of the overall development.
3. Nonstructural systems can be of a variety of landscape plant material that includes ground covers, low to medium height shrubs or a combination thereof.
4. Chain-link fencing is discouraged as an enclosure around storm water management pond facilities.
5. Where practical, fountains, benches and pedestrian paths should be incorporated into the design of storm water management ponds for passive recreational use.

## **G. Lighting**

All outdoor lighting should be of a design that accentuates the site, provides sufficient illumination for safety, comfort and convenience while fitting the architectural theme of the facility. The lighting fixture type must conform with City and VDOT requirements.

Site lighting should be consistent with the site lighting present in the surrounding area. Pole standards and fixtures should be of a style that is complementary to the surrounding area and structures.

## **H. Signs**

All signs should be consistent in color and theme with the primary structure. The overall surface area and height must be in compliance with the City Zoning Ordinance.

1. Signs should be clearly legible to both motorists and pedestrians. Oversized or overly elaborate signs competing for attention or which create visual clutter are not allowed.
2. Signs should primarily serve to identify the name and nature of the public facility.
3. All freestanding signs should be included into the facilities landscape plan for development.
4. All lighting used to illuminate signs externally should be positioned at ground level to be hidden yet illuminate the sign adequately. Lighting should be designed to avoid any glare onto adjacent properties. All lighting fixtures used to accomplish the external lighting should not overpower the sign. Internally illuminated signs constructed of plastic or similar materials are appropriate where not restricted by established guidelines.

## **I. Setback and Building Location in Relationship to Arterial Highways**

1. While attractive buildings should be showcased and oriented closer to the road, utility boxes and other similar structures should avoid fronting along highways. If required, a wide landscaped buffer or a storm water management pond adjacent to the highway right-of-way should be provided prior to siting any structures. This buffer should be protected from future alteration through use of a protective easement.

2. Open space areas should be included as part of the development and be strategically located in conjunction with an adjacent open space area or adjacent to the arterial highway. These green space areas should be located so as to be visually accessible from a public way.
3. Buildings situated along local or collector roads should be located more closely to the roadway, just beyond the buffer setback. Buildings should be designed, scaled and oriented toward the street to encourage pedestrian movement. The face of a wall parallel to a street should be offset with projections and recesses, and other interesting architectural design



features, including changes in material types or color to avoid a massive appearance of the facade from the road. (*See photo above*).

4. Public facilities should generally be oriented toward the front of the lot within a well-landscaped green area while locating the parking and loading areas to the rear. The height, bulk, and architecture of these structures should convey a sense of openness, ensuring substantial sunlight access.
5. Building and parking areas should be situated on a site to promote pedestrian movement from the facility to adjacent structures, instead of vehicular movement from one parking space to another to get from one business to another.

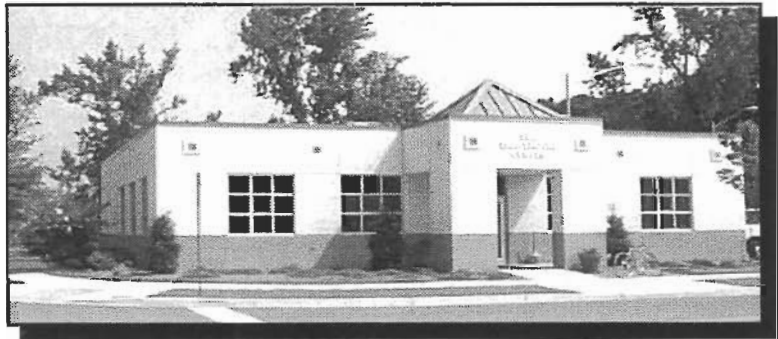
## IV. Building Design Guidelines

The placement of a building on a site and its aesthetic appeal on the surrounding area is important. Good site design cannot compensate for poor building design and nor can good building design compensate for poor site design. Both are interrelated. It is important to raise the standards of design when faced with situations that are less than ideal.

### A. Compatibility

The relationship of a building to its surroundings, both natural and built, is an important component of compatibility and architectural quality. That relationship is primarily conveyed through scale, mass, height, and proportion used in the design.

1. Scale is vital to achieving compatibility. Three important aspects of scale are: the ratio of the parts of a structure to the entire structure; the structure's size in relationship to the site; and the structure's size in relationship to other structures in the surrounding area.
2. Proportion is the relationship on one dimension to another. If proportion is correct, order seems to prevail. Each component of a building should have good proportion (ex., height to width of a door). The relationship of each component to each other (ex., wall to a window) should express good proportion and, equally, the ratio of building mass, size and height to the spaces around it should possess good proportion. *(See photo above).*



### B. Design Elements

1. The side or rear facade of a building located adjacent to and visible from a roadway should be designed with similar details and materials as the front

facade. Visual interest should be provided through window and door details, varied roof lines, consistent textures and color. Incorporate wall plane projections or recesses when confronted with long lengths of a wall.

2. Materials used on structures should be long-lasting, attractive, high quality, and low maintenance. Examples of inappropriate building materials include: smooth cinder block, large expanses of vinyl siding, and plywood sidings.
3. Like material, color should be similar with the character of the area.
4. Architectural details should be included in the design of buildings that are scaled to the pedestrian. Entrances to buildings should provide orientation and be highly visible.
5. Lighting of buildings should be designed as an integral part of the building's architecture to be as unobtrusive as possible. Lighting on the rear of buildings should be shielded away from adjacent residential areas.

## **V. Implementation**

The Virginia Beach Public Facilities: General Aesthetics Guidelines is only a guide. It is the responsibility of each department owning and managing a project to ensure that these guidelines are considered and used to the maximum extent practicable.

For specific projects, please contact the assigned project manager in Public Works at 427-4131 or Public Utilities at 427-4171. General questions or comments may be directed to the Department of Planning at 427-4621.

This document was prepared by the Department of Planning, General Services and Public Works in collaboration with the Quality Physical Environment Team and the Staff Committee on Community Appearance.