



Building a Foundation for Economic Development

Streetscapes

“Although we may not always look closely, roadway appearance creates an image that is about who we are, what we do, what we care for, and who we profess to be.”

- Roadside Design in Communities, Iowa State University

Streetscapes Play an Important Role in the Image of a City



Defining Space. Well designed streets affectively “define space” by having attractive vertical elements at the street edge. For example, the streetscape in the photo above has no landscaping, structures, or other vertical elements behind the sidewalk and is defined only by the haphazard placement of buildings, signs, and power lines, thereby creating a poorly defined space and unattractive street. In contrast, the streetscape below features formal plantings and an attractive landscaped retaining wall that defines the right-of-way and in effect creates an “outdoor room”.



Street Trees and Landscaping. Trees and landscaping, especially in a suburban context, play a key role in streetscape design. The image above, which obviously has no landscaping and is very unappealing, unfortunately is much too common. The image below, which also illustrates a parking lot adjacent to a very busy street, takes a much different design approach. Trees planted in the parkstrip at regular intervals combined with a landscaped berm behind the sidewalk present a much different and much more desirable streetscape.



Double Frontage Lots. Double frontage lots (lots that have frontage on two streets) create challenging streetscape situations because the rear lot line is often “out of sight and out of mind”. The result is often an unattractive and unmaintained streetscape—usually on a very busy and highly visible street corridor (above). By constructing sturdy, low maintenance, and attractive walls along the backs of these double frontage lots, streetscape quality (as well as safety) is greatly enhanced.



Arterial Streets. Limited access major arterial streets are seen by great numbers of motorists because of the large amount of traffic they carry. For various reasons, they are also often the least maintained streetscapes. As a result these weedy and litter filled roads present an unflattering image for the city in which they are located (above). Conversely, arterial streets planted with street trees and other low maintenance materials can create a parkway like affect that greatly enhances the quality of the street (below).



Redwood Road

The impact of a quality streetscape can be seen in the phase I improvements to Redwood Road between 5400 South and Interstate 215. Improvements such as placing overhead wires underground, installing decorative street furnishings (street lights, bus benches, etc.), planting street trees, and landscaping medians has made a tremendous difference to the aesthetics of this shopping district. Future phases of the streetscape plan will create a consistent streetscape on Redwood Road from 4100 South to 6600 South.


