
ROUTE 12 CORRIDOR PLANNING COUNCIL

Landscaping Guidelines for Corridor Development



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Route 12 Corridor Planning Council Landscaping Guidelines

INTRODUCTION

This is a joint corridor planning report prepared cooperatively by representatives from the Villages of Deer Park, Kildeer, Lake Zurich, Hawthorn Woods and North Barrington; Ela Township; and the Lake County Department of Planning, Building and Development; with the assistance of the Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission.

Rand Road Yesterday and Today

The Rand Road corridor within the boundaries of Ela Township overlaps unincorporated land and the territory of five villages. This jurisdictional pattern presents a multiplicity of land use regulations within a relatively small area. Historically, residential development has been the primary land use pattern in this portion of Lake County. In recent years, however, increased population in Western Lake County, a concomitant increase in vehicular traffic along Rand Road and economic prosperity have all contributed to an accelerating trend of large-scale non-residential development in the area. In light of this increasing development pressure, leaders from the five villages have recognized that a joint-municipal approach to corridor land use planning would facilitate orderly growth along the corridor.

Formulation of Route 12 Corridor Planning Council

Representatives from Ela Township and the participating villages agreed in 1997 to convene a series of meetings to discuss shared strategies to enhance development along Rand Road within the boundaries of Ela Township. Representatives from the Lake County Planning Department and the Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission were also invited to participate in the discussion. This group is referred to collectively as the Route 12 Corridor Planning Council.

The Corridor Vision

From the outset, Council members shared the vision of Rand Road as a gateway to and from Southwestern Lake County. The “gateway” concept becomes even more relevant as an ever-increasing number of motorists travel the Rand Road corridor on a daily basis. Formation of the Council presents an opportunity to harness this unique geographic characteristic. In turn, coordinated land use planning strategies can help foster in residents and visitors alike a “sense of place”. This collaborative effort could also help ensure that the Rand Road corridor stands out as an example of Lake County development at its best.

Establishment of Priorities

Meetings over the first two years focused attention on particular physical aspects of corridor development that merit improvement. Several development aspects were identified as presenting a significant impact on the physical character of corridor development, including landscaping, setbacks, signage, and building height. It was recognized that treatment of all such aspects would involve considerable time and resources. Accordingly, the Council agreed to prioritize these issues for discussion, in order to establish a planning strategy that was both timely and manageable.

Landscaping Guidelines

Corridor landscaping was established as a first priority for discussion as it coincided with the Council's application for and receipt of Illinois State grant funding for a vegetative corridor enhancement program. Landscaping can be arranged to effectively soften and complement the visual impact of roadside development. As such, corridor landscaping guidelines represent an opportunity to enhance motorists' driving experience along Rand Road and "showcase" development within member communities. The discussion of landscaping guidelines was also timely in that it coincided with the approval processes for the Deer Park Town Center and the Lake Zurich Retail Center. Suggestions from the landscaping discussion have been voluntarily incorporated into these development plans.

Implementation of Landscaping Guidelines

These corridor design guidelines are intended to be implemented primarily through the local development review and approval process. Lake County and the five member villages all regulate development, in part, through the conditional use permit and planned unit development (PUD) process. Additionally, member villages review new development proposals in the context of annexations. All such processes allow the imposition of reasonable conditions on new development along the Route 12 Corridor. Member communities have agreed, accordingly, to incorporate these guidelines into the process of reviewing new development along Rand Road.

It is also envisioned that each member community will disseminate these guidelines to developers in order to encourage them to incorporate the guidelines into their development plans.

PROCESS OF FORMULATING LANDSCAPING GUIDELINES

Initially, it was agreed that corridor landscaping should create a pleasant visual experience for passing motorists. At the most general level, the Council concurred that landscaping should be introduced in a manner that softens and complements the appearance of corridor development, without impairing the development's visibility from the roadway. Various landscaping characteristics tend to support this goal.

The Council in turn established an action plan to identify such landscaping characteristics. From these characteristics, the Council would formulate a series of "visual performance standards", or landscaping guidelines intended to promote the desired effect for passing motorists. Ultimately, these guidelines could be used by the County and member villages in reviewing development plans.

Visual Preference Survey

In early 2000, Lake County representatives conducted a photographic survey of the landscaping along various existing corridor developments throughout Lake County. These photographs were taken from a County vehicle in the roadway, at a distance intended to simulate the vantage point of a motorist driving along Rand Road. The results of this field work formed the basis of a "visual preference survey".

Specifically, after selecting a series of photographs representing a broad range of landscaping types, Lake County representatives presented these photographs to the Council. Council members were then invited to discuss the photographs with their village commissioners and trustees and to rank the various landscaping types in order of preference. Council members were also asked to explain their preferences, from the perspective of a motorist.

Formulation of Landscaping Guidelines

Upon receipt and tabulation of the survey results, Lake County representatives identified landscaping characteristics that the respondents repeatedly rejected, and landscaping characteristic that the respondents ranked highly.

From the reaction of the survey respondents, clear preference patterns emerged. These preference patterns were distilled into landscaping guidelines, which could then be incorporated directly into landscaping plan reviews.

For example, images depicting linear rows of trees among wide expanses of grass elicited a consistently negative reaction from the survey respondents, whereas images depicting irregularly-spaced plantings among natural groundcover drew consistently high scores. This preference pattern led to the conclusion that a “manicured or controlled appearance” should generally be avoided from the perspective of a motorist. This landscaping guideline could then be utilized in creating a more natural landscape pattern along corridor development, to enhance the driving experience.

LANDSCAPING GUIDELINES

The landscaping guidelines are organized into several categories, based on major areas of concern elicited among survey respondents: Intensity of Screening/Buffering; Degree and Type of Organization in Landscaping; Vegetation in Landscaping; Earthen Berms and other Structures in Landscaping; Paths for Bikes, Pedestrians; and Width of Landscaped Yard. Each category contains a number of specific landscape guidelines. These guidelines are not all-inclusive; future discussions may elicit additional guidelines for landscaping based on new concerns or changing conditions. The Council also retains the option to refine existing guidelines, when appropriate.

Intensity of Screening/Buffering

- Partially obscure or soften visibility of parking lots through landscaping (staggered landscaped berms or preserved natural vegetation)



Preferred: Landscaped berm reduces visibility of parked cars

Intensity of Screening/Buffering (Continued)

- Preserve visibility of signage (yet soften effect with complementary landscaping)



Preferred: Monument sign complemented by preserved woodland

- *Minimum Landscape Buffering for Buildings:*

Medium to High for Industrial
And Office (50 - 75% opacity)

Low to Medium for Retail
(30 - 50% opacity)

Medium for Residential
(50% opacity)

Degree and Type of Organization in Landscaping

- Generally avoid a manicured or controlled appearance



Discouraged: Wide, trimmed grass strip

- Preserve and enhance existing woodlands

Degree and Type of Organization in Landscaping (Continued)

- Plant random clusters of trees, rather than rows of trees



Discouraged: Even distribution of trees and bushes

- Group like species only to a degree that would maintain continuity or “make a statement”
- Limit formal landscaping to small/tight areas

Vegetation in Landscaping

- Provide a complementary mix of deciduous and evergreen, while emphasizing deciduous species



Preferred: Deciduous/Evergreen mix, with deciduous predominating

- Cluster varieties of species sizes (canopies interspersed with understories, bushes and groundcover)
- Emphasize hardy native species (limit predominance of non-native or ornamental species)
- Minimize the use of formal hedges

Vegetation in Landscaping (Continued)

- Incorporate groundcover and/or bushes into landscaping, while limiting the predominance of groundcover and/or bushes



Discouraged: Predominance of bushes, particularly if only one species

- *Establish Minimum Thresholds for Seasonal Colors:* 20% species providing Spring colors; 20% species providing Autumn colors; Predominance of white flowering species in Spring Mix; Predominance of Yellow Coloring in Autumn Mix; Preferred Annuals/Perennials: Black Eyed Susans, Stela D'Oros, Sedums, Daisies

Earthen Berms and Other Structures in Landscaping

- Emphasize naturalized berms (with plantings throughout contour of berm) over “naked” or grassed berms



Preferred: Liberal use of trees and groundcover throughout berm

- Vary height and setbacks of berms
- Maintain swales for positive drainage and appearance

Earthen Berms and Other Structures in Landscaping (Continued)

- Emphasize solid structures (masonry, earthen structures) over semi-transparent structures (fences)



Discouraged: Semi-transparent fencing

- At intersections, provide soft massings of landscaping to complement signage and to provide a focal point, while not impairing visibility of buildings nor impairing traffic safety
- Limit height of retaining walls to below 42 inches where practical

Paths for Bikes, Pedestrians

- Integrate pathways into landscaping to soften visibility and preserve pedestrian and/or bike safety; provide at sizable distance from roadway where practical



Discouraged: Highly visible pathway directly adjacent to arterial road

Width of Landscaped Yard

- For new development, landscaped yard should take into account at least 100-foot building and parking lot setbacks; with a variance of no more than 50 feet for practical difficulties



Discouraged: Setbacks of less than 100 feet for new development

- Assume right-of-way in calculation
- For renovation or expansion of existing business, efforts shall be made to incorporate elements of the preceding landscaping guidelines and setbacks, where practical