



**San Francisco  
Planning**

# Guide to the San Francisco **Green Landscaping Ordinance**

AMENDMENTS TO SAN FRANCISCO'S MUNICIPAL CODES

SAN FRANCISCO PLANNING DEPARTMENT | APRIL 2010





**San Francisco**  
**Planning**

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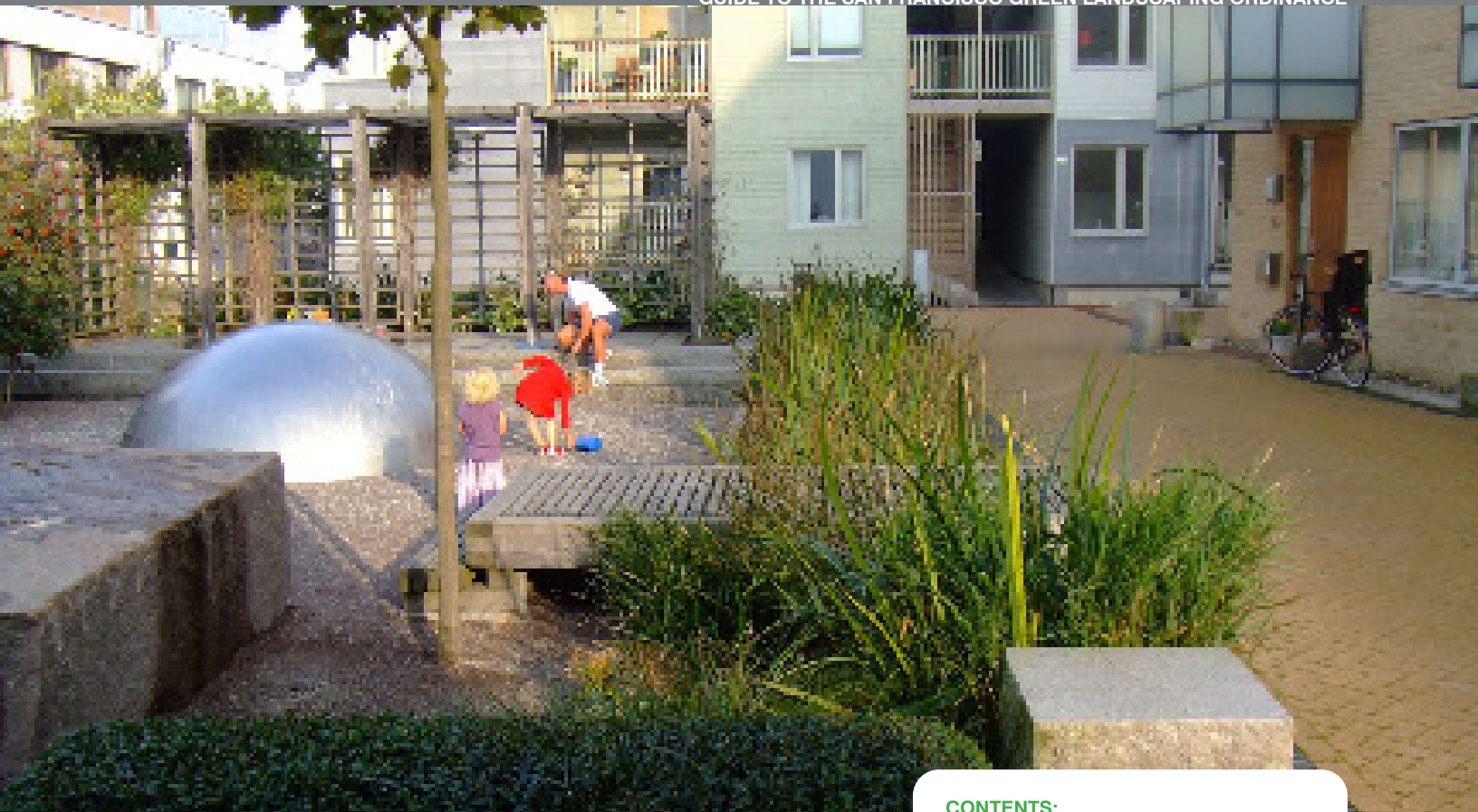
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To review the complete text of the Green Landscaping  
Ordinance No 0084-10 [BF 09-1453] visit:  
<http://www.sfbos.org/ftp/uploadedfiles/bdsupvrs/ordinances10/o0084-10.pdf>



## GOAL OF SAN FRANCISCO GREEN LANDSCAPING ORDINANCE:

The Green Landscaping Ordinance amends the Planning Code and Public Works Code to enhance new development & significant alterations. It seeks to achieve the following environmental and aesthetic goals:

- A. Healthier and more plentiful plantings through screening, parking lot, and street tree controls;
- B. Increased permeability through front yard and parking lot controls;
- C. Encourage responsible water use through increasing “climate appropriate” plantings; and
- D. Improved screening by creating an ornamental fencing requirement and requiring screening for newly defined “vehicle use areas.”

## GOAL OF THE GUIDE:

The guide describes the Green Landscape Ordinance and helps San Francisco residents and property owners understand the benefits, requirements, and ways to comply with the ordinance.

## CONTENTS:

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- 1.0 Greening of Front Setback Areas**  
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Benefits and Requirements
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- 5.0 Vehicular Use Area (NEW DEFINITION)**  
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- 6.0 Permeable Surfaces (NEW DEFINITION)**  
Planning Code Section  
Benefits and Requirements
- 7.0 Climate Appropriate Plants (NEW DEFINITION)**  
Public Works Code Section 802.1  
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Benefits and Requirements

# 1.0 Greening of Front Setback Areas

## **BENEFITS:**

Increased permeability and reduced stormwater runoff

Aesthetically pleasing front yards

## **SUMMARY:**

In Planning Code Section 132, the Green Landscaping Ordinance introduces a provision for permeable surfaces; amends the controls to landscaping areas; and introduces new triggers for the requirements.

## **APPLICABILITY:**

The requirements apply to

- Construction of a new building
- The addition of a new dwelling unit
- Construction of a new garage or the addition of new parking
- Paving or re-paving more than 200 sq. ft. of the front setback.

## **REQUIREMENTS:**

- Require 50% of surfaces in the front yard to be permeable by using porous asphalt, porous concrete, interlocking pavers, bricks, or landscaping. Areas counted towards the landscaping requirement (20% of the required setback area) can also be credited towards the permeability requirement.
- Depending on site's suitability the permeable surface area requirement may be waived after consulting with San Francisco Department of Public Works or the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission. In these instances, the permeable surface area requirement may be modified to include alternative stormwater strategies such as bio-retention, swales or other features regulated by San Francisco Public Utilities Commission.
- Comply with water use requirements of Chapter 63 of the Administrative Code.

GREENING OF SIDEWALK



Harrison Street and 23rd Street

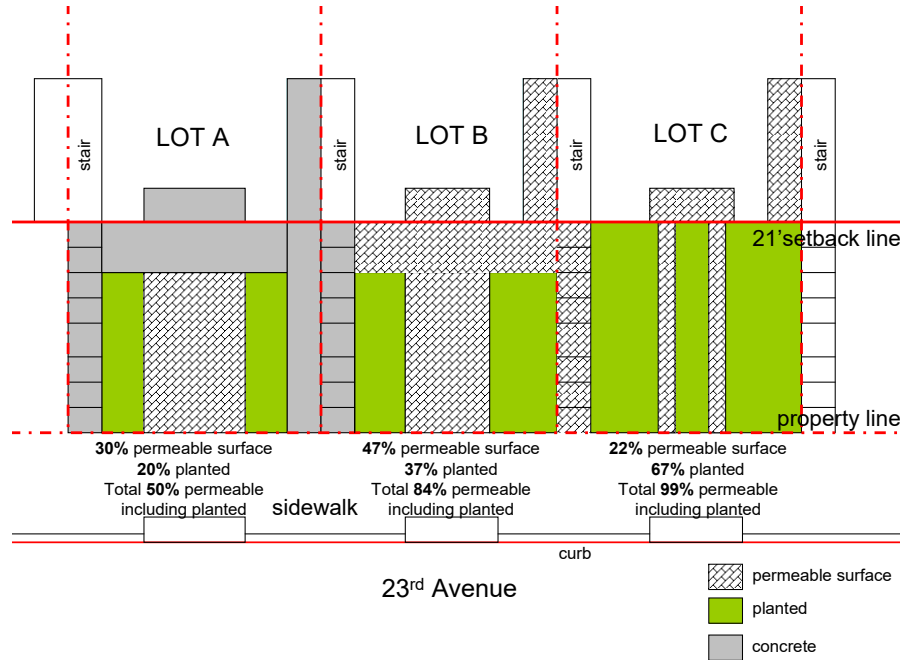


York Street



Shotwell Street

EXAMPLE:  
23RD AVE RESIDENTIAL DISTRICT



## 2.0 Screening of Parking Areas



Federal Reserve Bank, 101 Market Street



Orson, 4th and Bryant Streets



Minna Street Playground

### BENEFITS:

Enhance the pedestrian experience

Reduce stormwater runoff

Increase climate-appropriate plantings

### SUMMARY:

The Green Landscaping Ordinance expands the screening requirements to parking areas in all districts, articulating the different requirements for different frontage width of vehicular use areas, and introducing new triggers for the requirement. The Green Landscaping Ordinance also applies the screening requirements to “vehicle use areas” which include spaces such as gasoline stations; car washes; motor vehicle repair shops; and other areas devoted to vehicular use.

### APPLICABILITY:

The requirements apply to

- All zoning districts.
- Existing Vehicular Use Areas with more than 25 ft. along the public right-of-way must be screened in the following circumstances:
  - If a principal use (i.e. the use served by the parking area) expands by 20% or greater;
  - If the number of parking spaces increase by at least 20% or if 4 or more spaces are added, whichever amount is greater; or
  - If at least 50% or more of existing surface is excavated and replaced (except for emergency repair).

**REQUIREMENTS:**

If the frontage of the vehicular use area along the public right-of-way is less than 25 feet, the following screening requirements apply:

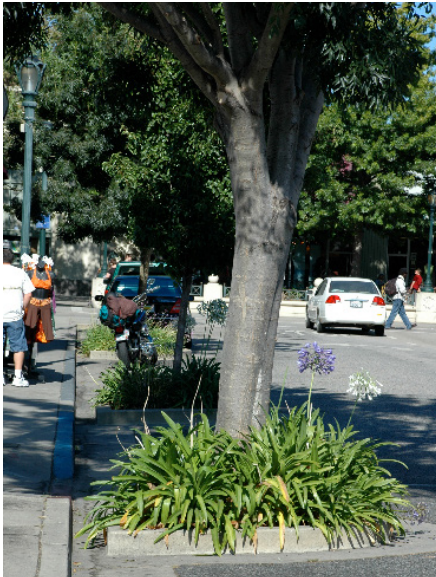
- 1) Vehicle use areas and parking areas within a building are to be screened from all streets and alleys through the use of garage doors.
- 2) If these areas are along rear yards or interior open spaces the screening shall be solid building walls.

If the frontage of the vehicular use area along the public right-of-way is more than 25 feet, the following screening requirements apply:

- 1) Provide a 4 foot high solid wall or "Ornamental Fencing" ("Ornamental Fencing" is a decorative metal fence, including wrought iron or fencing that gives the appearance of wrought-iron fencing, but expressly excluding plain chain-link fence, plastic-based materials, barbed wire and similar non-decorative fences) **and** 5 foot wide landscaping perimeter strip. **or**
- 2) Provide a combination of landscaping and ornamental fencing where the landscaping is the equivalent area of the 5 feet perimeter landscaping which has been otherwise configured to result in either
  - A public space or amenity which is accessible from the public right-of-way **or**
  - A natural drainage system such as combined swales, retention basins, detention basins and rain gardens to reduce stormwater runoff.
- 3) All plantings must comply with water use requirements described in Chapter 63 of the Administrative Code. If the Zoning Administer modifies these requirements, those modifications must
  - promote and enhance the pedestrian experience;
  - promote the reduction of stormwater runoff; and
  - use climate appropriate plant materials as defined in Public Works Code Section 802.1.

**EXAMPLE**

## 3.0 Street Trees



Planning Department

### **BENEFITS:**

Street trees increase property values, pedestrian comfort, and help clean the air. The greatest stormwater and environmental benefits occur when tree canopies cover impervious areas and intercept water before it falls to the ground.

### **SUMMARY:**

The Green Landscaping Ordinance expands the street tree requirement to all zoning districts; applies the requirement to parking lots, and introduces new triggers and flexibility for the requirements.

### **APPLICABILITY:**

The requirements apply to all zoning districts in the event of

- a new building or the relocation of an existing building;
- the addition of gross floor area equal to 20% or more of the gross floor area to an existing building;
- the addition of a dwelling unit, a garage, additional parking or
- the paving or repaving of more than 200 square feet of the front set-back.



**REQUIREMENTS:**

- Provide one 24-inch box or larger trees for every 20 feet of street frontage.
- Street trees shall be 1) compatible with the water use requirements of Administrative Code Chapter 63 and 2) 'climate appropriate' as defined by Section 802.1 of the Public Works Code. Note a permit is required from the Department of Public Works to plant or remove any street tree.
- The property owner must maintain the tree in good health per Article 16 of the Public Works Code and replace the tree within 6 months if it should die. (Section 805 of the Public Works Code)
- Trees planted in Downtown Residential (DTR) or Downtown Commercial (C-3) Districts have additional requirements to ensure tree health and adequate pedestrian passage in these densely populated areas.

**ALTERNATIVES:**

- If pre-existing condition does not allow tree planting sidewalk landscaping may be used to satisfy the tree requirements if recommended and approved by the Department of Public Works. Sidewalk plantings must be 1) compatible with the water use requirements of Administrative Code Chapter 63 and 2) 'climate appropriate' as defined by Section 802.1 of the Public Works Code.
- If the neither a street tree nor sidewalk planting is appropriate for the site, the Zoning Administrator will allow an in-lieu payment into the Department of Public Works "Adopt-A-Tree" fund as a substitution for each required tree that cannot be planted.

## 4.0 Greening of Parking Lots



### BENEFITS:

Reduce the stormwater runoff and improve local water quality by reducing untreated stormwater in the ocean and the bay.

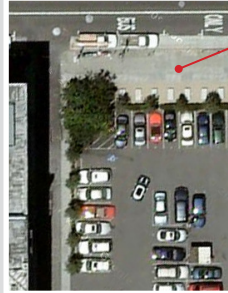
Improve the appearance of parking lots through screening, greening, and new seating.

### REQUIREMENTS:

- One street tree for every 20 feet of street right-of-way. See street tree details on previous page.
- One interior tree for every 5 parking spaces. These interior trees should be of a size and species where canopies could be expected to shade 50% of the lot within 15 years.
- Street trees must be both climate appropriate species as defined in the Public Works and must be compatible with the water use requirements of Administrative Code Chapter 63. Interior plantings need only be compatible with the water use requirements of Administrative Code Chapter 63.
- Provide a minimum of 20% permeable surfaces.
- Permeable surfaces of grading shall be coordinated so that stormwater can infiltrate the surface in areas with less than 5% slope.

**EXAMPLE:  
DOWNTOWN PARKING LOT**

**Existing: Former parking lot at 535 Mission Street**



Plaza: permeable surface with seating

Total parcel area: 16,240 s.f.  
 Parcel Perimeter: 360 degrees  
 Parking Spaces: 6  
 Planting Strip: 3' perimeter

Approximately 1,200 s.f. plaza with seating  
 30 trees on-site, no street trees

**The Green Landscaping requirements:**

5% permeable surface:  $5\% \times 16,240 \text{ s.f.} = 812 \text{ s.f.}$   
 5' deep perimeter landscaping strip =  $5' \times 360' = 1,800 \text{ s.f.}$   
 One on-site tree per 5 parking spaces  
 One on-site tree per 20' frontage

**Alternative A**

5' landscaping strip at 360 perimeter  
 approx. 1650 sf (after curbcuts, corners)

812 sf of permeable surface

64 parking spaces: 13 trees required on-site  
 18 street trees required (not shown)



**Alternative B**

Landscaping, alternative configuration.  
 Equivalent to  $360 \times 5 = 1,800 \text{ sf}$

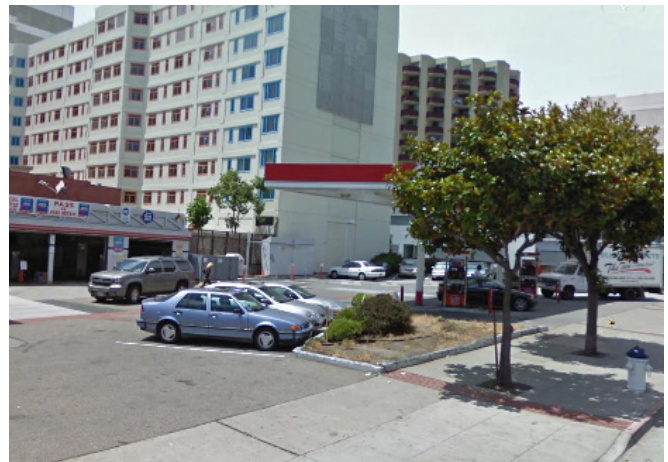
61 parking spaces: 12 trees req. on-site  
 18 street trees required (not shown)

Decorative fence



# 5.0 Vehicle Use Area

## New Section: 102.3 Planning Code



### NEW DEFINITION:

Vehicular use areas are defined as any area of a lot not located within any enclosed or partially enclosed structure and that is devoted to a use by or for motor vehicles including parking (accessory or non-accessory); and automotive uses as defined in Section 223 that are not enclosed by a structure, including but not limited to storage of automobiles, trucks or other vehicles; gasoline stations; car washes; motor vehicle repair shops; loading areas; service areas and drives; and access drives and driveways.

### APPLICABILITY:

Newly-defined vehicular use areas should comply with landscaping and screening requirements under the following circumstances:

- Construction of new vehicular use area;
- If the property with the vehicular use area adds gross floor area equal to 20 percent or more of the gross floor area of an existing building or 3000 square feet, whichever is less;
- If existing vehicle use area increases the number of existing parking spaces by 4 or more; or
- If reconstruction of an existing vehicular use area involves the removal of 200 square feet or more of the asphalt, concrete or other pavement—except for emergency utility access.

## 6.0 Permeable Surfaces

### New Section: 102.33 Planning Code

1. Porous asphalt
2. Porous concrete
3. Porous concrete detail
4. Interlocking pavers/brick
5. Interlocking pavers, planted ("Turf Pavers")
6. "Turf Pavers" detail



#### BENEFITS:

Permeable surfaces decrease stormwater run-off and help increase water quality of the ocean and the bay.

#### NEW DEFINITION:

Permeable surfaces are those that allow stormwater to infiltrate the underlying soils. Permeable surfaces are required to be contained so neither sediment nor the permeable surface discharges off the site.

Permeable surfaces shall include but are not limited to:

- Porous asphalt
- Porous concrete
- Single-sized aggregate
- Planting beds
- Open-jointed blocks
- Stone
- Pavers
- Brick that are loosely set without mortar.

## 7.0 Climate Appropriate Plants

### **New Section: 802.1 Public Works Code-- Climate Appropriate Chapter 63 of the Administrative Code-- Water Use Requirements**

#### **BENEFITS:**

California faces a real challenge to meet the water needs of a growing population with a limited supply of water. To meet this challenge, water use in landscapes must become more efficient. Even modest improvements can have a cumulative effect in saving a great deal of water.

#### **NEW CLIMATE APPROPRIATE DEFINITION:**

Plants, shrubs, ground covers, or tree species that meet one of the following are considered “climate appropriate”:

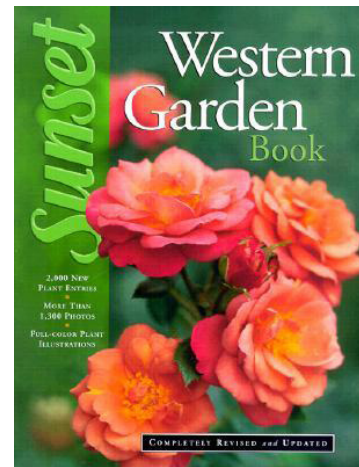
- 1) classified as “low” or “very low” water use as determined by the California Department of Water Resources. See “Water Use Classification of Landscape Species” at <http://www.water.ca.gov/wateruseefficiency/docs/wucols00.pdf>
- 2) classified as “no water,” “little water,” or “little to moderate water” for San Francisco according to the Sunset Western Addition Garden Book;
- 3) function as part of an engineered stormwater management feature approved by the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission;
- 4) has been classified as low water use by San Francisco’s Department of Public Works, the Recreation and Parks Department, or Public Utilities Commission;
- 5) appears on the “San Francisco Street Tree Species List” established by the Department of Public Works;
- 6) is undergoing testing by the Department of Public Works or the Recreation and Parks Department; or
- 7) has been approved for a specific wet soil location by the Department of Public Works or Public Utilities Commission based on naturally occurring water sources.

**APPLICABILITY:**

**Public Lands:** New street trees, required trees and landscaping in the public right-of-way shall meet the “climate appropriate” definitions in Section 802.1 of the Public Works Code **and** the water use requirements of Chapter 63 of the Administrative Code.

**Private Property:** All newly planted landscaping shall comply with Chapter 63 of the Administrative Code.

Climate appropriate plants are encouraged everywhere.





**San Francisco**  
**Planning**

**FOR MORE INFORMATION:  
Contact the San Francisco Planning Department**

**Central Reception**  
49 South Van Ness Avenue, Suite 1400  
San Francisco, CA 94103

TEL: **628.652.7600**  
WEB: **www.sfplanning.org**

**Planning counter at the Permit Center**  
49 South Van Ness Avenue, 2nd Floor  
San Francisco, CA 94103

EMAIL: **pic@sfgov.org**  
TEL: **628.652.7300**



**For more information on climate appropriate plantings  
and water use requirements:**

**San Francisco Public Utilities Commission**  
Stormwater Management Section **stormwaterreview@sfgov.org**  
Water Conservation Section **415.551.4730** or **waterconservation@sfgov.org**



**For more information on sidewalk plantings or street tree permits  
contact:**

**Department of Public Works**  
Bureau of Urban Forestry **628.652.4887** or **urbanforestry@sfdpw.org**