

LANDSCAPING REVIEW**BACKGROUND –**

I have had several communications with the applicant and they would be happy to work with the DRB to add landscaping to meet the landscaping budget requirement. That being said, since the landscaping budget is clearly a minimum, and as well the configuration of the parking area itself is in dispute, reliance on a budget may not produce the required results. It will be more productive to concentrate on the specifics of the landscaping at this point. I am reviewing the landscaping in reference to the submitted plans as there is no evidence that the applicant will submit a reconfiguration of the lot to comply with the requirement that parking cannot be in a front yard

RELEVANT REGULATION:

A recent revision to the zoning ordinance 4.3.8 Landscaping Plan & Standards (Full text is attached at end of this document) placed a substantial emphasis on the landscaping component of developments in the Village Area. This “green infrastructure” has clearly identified purposes and goals. It requires a mix of large canopy tree species throughout the project area with native plant species preferred. Parking areas have to be landscaped with appropriate trees, shrubs, and other plants including ground covers. Deciduous shade trees have to provide shade and reduce glare, and importantly, large expanses of parking have to include landscaped islands to establish a safe, convenient, and attractive parking area.

This section is augmented by section 5.6 Design Standards for Commercial and Industrial Uses (Full text is attached at end of this document) which contains two relevant parts.

The first being that Parking and loading areas have to be located in the side or rear yards of the structure unless that you approve that sufficient screening is provided, in which case up to 20% of the total number of parking spaces may be located in the front yard of the structure.

The second is that plantings, fencing and other landscape features have to serve clear functions such as screening between incompatible uses or structures, visually screening expanses of pavement or large un-broken building facades, providing shade in summer for roads, parking lots and buildings; defining street edges and other public spaces; giving visual emphasis to entryways; providing privacy; controlling erosion, and/or to filter, absorb and slow storm water runoff.

Finally, section 4.3.4(3) which requires an adequacy of landscaping, screening,in regard to achieving maximum compatibility with adjacent property and with the character of the neighborhood.

These regulations both clearly require a functional landscape which will shade, buffer and screen, and as well, a design that is attractive in its own right.

PREVIOUS DECISIONS:

The Planning Commission 12/10/86 - 15 Lot Commercial Subdivision Final Plat Approval contains:

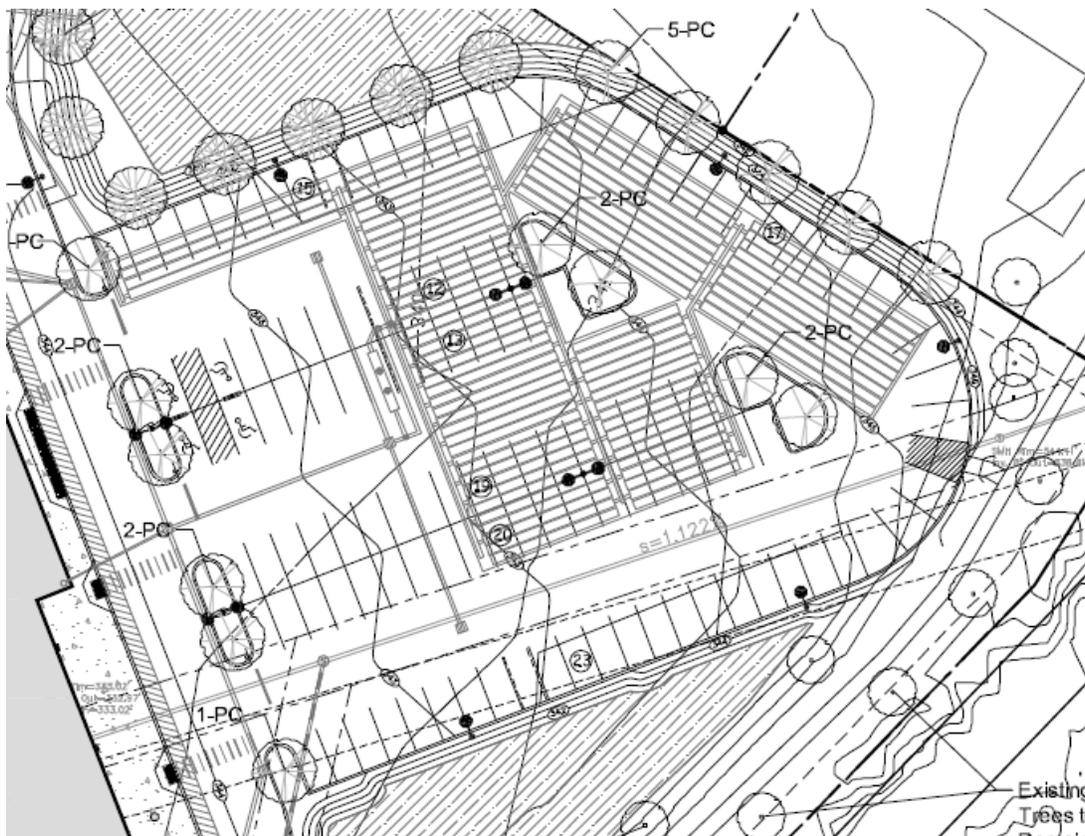
#8The purchasers of lots 1, 9, 8 and **15** are notified that the planning commission will be particularly insistent upon appropriate grass strips, berms and/or plantings to improve the aesthetics and appropriately screen these lots.

While not binding on you, it is advisory.

ISSUES -

Parking lot landscaping - The regulations call for both landscaped islands in the parking areas, and as well, large canopy deciduous shade trees to provide shade and reduce glare. The applicant has stated that they see no clear standards for formula or minimum requirement for islands in the parking areas and it is my understanding that they feel what is proposed is sufficient.

In the plan, below, the trees at the very top are red maples, the rest, labeled PC, are Chanticleer pear. The area of the trees shown on this plan is the average mature spread they will achieve.



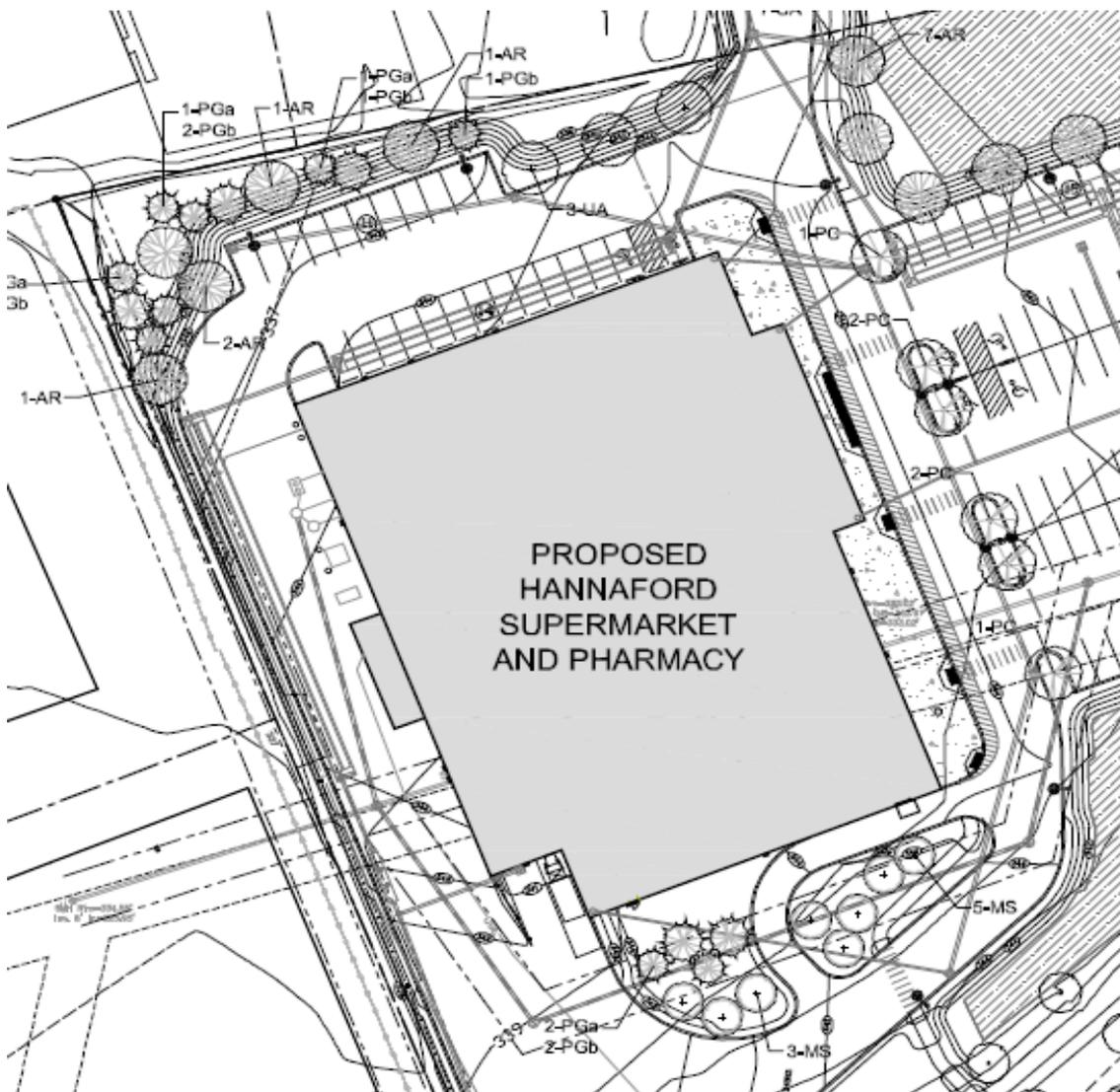
- The tree species Chanticleer pear is not a large canopy tree species. It has an average maturity height of 40 feet and a spread of 20 feet, not well suited to provide the shade and glare reduction. It is a variety noted for a pyramidal shape, narrower than other ornamental pears, chosen for areas where lateral space to spread is limited. See end of document for specifics.
- The larger red maples are located on the north side of the parking area, not providing shade at all.
- There are no trees on the southern side of the parking area, and none within the majority of the parking lot itself.
- The spread of the trees in the plan is indicative of the shade they provide at noon in mid summer. While obviously more shade will be provided at other times as the angles of the sun change, almost none of the parking spaces actually are receiving shade.

Appropriate growing medium and space for mature trees. - In order for a tree to become a mature, healthy within a reasonable time span it requires sufficient an area to grow in that is in proportion to

its mature size. As well the growing medium has to be suitable. While some smaller varieties such as the pears require less, larger varieties cannot be successful in the same area.

- This development will be located on a raised platform of fill above the native soils, and all the perimeter trees around the parking lot are located on the outer slopes of this platform. The planting specifications are calling for an area to be excavated twice the diameter of the root ball or container, approximately four feet in diameter. The earth surrounding this excavated hole must be of a soil mixture, not over compacted, and area suitable to nourish a mature tree, and if the pears are deemed unsuitable shade trees, a sufficient area for the larger tree species. This same issue applies to any trees in the islands. At this point the applicant maintains that the area shown on the planting specifications is sufficient for a mature tree.
- The 50% slope of the above planting location is not reflected in the landscaping boiler plate details L 3 which is for flat situations. Some type of retaining wall is required to insure that the soil doesn't slope down on to the tree trunk in the future.

Plantings around the structure - Plantings are required to screen large unbroken building facades, an honest description of the proposed structure.

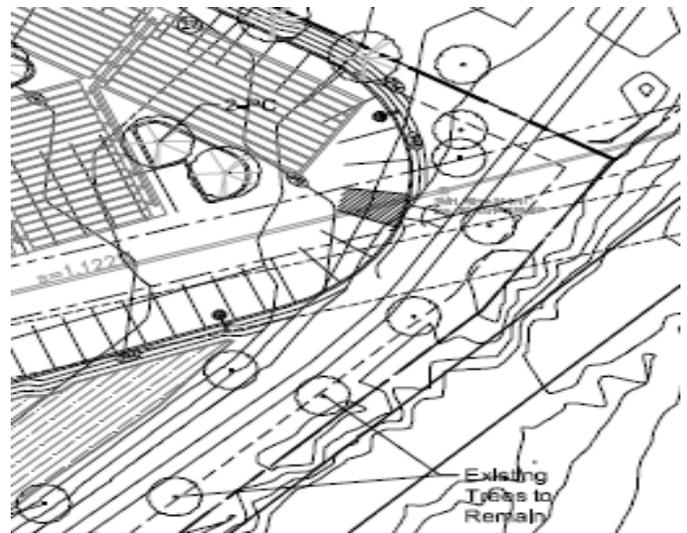


In the plan above the MS are crabapples, the UA are a variety of American elm, the PG are spruce and the AR are red maples.

- The trees proposed for the northern façade in the Mechanicsville Road viewshed are all deciduous as well nothing is planted in the vicinity of the structure.
- On the southern façade only low growing (10 – 15 feet) Sargent Crabapple trees, are proposed for the majority of the visible structure, although clusters in the western area are more mixed with the intention of screening the loading areas in the rear.
- The rear of the land platform is seven feet above the neighboring Giroux property, and the rear, operational area has no screening proposed for this façade. There are some pine and willow existing in portions of this easement area that the applicant obtained, but not sufficient and possibly not healthy or appropriate screening varieties.
- The ten foot wide easement area is located within the easement area reserved for the stormwater system under previous permits. It should be established that trees can be planted in this area, and that they will be protected from future filling of the Giroux property over their root systems. It should be further established that the proposed fill of the platform will not harm these existing trees if they are being included in the landscaping screening plan.
- Assuming that these issues can be resolved there still is a remaining area at the southern terminus of the western boundary that has no plantings and they may be needed.
- There is an area to the north of the path between the landscaping cluster in the south western corner of the site and the proposed path connection to the store that will have full view of the loading area of the store. This should have some year round screening to mitigate this view, possible similar to the cluster to the west.

Recreational Path Screening and Landscaping.

Section 5.6.5 requires that landscaping shall visually screen expanses of pavement and between incompatible uses. The plan to the right is the corner of the parking lot nearest the post office. The parking lot comes within ten feet of the recreational path. At this point no plantings have been proposed, and some existing trees have to be removed to accommodate the parking area.



- The challenge is to adequately screen the parking area from the public recreational path without creating a solid wall of vegetation, which visually would destroy that portion of the path, and as well could create security concerns because of the presence of the heavy vegetation immediately adjacent to the path.

Other issues-

- The applicant agreed to examine the feasibility of moving the retaining wall on the west side of the Commerce Street Extension should be located so that, depending on the eventual use

of this now vacant lot, it would be possible to construct a sidewalk on that side in the future. However I have not heard a reply

- The Princeton Elms proposed for there have root systems that spread, and while potentially a wonderful tree, there may not be sufficient room for the necessary root system considering the paving to the east, the retaining wall there and the possibility that a sidewalk may be needed on that side of the commerce extension for development of the open lot there. As well, it appears most of their root area will be on the neighbors property where future development could jeopardize their health and this should be investigated.

Peter Erb, Zoning Administrator.

Full texts of relevant regulations.

4.3.8 Landscaping Plan & Standards: PURPOSE: The Town of Hinesburg recognizes the importance of trees, landscaping, and well-planned green spaces in promoting the health, safety, and welfare of residents through improved drainage, water supply recharge, flood control, air quality, sun control, shade, and aesthetics. Landscaping shall be required and a landscape plan submitted for all uses subject to site plan review, and, within the village growth area districts, for subdivisions and planned unit developments. In evaluating landscaping, screening, and street tree plan elements, the Development Review Board shall promote the retention of existing, healthy trees while encouraging the use of a variety of plant species that are suited to the site and soil conditions. Native plant species are preferred, and under no circumstances shall non-native invasive species be used. See “Invasive Plants of the Eastern US” website (www.invasive.org/eastern) for a list of non-native invasive species. Also see the Vermont Invasive Plant Council website (www.vtinvasiveplants.org) for more information on invasive species management and statewide restrictions. Contact the Planning & Zoning Office and/or the Hinesburg Tree Warden for street tree species recommendations.

(1) Landscaping Plan: Applicants are encouraged, but not required, to have the plan crafted by a landscape architect, professional landscape designer, or other landscape professional. For subdivisions and planned unit developments in the village growth area, such plans shall be submitted with the preliminary and final plat applications. The plan shall include:

- (a) All proposed physical improvements, such as buildings, parking areas, sidewalks, etc.
- (b) The location of existing natural features, such as significant trees, streams, wetlands, and rock outcroppings.
- (c) Proposed landscaping location and materials, including existing vegetation to remain, types of new plant materials, identified by and botanical name, sizes of all new plant materials by height and/or diameter at time of planting and at maturity, quantities of each of the planting materials, tree planting specifications, and treatment of the ground surface (paving, seeding, mulch, etc.).
- (d) Methods for controlling erosion and protecting landscaped areas.
- (e) An explanation of when the landscaping will be installed relative to construction activities and phasing.

(2) Landscaping Standards: Landscaping can be seen as “green infrastructure” both for individual projects and for the Town as a whole. As such, a well-designed landscape plan is just as important as a properly-engineered road, sewer system, or stormwater control system.

(a) The Development Review Board shall require compliance with any Tree Ordinance or Landscaping Design Standards enacted by the Town, subsequent to the effective date of these regulations.

(b) Within each landscaping plan. To the extent practicable, these trees shall , and shall be included throughout the project area (e.g., front, side, rear yards).

(c) Landscaping of Parking Areas. Except for parking spaces accessory to a single-family or two-family dwelling, all off-street parking areas subject to review by the Development Review Board, shall be landscaped with appropriate trees, shrubs, and other plants including ground covers, as approved by the Development Review Board.

(d) Landscaping Budget Requirements. The Development Review Board shall require the following planting costs for all landscape plans. Landscaping standards must be addressed, regardless of the minimum planting cost calculation – i.e., . Total landscaping improvement cost (not including cost to develop the plan) shall be no less than 3% of the first \$250,000 in construction and site improvement cost, plus an additional 2% of the next \$250,000 in construction and site improvement cost, plus an additional 1% of the remaining construction and site improvement cost over \$500,000. For example, a project with a construction and site improvement cost of \$150,000 would require \$4,500 in landscaping improvements; whereas, a \$2,500,000 project would require landscaping of at least \$32,500 (\$7,500+\$5,000+\$20,000). In evaluating landscaping requirements, the DRB may grant some credit for existing trees or for site improvements other than plantings (e.g., berms, stone walls, public art installations, etc.) as long as the objectives of this section are not reduced

(e) Maintenance & Responsibility. Plantings shown on an approved landscaping plan shall be maintained by the property owner in a vigorous growing condition throughout the duration of the use. Plants not so maintained shall be replaced with new plants at the beginning of the next immediately following growing season.

Section 5.6 DESIGN STANDARDS FOR COMMERCIAL AND INDUSTRIAL USES

5.6.3 Parking and loading areas: Parking and loading areas for any new structures shall be located in the side or rear yards of the structure. Where sufficient screening is provided, and with Development Review Board approval, up to 20% of the total number of parking spaces may be located in the front yard of the structure. If more than one structure is served by the parking area, the parking area may be located in the front yard of half of the structures.

(1) Parking and loading areas shall be set back a minimum of five (5) feet from any property line to allow sufficient space for screening, grading and or control of storm water. No such setback shall be required from property lines crossed by shared parking facilities.

5.6.5 Landscaping: In addition to generally improving the appearance of a site, plantings, fencing and other landscape features shall be designed to serve a clear function such as: screening between incompatible uses or structures; visually screening expanses of pavement or large un-broken building facades; providing shade in summer for roads, parking lots and buildings; defining street edges and other public spaces; giving visual emphasis to entryways; providing privacy; controlling erosion, and/or to filter, absorb and slow storm water runoff.