



Urban Forestry

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Permeable Sidewalk Landscaping Process and Application

Green spaces are vital to San Francisco's quality of life as they provide a range of environmental benefits and bring beauty to our neighborhoods and commercial districts. A permit is required to ensure that landscaping in sidewalk areas is properly constructed and maintained in order to maximize environmental benefits, protect public safety, and limit conflicts with infrastructure. A permit is required when installing permeable medium in the public-right-of-way, either new or retroactive.

PERMIT APPLICATION MATERIALS

Submit the following materials by e-mail to **UrbanForestryPermits@sfdpw.org**, or mail to: **Bureau of Urban Forestry, 49 S. Van Ness Ave., Suite 1000, San Francisco, CA 94103**

- Completed application form signed by the property Owner or Owner's agent
 - A plan drawing of the proposed sidewalk plantings (See "Application for Permeable Sidewalk-Landscaping Permit" form, at the end of this form, and Sample Drawing, linked here, for requirements.)
- Non-refundable fee, per permit application, made payable to **CCSF-DPW-BUF** | Fees as of July 2025

- **Submitted individually per property :** \$362
- **Submitted jointly with 2-4 properties:** \$311
- **Submitted jointly with 5+ properties:** \$269

**Joint property submissions only apply to neighboring properties within the same block or intersection. Fee is per block lot.*

PERMITTING AND CONSTRUCTION PROCESS

1. Submit the Application Materials as noted above.
2. E-mail UrbanForestryPermits@sfdpw.org to schedule pre-construction site inspection, at which time Public Works staff will evaluate the proposed landscape plans in relation to existing infrastructure, American with Disabilities Act (ADA) Accessibility Guidelines, California Building Code Title 24, and other regulatory codes and guidelines. *Schedule an inspection at least two (2) weeks before the anticipated start of construction. We may waive the site visit if site plans are detailed and properly labeled with dimensions.*
3. Attend the scheduled *pre-construction site* inspection if requested.
4. Issuance of permit is subject to staff approval. Applicant will be notified of any required changes or receipt of permit at the conclusion of the on-site inspection.
5. Call Underground Service Alert (USA) at 811 at least two (2) days prior to digging to check for the location of your underground utilities. There is no charge for this service. See USAnorth811.org for further details.
6. Proceed with demolition and installation. It is recommended to use a licensed and insured contractor. Work may be conducted by the owner as a general contractor.
7. Email photos to UrbanForestryPermits@sfdpw.org at least one (1) week in advance to schedule a final inspection to be conducted once work is completed. We will request a *post-construction* site inspection meeting if necessary.

Public Works staff will sign-off on the project or inform the applicant of any changes required to comply with the plans as permitted. If changes are necessary, an additional post-construction site inspection will be required.

KEEP THESE INSTRUCTIONS FOR YOUR REFERENCE

For additional information, refer to San Francisco Public Works' web page on Sidewalk Landscaping Permits (sfpublicworks.org/services/permits/sidewalk-landscaping). Different regulations apply specifically to tree planting. Other pertinent reference materials include San Francisco Public Works' *Director's Order No. 187246* Regulating the Planting, Maintenance, or Removal of Trees on Public Sidewalk Areas. Also see the *Better Streets Plan* for guidance on the design and management of the pedestrian environment in San Francisco.

PLANTING BED AND GRADING: (Refer to Sample Layout Options at sfpublicworks.org/services/sample-layout-options-different-sidewalk-conditions)

Minimum Unobstructed Path Width: A 72-inch wide minimum unobstructed path in the throughway zone is required for most sidewalks. Narrow residential and alleyway sidewalks may be an exception. In no case shall new landscaping result in an unobstructed sidewalk width of less than 48 inches, or increase the cross-slope of the portion of the sidewalk designated as an access path-of-travel for ADA purposes. The path of travel along the sidewalk shall be straight and continuous, without jogs or offsets. The paved sidewalk should provide adequate and comfortable pedestrian space in response to the pedestrian activity level of location.

Courtesy Strip: A courtesy strip is located in the Sidewalk Edge Zone between planting bed and curb. The courtesy strip is only required for sidewalks with curbside parking to provide a clear area for passengers to step out onto sidewalk. This strip measured from the face of curb shall remain accessible and clear of landscape planting. The strip width requirements vary with parking layout:

- a. 24-inch wide courtesy strip is required for sidewalks adjacent to parallel parking
- b. 32-inch wide courtesy strip is required for sidewalks adjacent to diagonal parking
- c. 48-inch wide courtesy strip is required for sidewalks adjacent to perpendicular parking
- d. Sidewalks without curbside parking do not require the courtesy strip.

4-Foot Accessible Path: For each curbside parking space (approximately 15-20 feet of curb length), a minimum 48-inch wide access path is required to pass perpendicularly from the curb to the sidewalk path-of-travel. This path shall be located at the approximate centerline of each curbside parking stall. The path must be made of accessible material, such as concrete or pavers set on a firm base, and not exceed a 2% cross slope where technically feasible. The path layout within a block varies based on parking layout:

- a. For parallel parking, space a 4-foot path a maximum of every 18-20 feet.
- b. For perpendicular and diagonal parking, space a 4-foot path a maximum of every 12 feet.
- c. Areas without curbside parking do not require this additional path.

Planting Restrictions at Intersections: Landscape material shall not obscure traffic or parking signs/signals or vehicular sightlines. Landscape material, other than trees, may be planted up to the projected property line (typically crosswalk edge) on sidewalks and medians provided that it does not exceed 36" in height from sidewalk grade. This restriction pertains to the following areas:

- a. Within 25 feet in front of a traffic sign or signal
- b. Within 25 feet measured from the corner building property line toward the direction of oncoming street traffic's approach to an intersection and measured 5 feet off the property line on the street traffic's exit from an intersection, if property is within 25 feet of a street intersection

Sidewalk Landscape Plantings are *Not Permitted* in the following cases:

- a. If the existing sidewalk is less than 7 feet wide and has curbside parking
- b. Adjacent to existing Bus Zones where the sidewalk is narrower than 12 feet. Subject to review.
- c. Adjacent to an existing designated Blue (Accessible) Parking Zone, designated White (Accessible) Passenger Loading Zone (maintain 8 feet clearance perpendicular from face of curb and 2% max cross slope) and designated Green Parking Zone
- d. Within curb return (the curved portion of the sidewalk at intersections)
 - o *Consult SF Public Works' Urban Forestry concerning potential planting in areas with wider sidewalk "bulb-outs" outside the projected property lines.*
- e. If impacting existing or potential curb ramp locations
- f. Within 5 feet of a fire hydrant
- g. In front of mailboxes, newspaper racks, police and fire call stations, or parking meter boxes

Guidelines A-E may not pertain to planting opportunities that exist along building front.

Grading and Drainage of Planting Beds: The grade of the planted area shall be 1 inch maximum lower than the grade of the sidewalk. Planted areas on steep sidewalks (greater than 10% slope) shall be terraced to avoid soil erosion and spillage onto the sidewalk and street. Select heavier mulch to avoid spillage in steep or windy areas. Landscaping and edging treatments shall allow water to drain from the sidewalk into the landscaped area. In areas with a known high-water table and other subsoil issues, the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission may review sites as to their appropriateness for permeable landscaping.

PLANT MATERIALS (Refer to Sidewalk Landscaping Recommended Drought Tolerant Plant List and other sidewalk landscaping guidance at sfpublicworks.org/services/permits/sidewalk-landscaping.)

Street Tree Planting: Street tree plantings are also strongly encouraged for both their environmental benefits and aesthetic qualities. A separate permit is required for street trees and may be submitted together with the sidewalk landscaping permit. For information on planting a street tree, email San Francisco Public Works' Urban Forestry at urbanforestrypermits@sfdpw.org or refer to the website at sfpublicworks.org/plant-street-tree.

Plant Requirements: Plant species and layout are subject to SF Public Works' Urban Forestry staff approval. Plants shall not pose a hazard to public health (avoid plants with spines, thorns or irritants). To conserve water, plant species requiring minimal irrigation and adapted to local site and climate conditions are recommended. Planting within 3 feet of the trunk of trees less than 3 years old or near the root crown of established trees is not permitted.

Maintenance: The permit holder is responsible for maintaining the sidewalk landscaping in a condition that is safe to pedestrians and vehicular traffic, free of litter and unsightly weeds. Plant health must be maintained with appropriate pruning, watering, and other care as needed. Permit holder must ensure that planting does not encroach into the accessible path, through-way zone and into courtesy strip.

PAVING MATERIALS AND LANDSCAPE ELEMENTS: (Refer to Public Works' sidewalk landscaping information page at sfpublicworks.org/services/permits/sidewalk-landscaping.)

In-Ground vs. Above Ground Planters: Above ground planters may not be permitted under sidewalk landscaping permits because they do not collect storm water runoff from the sidewalk, may obstruct the sidewalk and may allow undesirable opportunities for vandalism and graffiti. In locations where in-ground plantings are not possible, (i.e., areas with sub-sidewalk basements), raised planters that are not permanently affixed to the pavement may be allowed per Order 179231. Planters that are permanently affixed to the pavement must obtain a Minor Sidewalk Encroachment Permit from Bureau of Street Use and Mapping (BSM).

Paving Material Options: Surface materials within sidewalk landscaping access path at curbside parking may be made of materials such as concrete or stone pavers, bricks, permeable concrete, concrete or other firm, stable and slip resistant material, and must be set on a firm base and free of tripping hazards. The courtesy strip may be made of any of above mentioned materials in addition to unit pavers or compacted crushed stone over aggregate base (slopes must be less than or equal to 5% for crushed stone to be used). Materials are subject to SF Public Works' Urban Forestry Permits and Policy staff review.

Raised Edge Treatment: A raised edge treatment is recommended, but not required unless sidewalk slope exceeds 10%, or hazards exist in the adjacent sidewalk landscape area, such as when sidewalk has sudden changes in slope, including warping. All edging treatments must be 4 inches minimum in height measured from the sidewalk with a minimum 2-inch solid base. The maximum height for edge treatments adjacent parallel parking is 6 inches. Edge treatments may be a maximum of 15 inches in height adjacent to "no-parking" zones or courtesy strips 30 inches or wider. Edging must be continuous and circle the entire planting bed. The edging, except in cases where slope exceeds 10%, may **NOT** be cast/formed concrete to allow runoff to flow into the landscape. Edging must be a minimum of 70% permeable except where soil is to be contained on the downhill edge of the landscaping with slopes of 10% or more. Edging may be made of wood (pressure-treated wood products must be free of arsenic and known carcinogens), stone, decorative metal or other sturdy material, subject to SF Public Works' Urban Forestry staff review.

Some Landscape Elements may Require Additional Permitting: Other raised structures, decorative and/or protective fencing may require a Minor Sidewalk Encroachment Permit from the Bureau of Street Use and Mapping (BSM).

UTILITIES

Protect Utilities: The property owner shall check for the presence of underground utilities in the area of proposed plantings and shall be solely responsible for avoiding interference with or damage to electric or telephone conduits, sewers and other utilities. Call Underground Utility Alert at 811 at least 2 days prior to any demolition work to identify and locate all underground utilities.

Utilities in Planters: Any parking signs, meters, and many other above-ground infrastructures must remain set within concrete for adequate anchoring. Street lights and Utility poles have deep footings and do not rely on surrounding concrete for stability; therefore, adjacent concrete may be removed to expand planting bed.

Maintain Access to Above Ground Utilities and Sidewalk Fixtures: Street lights, utility poles, mailboxes, fire/police call boxes, pedestrian push buttons, trash receptacles, bike racks, and other street fixtures, with the exception of parking meters and parking signs, must remain accessible by a 48-inch wide clear path perpendicular to the curb, as measured from the centerline of the fixture. The accessible path to mailboxes, trash receptacles, bike racks and other such street fixtures is required from the sidewalk. The accessible path to utility poles and street lights is required from the edge of curb.

Maintain Access to Below Ground Utilities: Points of access to underground utilities must remain unobstructed. Plantings adjacent to such points of access shall be kept a minimum of 6 inches clear from all sides. Utility lids and boxes may lie within the planting bed and the portion of concrete sidewalk surrounding the utility box may be removed. Within the 6-inch clear area, install pavers or stone mulch around utility to keep plants from covering the lid.

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APPLICATION FOR PERMEABLE SIDEWALK-LANDSCAPING PERMIT

Mail complete applications to : Bureau of Urban Forestry, 49 S. Van Ness Ave., Suite 1000, San Francisco, CA 94103

Check payable to: CCSF – DPW – BUF | Telephone:

Fax: 415-522-7684

DATE _____ APPLICATION # _____ APPROVED BY _____

Application is hereby made under provision of Article 16 of the Public Works Code for permission to install landscaping in or on the sidewalk adjacent to the premises located at

SITE INFORMATION

Site Address: _____ Zip: _____

Cross Street: _____ Block: _____ Lot: _____

Owner Name: _____

Phone: _____ E-Mail: _____

APPLICANT/AUTHORIZED AGENT INFORMATION ☐ Check here if same as above

Company Name: _____

Applicant Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____ E-Mail: _____

PROJECT INFORMATION

Provide a to-scale site plan drawing indicating the proposed changes to the sidewalk area under consideration. Indicate sidewalk dimensions, property boundary, curb and location of existing street trees, utilities, light poles, street signs and any other encroachments to remain. Indicate areas of new plantings, location of new trees, and permeable surfaces.

☐ I am submitting this application in response to a Notice to Repair (NTR) from SF Public Works.

NTR # _____ City Inspector's Name _____

PLANT LIST	Quantity	Species (Attach additional list as needed)
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

I agree to hold harmless the City and County of San Francisco, its agents, officers, and employees from any damage or injury caused by reason of planting, placement, maintenance, or removal of the planter or plants. The owner or owners of the respective property shall be solely liable for any damages. The City has the right to make changes in parking restrictions, such as designating new bus stops or blue zoned parking areas. If parking restrictions change adjacent to your sidewalk landscaping, your sidewalk landscaping permit may be rescinded and you will be required to remove the landscaping and reinstall concrete sidewalk paving. Any proposed changes in parking restrictions will require public notice and require a public hearing prior to implementation.

Signature of Applicant/Authorized Agent

Date

_____ Property Owner _____ Authorized Agent

We encourage all applicants to submit plans by e-mail to UrbanForestryPermits@sfdpw.org