

XERISCAPING & RESPONSIBLE LANDSCAPING



CITY OF SAN ANTONIO
**OFFICE OF HISTORIC
PRESERVATION**

CITY OF SAN ANTONIO
HISTORIC DESIGN GUIDELINES
LANDSCAPING POLICY DOCUMENT

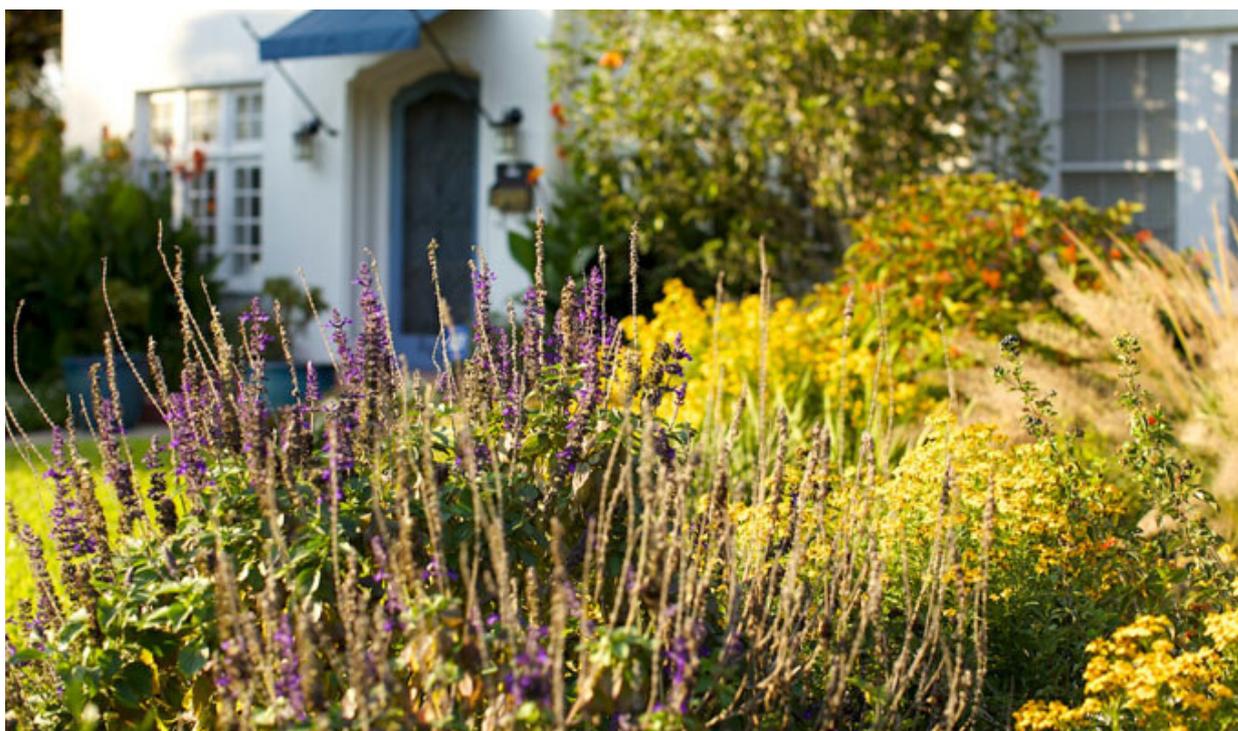
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WHY IS LANDSCAPING IMPORTANT?

The City of San Antonio Office of Historic Preservation is dedicated to being a leader at the intersection of climate-sensitive policy and historic preservation. This policy document provides property owners guidance on how to effectively balance sustainable landscaping plans with the retention of historic integrity.

For most people, historic properties are viewed from the public domain, making the spaces immediately visible from streets and pedestrian walkways an important aspect in historic district preservation. Because of this, an emphasis is placed on front yard landscaping and hardscaping in the historic and design review process.



The primary guideline to follow is the **retention of at least 50% of green space**, which can replace traditional turf grass entirely and be comprised fully of drought-tolerant, native plantings. This requirement helps retain the many environmental benefits of plants in dense residential neighborhoods, including offsetting the heat island effect, supporting pollinators, improving water retention after heavy rains, and providing shade if taller trees and plantings are incorporated.



Did you know? Front yards can be kept low-maintenance by incorporating low-growing and spreading species versus traditional turf grass.

LOCAL SUSTAINABLE LANDSCAPING

San Antonio has a warm, temperate climate that supports a diverse palate of plant species and allows for almost year-round green. A densely-planted garden composed of native plants can provide interest throughout all four seasons. In many instances, low-growing or spreading native species are a suitable replacement for turf grass and are more resistant to seasonal extremes. As infrastructure demands of an ever-growing city continue to strain our finite water sources, water conservation is at the forefront of today's landscaping conversation.



Keep in mind that native xeriscaping, like all landscapes, takes time to establish. During the first few years, new plants sometimes require more water than mature plants with established and deep root systems. It is important to consider and evaluate the projected water use of your sustainable landscape proposal with a long-term view.

Benefits of Native, Drought-Tolerant Landscapes

 **Reduces the heat island effect:** "Heat islands" are created by large impermeable surfaces, such as concrete and buildings. Plants help cool the environment and shade from intense sun, which reduces energy costs and mitigates greenhouse gas emissions.

 **Supports pollinators:** Pollinators, including bees and birds, are vital to our local ecosystems. Landscapes with plant diversity can better weather changes in the environment. Native landscapes help foster and protect our local wildlife habitats.

 **Reduces water runoff:** Native, drought-tolerant landscapes are more effective at absorbing water after heavy bursts of rainfall, which is common in San Antonio.

THE DO'S

Proposals that follow these guidelines are eligible for OHP staff approval.

- **Do** retain at least 50% of green space in your landscaping plan through turf grass, the integration of native, drought-tolerant, low-maintenance plantings, or a combination of both. **Exceeding 50% native green space is highly encouraged.**
- **Do** incorporate natural-colored (not black) gravel, decomposed granite, river rock, mulch, and other pervious ground cover to help facilitate rainwater absorption. These elements should be used as accents or for pathways versus primary coverage.
- **Do** incorporate rocks with a diameter of less than 2 inches.
- **Do** incorporate rock ground cover or low, native plantings near the foundation of your historic home to protect from water infiltration. Planting trees or shrubbery directly adjacent to your foundation is discouraged, as roots can cause damage to the structure as they grow.
- **Do** incorporate rain catchment systems in the side or rear yard in a manner that does not negatively impact the visibility of the historic structure from the public right-of-way.
- **Do** incorporate Texas Agricultural Extension's seven basic principles that lead to saving water:
 - ✔ Planning and design
 - ✔ Soil analysis
 - ✔ Practical turf (grass) areas
 - ✔ Strategic use of mulches
 - ✔ Appropriate plant selection for your area
 - ✔ Efficient irrigation
 - ✔ Effective maintenance



THE DO NOT'S

Proposals that incorporate one or more of the following elements may be subject to Historic & Design Review Commission (HDRC) review with no guarantee of approval.

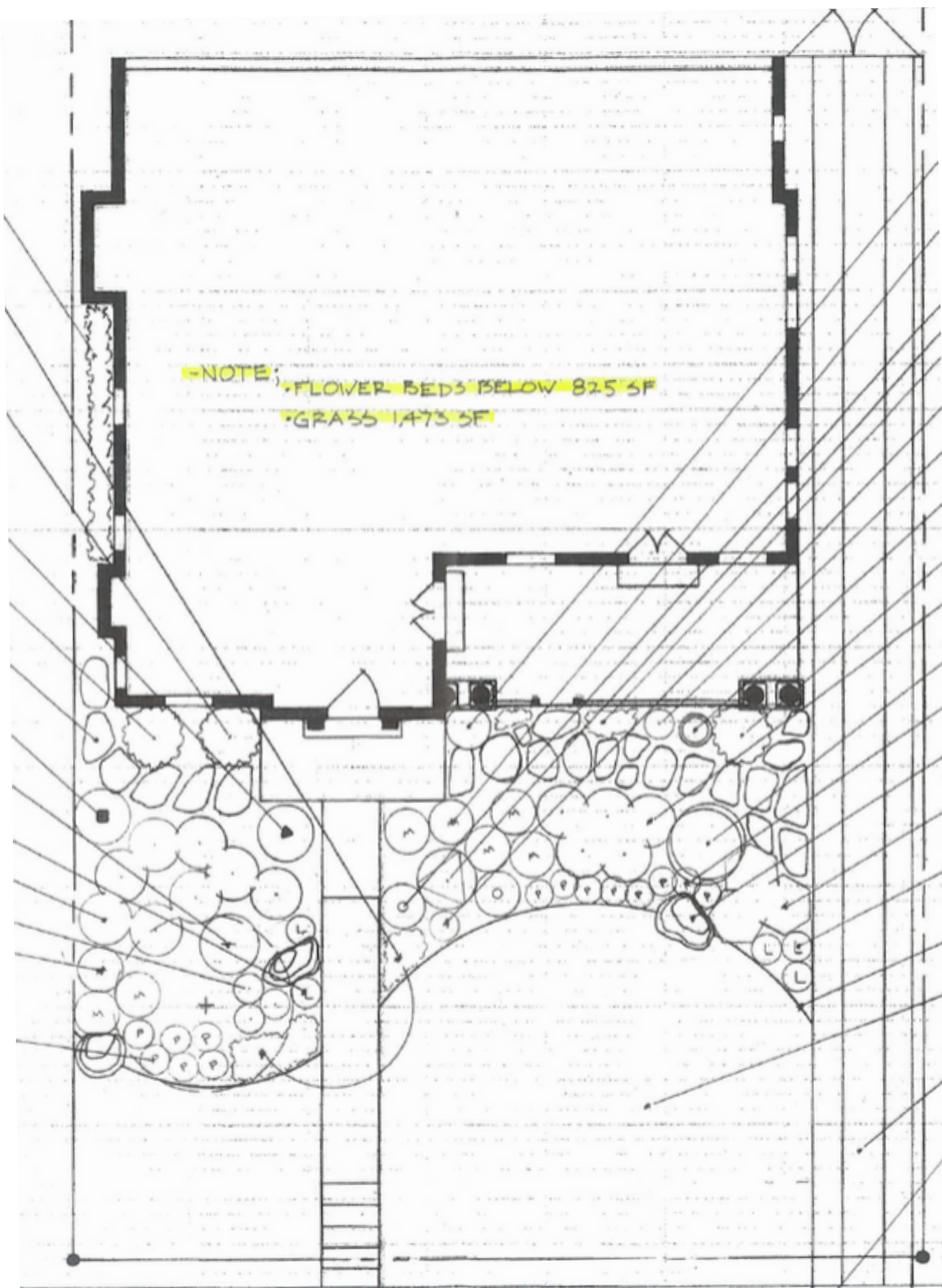
- **Do not** develop proposals that remove over 50% of the total green space in the front yard.
- **Do not** fully remove plants from the planting strip (the space between the sidewalk and street). Retaining at least 50% plantings in this area is highly encouraged to reduce the heat island, aid in rainwater absorption on streets, and create a lively pedestrian experience.
- **Do not** utilize gravel, decomposed granite, or other small rock ground cover as the primary element of your landscaping plan.
- **Do not** incorporate black, non-native, or artificially colored rocks.
- **Do not** incorporate rock ground cover with an overall diameter of greater than 2 inches.
- **Do not** incorporate large boulders or flagstone as accent pieces. Consider integrating drought-tolerant trees or low shrubbery instead to add visual diversity and interest.
- **Do not** incorporate excessive use of concrete or impervious (non-permeable) hardscaping. Hardscaping is best for functional purposes only: driveways, walkways, steps, and patios.

In summary, **avoid** plans that:

- ✗ Prioritize hardscapes or rock features
- ✗ Incorporate non-native plant species
- ✗ Feature non-native or artificial rocks
- ✗ Are overly complex or conceal historic features
- ✗ Remove over 50% of green space
- ✗ Are not pollinator-friendly



GO GREEN

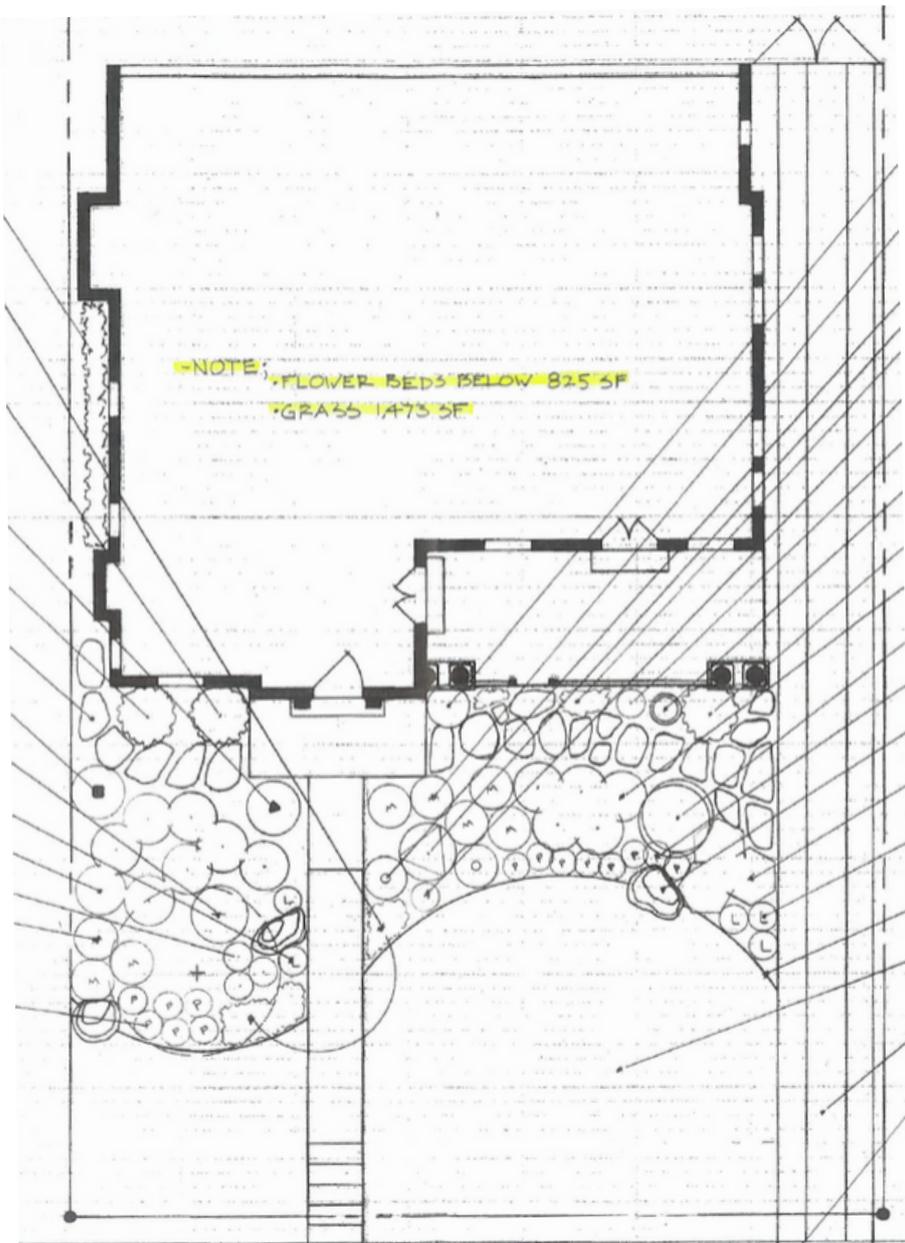


Diverse, Drought-Tolerant Xeriscape

-  **Over 50% green space:** A mix of shrubs, small and large trees, and native groundcover: this xeriscape provides shade, reduces water demands, and is pollinator-friendly.
-  **Native species:** Bluebonnet, scarlet sage, Texas sycamore, butterfly milkweed, red yucca: several plant species native to Central Texas require low to very low water to thrive.
-  **Rock and hardscape accents:** Flagstone and decomposed granite are used as functional pathways and decorative bedding, respectively, making the plants the star.

Pictured: Lantana (top) and Wright's Skullcap (middle) are two examples of pollinator-friendly perennials that are native to Central Texas. Frogfruit (bottom) is an excellent native, low-growing, drought-tolerant groundcover option to replace traditional turf grass. Find more options at www.gardenstylesanantonio.com.

"ZERO-SCAPING"



Barren, Rocky "Zero-scape"

-  **Less than 50% green space:** Large expanses of hardscaping or pervious rock can contribute to the heat island effect, providing little shade and increasing energy demands.
-  **Focus on rocks and hardscapes:** This plan places strong visual and functional focus on rocks and solid surfaces versus pollinator-friendly plantings.
-  **High-water species:** The species present in this plan include palm trees and high-water grasses, which are not native to Central Texas and require additional care to thrive.

Pictured: Lava rock (top) derives from volcanic regions versus Central Texas. Native rock of a similar size is a recommended alternative. Expansive areas of rock with sparse plantings (middle) or large stones (bottom), or "zero-scapes," are not as effective as green xeriscapes in attracting pollinators and cooling the environment.

RESOURCES

Office of Historic Preservation Staff. Consult with a historic preservation specialist to receive property-specific guidance on landscaping plans and the Historic Design Guidelines.

www.sapreservation.com | (210) 207-0035 | info@sapreservation.com

San Antonio Water System (SAWS). SAWS is an excellent resource for native and drought-tolerant plant advice. Their programming includes WaterSaver Rebate and Coupon Programs, Garden Style San Antonio, a comprehensive plant directory, consultations, and more.

www.gardenstylesanantonio.com | (210) 704-SAVE | (210) 704-SAWS

San Antonio River Authority (SARA). River Authority staff is highly knowledgeable on water conservation and local plant ecosystems. Their headquarters at 100 E Guenther St in the King William Historic District features a native, drought-tolerant, pollinator-supporting landscape design.

www.sara-tx.org | (210) 207-1313 | [Email inquiries via www.saratx-org/contact-us](http://www.saratx-org/contact-us)

Your neighborhood association. Your registered neighborhood association can provide guidance on landscape characteristics, assistance in design and contractor referrals, and more. To find your association, visit www.sanantonio.gov/nhsd/neighborhoods or inquire with Office of Historic Preservation staff if you live in a historic district.

