

# STANDARD OF APPEARANCE *for the public realm*





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## you never get a second chance to make *a first impression...*

In cities, looks matter. Places are judged by their residents and visitors alike based on their appearance—from the basics of cleanliness and orderliness to the higher order signals of care and attentiveness such as well-designed buildings, landscapes, and public art.

The most successful cities, those that are desirable places to live, work, and play, ensure that their public realm is intentionally designed and cared for. They set a high standard of physical appeal that residents, business owners, and developers feel compelled to embrace. New Bedford seeks to be such a city, and the goal of this document is to lay out, in concrete and specific terms, our expectations for the level of cleanliness and orderliness to which city government and residents will hold themselves mutually accountable.

The Standard of Appearance detailed in this document is in service of an ambitious but achievable goal—for New Bedford to be the cleanest center city in New England.





# 01

## streets & sidewalks

### Departments of Planning, Public Infrastructure, and Traffic

The **most heavily travelled streets and sidewalks** in the City of New Bedford should:

#### HAVE

- ✓ Street lampposts painted black, not rusted
- ✓ Street signs mounted on lampposts where possible
- ✓ Parking meters in good repair and painted black
- ✓ Tree wells mulched and trees free of dangling limbs and suckers

#### NOT HAVE

- ✗ Graffiti
- ✗ Litter and debris
- ✗ Unnecessary fencing
- ✗ Unnecessary construction materials (e.g. barrels, cones, signs)
- ✗ Pay phone and magazine kiosks
- ✗ Overflowing trash receptacles



## EYESORES TO BE ADDRESSED:



An unnecessary and confusing sign on Rte. 18 and Walnut St.



Excessive commercial signage per ordinance (only one of these banner signs is allowed on private property)



No commercial signs on public utility poles or grass ribbons



Sidewalk and gutter weeds and litter are the responsibility of the property owner



Catch basins should be well-groomed and maintained to prevent flooding and to ensure curb appeal



Rusty, old, and green cobra lights (should be painted or replaced)



No tree well should be empty



This recently planted tree needs to be properly pruned, weeded, and mulched



This litter strewn City-owned parking lot requires more frequent maintenance

## Downtown and Historic District

An extra level of attention is required to ensure our downtown continues to be safe, clean, and aesthetically appealing. Downtown is the commercial and cultural center of Greater New Bedford, and as such, must adhere to the highest possible standard of cleanliness, good order, and repair. The City can fund these efforts through the Downtown Enterprise Fund. Downtown litter should be addressed systematically and quickly through a combination of enforcement and removal.

### Downtown New Bedford and Historic Neighborhoods

**Downtown New Bedford (outside of Bedford Landing Historic District) & Historic Neighborhoods (Buttonwood, Clasky, Foster Hill and Acushnet Heights) should:**

#### HAVE

- ✓ Appropriate street signs (black frame with a traditional blue sign mounted on street light)
- ✓ New Bedford-Style or Washingtonian light fixtures

### New Bedford Historic District

**The New Bedford Historic District should:**

#### HAVE

- ✓ Appropriate light fixtures
- ✓ Street signs (white with black lettering, mounted on buildings/fences where possible)
- ✓ Bluestone sidewalks
- ✓ Bluestone-colored crosswalks and driveway aprons

#### EYESORES TO BE ADDRESSED:



Downtown litter should be addressed systematically and quickly through a combination of enforcement and removal





02

## graffiti

### Department of Public Infrastructure

Graffiti is an act of vandalism, and one of the most corrosive signs of blight and disorder. It serves as a warning sign that danger may be lurking, quite the opposite of the message that we hope to convey to residents and visitors. A graffiti perpetrator's goal almost always is to be able to admire his work long afterward. For this reason, graffiti tends to beget more graffiti in cities where it is allowed to remain on display. On the other hand, cities that are consistent in promptly removing graffiti can turn it into a much more manageable problem.

Toward this end, the expectation in New Bedford is that graffiti will be addressed within 48 hours, weather permitting. On public property this means removing it or covering it up; on private property, this means reporting it to a supervisor who will contact the property owner to ask them to remove it or to obtain permission for the City to remove it. While DPI is responsible for removing or covering up graffiti, all City employees are expected to bring instances of graffiti promptly to DPI's attention. Residents are strongly encouraged to do the same.

#### EYESORES TO BE ADDRESSED:



This weeks-old graffiti tag at a City park should have been removed within 48 hours



03

# parks, playgrounds, & beaches

Departments of Parks, Recreation and Beaches,  
Planning, Public Infrastructure

**All City parks and beaches should:**

## HAVE

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- ✓ Grass mowed to the recommended height (Park Maintenance Plan)
- ✓ Playground equipment in good repair
- ✓ Proper standard trash receptacles with appropriate baffles/covers, augmented during the summer season with plastic barrels as necessary (no open wire mesh barrels)

## NOT HAVE

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- ✗ Graffiti
- ✗ Litter and debris
- ✗ Unnecessary fencing/signage
- ✗ Overflowing trash receptacles or obtrusive dumpsters
- ✗ Excessive weeds in planting beds, tree wells, and curbing
- ✗ Private signage



**EYESORES TO BE ADDRESSED:**



These shabby signs and lock box mar an otherwise beautiful view on West Rodney French Blvd.



Over time, we should have a uniform style of trash receptacle for parks



Over time, dead and diseased trees should be removed



Litter should be picked up frequently



## 04

# gateways

## Departments of Planning & Public Infrastructure

The City should perform more frequent maintenance (litter picking, weeding, tree care, eyesore removal) on the city's gateways—intersections and stretches of roadways that welcome people into the city or into distinct parts of the city.

### GATEWAYS INCLUDED:

- ✓ JFK Blvd. (Rte. 18) from the I-95 offramp to the intersection of Cove St. and the following intersections: Elm St. \ Union St. \ Walnut St. \ Rivet St.
- ✓ Kempton St. and Rte. 140
- ✓ Rockdale Ave. \ Cove Rd. \ Orchard St. intersection
- ✓ Cove Rd. from Rockdale Ave. to West Rodney French Blvd. and intersection
- ✓ West Rodney French Blvd. and Brock Ave.
- ✓ Brock Ave. and Ruth St. (Public Safety Center)
- ✓ "Octopus" intersection (Rte. 6 \ Purchase St. \ Pleasant St. \ Hillman St.)
- ✓ New Bedford Fairhaven Bridge
- ✓ Coggeshall St. and Acushnet Ave.
- ✓ Coggeshall St. and 195 offramp (Exit 17 \ Market Basket)



## JFK Boulevard (Route 18)

Among all city gateways, JFK Blvd. is the most in need of a special level of attention. It is the most frequently used access road into our downtown, and the connector between two of our greatest assets—downtown and the beaches.

An example to which to aspire is the George Washington Memorial Parkway in the Washington, D.C. area. A limited access highway of similar proportion and function, the George Washington Parkway is spotless, free of excessive sign clutter and chain link fencing, and planted abundantly with striking specimen trees.

### A SECTION OF G.W.MEMORIAL PARKWAY



### A SECTION OF JFK BOULEVARD





## 05

# buildings & grounds

## Department of Facilities and Fleet Maintenance

The City owns, and manages, some 90 public buildings (not including schools) and must model for the private sector a high level of care and maintenance. With the institution of an annual Capital Improvement Program in 2014, we are now on a path to ensuring our public buildings themselves are in a basic state of good repair, are aesthetically appealing, and, where applicable, adhere to high standards of historic architectural appropriateness.

The premier example of the application of these standards is the ongoing renovation of City Hall. Great care has been taken over the last five years to remove unsightly and cluttering elements from public view inside and out, to restore the exterior (brick repointing, brownstone restoration, door and window replacement, painting, etc.) and many interior spaces to the highest standard of aesthetic appeal and historical appropriateness, and to apply a professional standard of care to the building that is becoming of the City's seat of municipal government.



Of equal importance are the public spaces surrounding our public buildings, the standard for which has been set by improvements to the grounds of City Hall and the Main Library. The installation of irrigation systems and robust perennial and annual planting schemes have brought these buildings up to a high level of beauty and lushness, and the custodial staff takes great care to ensure this condition persists.

### RECENT EXAMPLES OF GOOD DESIGN AND EXECUTION INCLUDE:



Elm Street Garage



Sister Avelar Building



South Public Safety Center



Phase 1 Hillman Street Complex  
Rehabilitation



Buttonwood Community Center  
Renovations

While the “showcase” standard applied to our flagship buildings (like City Hall and the Main Library) may not necessarily be realistic for all City facilities, the appearance of all our public buildings should proudly reflect the important work that goes on in them. When City buildings are built or renovated, we should strive to achieve an appearance in which our residents can take pride.



## 06

# general design principles for enhancement of the public realm

### Departments of Planning, Public Infrastructure, & Parks, Recreation, and Beaches

To demonstrate a high level of intention in the public realm requires attention to detail and thoughtfulness in the design and execution of enhancements such as planting beds, above-ground planters, trees, public art, lighting, wayfinding signage and identifying signage.



THE FOLLOWING ARE EXAMPLES OF HIGH-QUALITY EXECUTION  
WITHIN OUR OWN CITY:



City Hall



Main Library



Wings Court



Jack Markey Plaza



Covewalk Entrance



Custom House Square



Entrance to Ashley Park



Front St. Pumping Station



Elm Street and JFK Boulevard





## 07

# resident responsibility

Mayor's Neighborhood Quality Task Force, Department of Facilities & Fleet Management, Department of Health, Department of Inspectional Services

The City, of course, cannot do it alone. To become the cleanest center city in New England, everyone in New Bedford must do their part. While the City cannot regulate good taste or cleanliness to the standards it applies to public property, the existing ordinances set a minimum level of responsibility on the part of the owners, which should be fully enforced. As outlined in various sections of New Bedford's Municipal Code of Ordinances (6, 12, 16, 22), property owners are required to contribute to the care and maintenance of the public right of way adjacent to their properties. For example, they are obligated to remove snow and ice; to keep sidewalks and gutters free of litter, weeds, and debris; and to mow grass sidewalk ribbons.

There may be situations in which there is a question about where the responsibility lies to correct a problem with the property owner or with the City. These questions can be answered by applying the "what if it was on my street?" standard. In other words, whom would you reasonably expect to be responsible to cure the problem if it was on your street, or in front of your house?

One example is gutter weeds. Many property owners may not be aware that they are responsible for the right of way in front of their properties up to, and including, the gutter,



and believe it is the City's responsibility. Not only is it explicitly spelled out in ordinance that property owners are responsible, but it is also unreasonable to expect that the City workforce would ever have the necessary resources to remove litter and weeds from every inch of sidewalk and gutter in our nearly 300 miles of roadway. Thus, the ordinance reinforces common sense and the principle of "many hands make light work". Of course, this does not obviate the need for street sweeping, but the primary purpose of that activity is not litter or weed control, but rather grit removal for better stormwater management.

On the other hand, consider debris in storm drains. Is it reasonable to expect an owner whose property happens to be on a corner lot to clean out storm drains as a matter of routine? Probably not. And while it may be prudent to do some outreach to encourage residents and property owners to lend a hand (particularly in potential emergency situations), the primary responsibility for this function should lie with the City.

Over the years, enforcement of some of these provisions has been inconsistent and sometimes non-existent, and there are understandable concerns about being "heavy-handed" with residents and business owners in imposing fines for minor infractions. This is particularly true if the City is not living up to its own obligations for property care and maintenance. It is critical that the City strive for consistency in its maintenance of the public spaces under our care.

### COMMON ISSUES FOR ENFORCEMENT:



Excessive amounts of litter  
in a private parking lot



Excessive overgrowth



Parking on sidewalks not only  
damages concrete and street trees  
but is also a public safety hazard



Private property overgrowth in  
public right of way



Blighted private properties



Open and overflowing dumpsters,  
causing litter to spread throughout  
neighborhoods







## conclusion

City government, residents, and business and property owners can work together to leverage private initiative as a duty of citizenship.

Where such initiative manifests itself in organizations like Operation Clean Sweep; the Friends of Buttonwood, Hazelwood, and Brooklawn parks; Out on a Limb; and Groundwork South Coast, the City must do its part to support and facilitate their work by consistently doing those things for which it is responsible and going above and beyond when it's necessary to achieve a specific objective.

With City government and its civic partners engaged in mutually reinforcing actions that demonstrate to each other and to the broader citizenry that we are committed to a high standard of appearance for New Bedford, our goal of becoming the cleanest center city in New England is well within reach.

