Guidelines to Avoid Conflicts Between Street Trees and Critical Street Signs

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CITY OF SPOKANE

Acknowledgements

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Overview

These guidelines were written to be a resource for City staff. They are the result of a collaborative effort between department directors and staff that began at the direction of the Mayor in response to recommendations of the Urban Forestry Citizen Advisory Committee. They are intended to help avoid potentially costly conflicts between street trees and other street infrastructure while recognizing that street trees are a necessary feature of a livable city environment. A healthy canopy of street trees provides countless benefits to neighborhoods and business districts. Besides beauty, studies indicate that street trees can result in added property value to adjacent homes and businesses, increased spending in business districts, safer and more pleasant walking environments, modified urban air temperatures (which can result in lower energy bills), reductions in stormwater runoff, reductions in airborne pollutants, and auto traffic calming. In addition, tree lawns allow for winter snow storage.

For many reasons, the preferred location for a street tree is between the curb and sidewalk. Therefore, the Spokane Municipal Code requires that street trees be in this location except in very limited circumstances. Other policies that must be considered when placing street trees and signage in the right of way include the following:

-SMC 17C.200.050 Street Tree Requirements
-City of Spokane Engineering Design Standards, approved by City Council, 2007
-Arboricultural Standards and Specifications, reference SMC 12.02.932
-Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD)

Contents

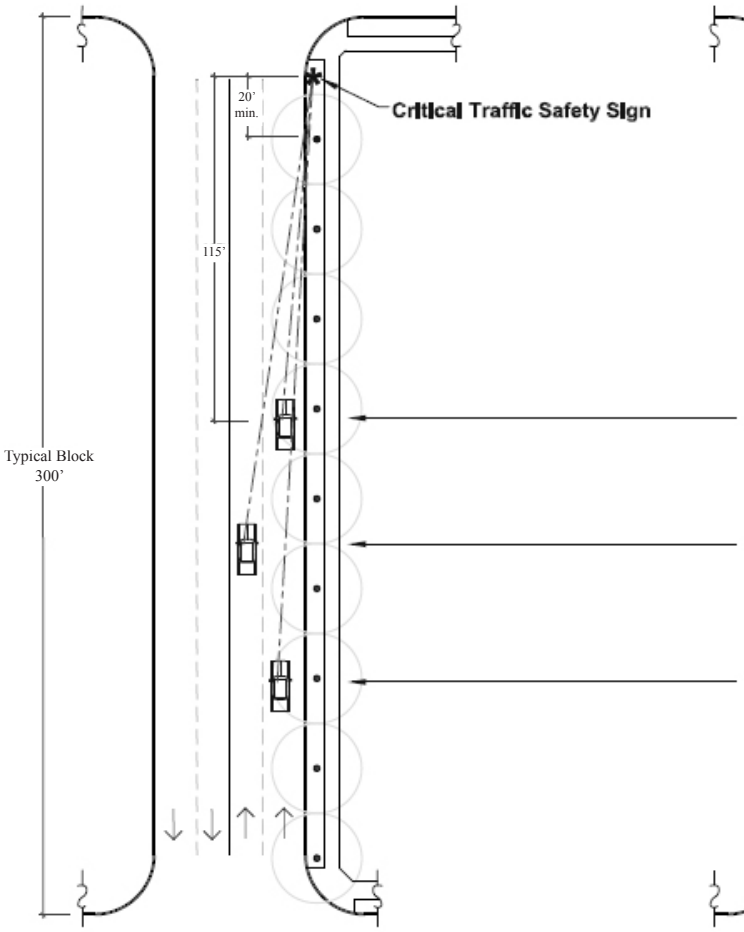
1. Guidelines for planting new street trees to avoid conflicts with street signage.

Key Points

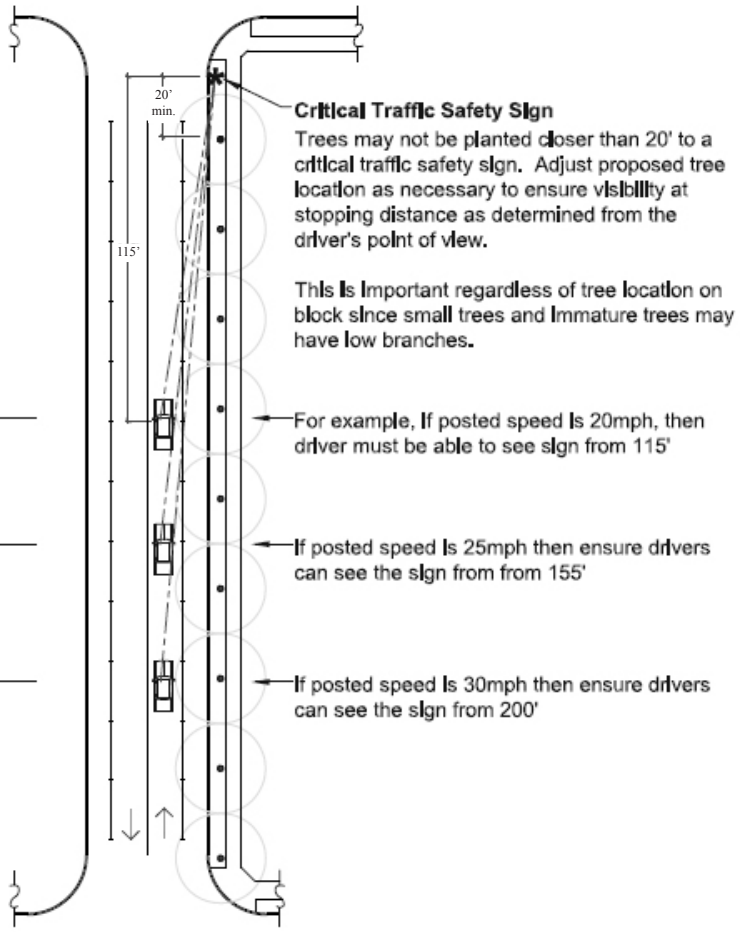
A. All existing and proposed signage *and* trees must be shown on the same plans submitted for permit review. In addition, show underground and overhead utilities.

B. Street trees may not block street signage from automobile drivers. All street signage (which can include regulatory, warning, no parking, transit and other city installed signs) shall be clearly visible.

C. Street trees may not be closer than twenty (20) feet in front of a "critical traffic safety sign" or fifteen (15) feet from a street sign. However, in order to meet code requirements for street trees, the first street tree also may not be any further from the sign than is necessary to maintain visibility.



Example 1
Two-Way Street with Two Drive Lanes
No Parking Lane.



Example 2
Two-Way Street with Parking Lane.

D. Verify visibility for all signs, and at stopping distance to critical traffic safety signs before planting a tree. Because visibility may be affected by individual site conditions, project applicants must verify with Engineering Services that proposed trees will not obstruct signs from the perspective of a typical driver.

Stopping Distance for Critical Traffic Safety Signs

Posted Speed Limit (mph)	Stopping Distance (feet)
15	80
20	115
25	155
30	200
35	250
40	305
45	360

E. Use one or a combination of the following tree planting measures as necessary to ensure critical sign visibility:

i. Tree selection for high branching individuals - 7' to 8' clear.

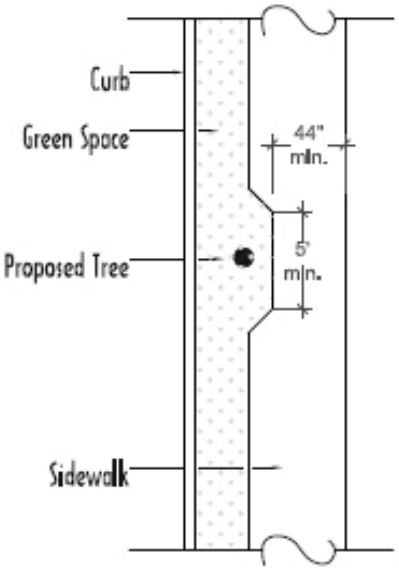
ii. Plant 3" caliper or larger trees.

iv. Rotate branches for best visibility and pedestrian passage.

iii. If necessary, maximize the trunk distance from the curb up to a min. of 1'-6" from the sidewalk (2' is the typical minimum distance from the sidewalk);

v. Selective pruning by a qualified arborist may be necessary at the time of planting or as determined by the Urban Forester.

vi. Sidewalk cutout (see example). If necessary when replacing trees between the curb and an existing sidewalk, it may be possible to cut a "notch" in the sidewalk in order to expand the planting strip/green space/trunk distance form the curb to the extent possible while maintaining a min. 44" wide walkway. Contact Engineering Services for information on locating sidewalk cuts.



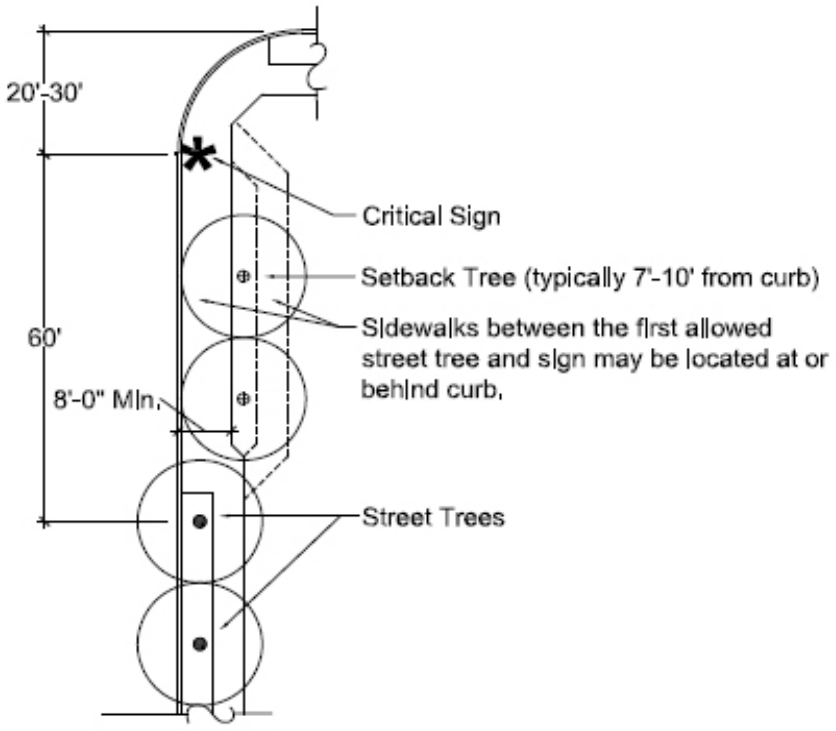
Example of Sidewalk Cutout

If the above options have been exhausted and it is not possible to plant a street tree without obstructing a sign then the following steps may also be considered:

vii. Staff may re-assess the need for the sign and/or explore opportunities for temporary signing and striping.

If applicable please also refer to the *Guidelines for Infilling Street Trees in Existing Narrow Planting Strips in Spokane's Residential Areas*.

F. When to use "setback trees" instead of "street trees." For projects subject to full code compliance, it may occasionally be necessary to plant trees behind the sidewalk in order to maintain critical traffic sign visibility and address Section 17C.200.050 Street Tree Requirements. In this instance, the sidewalk in front of a critical traffic safety sign may be maintained or replaced immediately next to the curb at a minimum 8'-0" width as shown in the examples below. Setback trees are further described under "definitions." Setback trees are allowed only after all options listed above have been exhausted because many important benefits associated with street trees would be lost with this configuration.



Example Using Setback Trees

In this hypothetical example of a project subject to full code compliance, the first street tree could not be planted closer than 60' to the critical traffic safety sign and still maintain visibility. Therefore, to meet code and maintain continous tree spacing, new sidewalk is installed next to the curb (sidewalk next to curb must be at least eight (8) feet wide) and setback trees are placed behind the sidewalk.

Alternatively, trees could be set back far enough from the curb to ensure visibility and a sidewalk placed behind the trees.

Definitions

Critical Traffic Safety Sign - examples include but are not limited to stop, yield, regulatory and warning signs.

Street Tree - a typical street tree located between curb and the walking path of the sidewalk as required by code.

Setback Tree - trees set seven (7') to ten feet (10') from the face of curb and located behind the sidewalk if necessary to address code requirements for street trees when the preferred location between curb and sidewalk would interfere with sign visibility. Setback trees are required as necessary to maintain continuous spacing between the sign and the first street tree. Setback trees must be at least two feet (2') from a sidewalk, and shall not obstruct a sign.

2. The order of priority when there is a conflict between an existing tree and street sign.

1 - Urban Forester will be called to assess the tree's condition and prune.
2 - Sign options and placement will be reviewed including re-assessment of the need for the sign.
3 - Remove and replace tree.

3. Guidelines for placing new signs near existing or proposed street trees.

Staff will collaborate with other departments as necessary to reach a solution that addresses all applicable policies.