CITY OF PORT WASHINGTON | ENGINEERING/ DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS
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Port Washington Street Design Standards

Background

Circa 1960, Port Washington, like many cities, set a new practice of constructing streets that were wider than what had been built prior to that time. The "new" design standard allowed 2 cars to pass one another when cars are parked on both sides of the street. In residential neighborhoods which have garages and low volumes of traffic, this is an extremely rare occurrence. The result was overdesigned streets which cost more to build, encouraged higher speeds, made neighborhoods less pedestrian friendly, increased stormwater run-off, and negatively affected the urban tree canopy that once graced our neighborhoods. In 1999, the Common Council approved a resolution requiring more traditional residential street design, and since then, new subdivisions and newly re-constructed streets have followed these guidelines. In 2015, the policy was modified to better align the City's standards for street width with WisDOT guidelines for road classification, AASHTO (American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials) design standards, and current best practices for street design.

There are 4 street classifications: arterial, collector, local, and cul-de-sac. The general definitions are:
Arterial (42' – 48' wide) ≥ 6,000 vpd (vehicles per day).
Collector (36' – 42'wide) ≥3,000 vpd
Local (28' - 32' wide) ≤ 3,000 vpd
Cul de Sac (28' wide street and 30'radius for circle)
Note: Pavement widths may be reduced when seasonal or permanent parking restrictions are imposed.

Why do we want to go back to the "old" way of constructing streets? Because streets should be designed for their context, ie, traffic volume, parking requirements, and overall function. Traditionally designed streets:

- **Cost less to build and maintain.** Lower initial construction cost. Less crack-filling and pothole patching. Less plowing and salting. Lower resurfacing costs.
- **Are safer**. Traditional streets cause traffic slow down and drive more cautiously, resulting in fewer accidents of lower severity.
- **Are more pedestrian friendly.** Traditional streets have shorter crosswalks which make it easier for pedestrians to cross. Lower speeds favor pedestrian safety and therefore promote walkability. Wider parkways create a greater safe zone for pedestrians (especially children) on sidewalks.

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- **Provide greater snow storage.** Wider parkways allow more room for snow plows to store snow in winter, keeping it off of sidewalks and out of the street.
- **Allow more accessible driveway aprons**. Wider terraces create flatter driveway aprons. Narrow terraces create steeper driveway approaches.
- **Are better for the environment**. Less impervious surface means less stormwater run-off and improved water quality.
- **Improves viability of street trees.** Tree lined streets are proven to increase property values and improve the aesthetics of a neighborhood, decrease cooling costs, soak up additional stormwater by both the root system and the canopy, and even provide psychological benefits. Wider parkways encourage mature tree growth and decrease the root conflicts with pavement.
- **Is consistent with current best practices**. In addition to numerous studies documenting the reasons for traditional street design as stated above, modern developers are requesting narrower street pavement because that is what buyers prefer.
- **Higher property values.** Traditionally designed streets encourage slower speeds, promote a mature tree canopy, and provide larger front lawns which are preferred by home shoppers and increase property values. Lower costs for street construction allows tax dollars to go further toward reconstructing more streets and further increasing curb appeal and home value.

Sidewalks

Chapter 18 of the Municipal Code requires that sidewalks be constructed on both sides of all streets in all new subdivisions. Some City subdivisions constructed prior to the writing of this section of the code lack sidewalks in various locations and create an incomplete pedestrian grid. When streets are reconstructed, these gaps in the pedestrian network are filled wherever possible. Filling these gaps creates a safer, more walkable community and creates equity within and among neighborhoods.