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# Technical Criteria for Landscape Plans

**DRAFT**

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## PURPOSE

This document outlines landscape design standards and minimum requirements for Landscape Plan submissions.

The Niagara Escarpment Plan (NEP) [[1]](#footnote-1) provides for the development of guidance material and technical criteria to assist the Niagara Escarpment Commission (NEC) with implementing the policies of the Plan. These documents are intended to support but not add to or detract from the policies of the Plan[[2]](#footnote-2).

This version of the Technical Criteria for Landscape Plans was approved by the Niagara Escarpment Commission on DATE, YEAR. The NEC will, from time to time, update the Technical Criteria for Landscape Plans to reflect current technology, provide clarification, or refine the processes. The revision date will be noted at the beginning of the document and the most current version will be available for download from the NEC website at [www.escarpment.org](http://www.escarpment.org).

## BACKGROUND

A Landscape Plan is a technical drawing that presents detailed information on proposed landscaping relevant to a development proposal. A Landscape Plan is intended to:

* Demonstrate conformity to NEP policies that protect natural heritage and scenery
* Meet the requirements of any applicable municipal by-laws or other agencies’ policies (e.g., conservation authorities)
* Implement recommendations of related studies such as a natural heritage evaluation or environmental impact study (EIS), visual impact assessment (VIA), vegetation protection plan (VPP)

The NEP and the Niagara Escarpment Planning and Development Act (NEPDA)[[3]](#footnote-3) call for the protection of natural heritage features and functions, and the conservation of landform and scenic resources. Further policy context is provided in Appendix A.

Where it has been determined that landscaping is required for mitigating visual or environmental impacts or for enhancing the natural environment, the NEC, as the implementing authority of the NEP, may require a Landscape Plan for applications such as:

* NEC Development Permit Applications - the Landscape Plan may be required prior to NEC decision on an application or as a Condition of Approval to be completed for the issuance of a permit, depending on the scale and impacts of the proposed development.
* Niagara Escarpment Plan Amendments
* Niagara Parks and Open Space System (NEPOSS) Master Plans
* Municipal approvals under the *Planning Act* or other processes (e.g., environmental assessments)
* Other applications under provincial or federal legislation (e.g., telecommunications tower) where the NEC is a commenting agency

## EXPERTISE

A Landscape Plan shall be completed by a qualified professional with expertise in landscape planning and planting design. Qualified professionals include Landscape Architects (OALA), landscape designers, and Ecologists. Applicants are advised to select a professional with expertise appropriate to the scope of work.

## SCOPE OF WORK

Landscaping may be required for the purposes of:

* Visual impact mitigation (e.g., screen planting)
* Environmental impact mitigation or enhancement of the natural environment (e.g., edge management, ecological restoration or rehabilitation of disturbed areas, slope/bank stabilization, reforestation)

A Landscape Plan may be required to satisfy a Condition of the Development Permit. In this situation, the scope of the Landscape Plan shall be consistent with the terms and conditions of the permit. In other cases, a Landscape Plan may be requested earlier in the application process as a component of or subsequent to other technical studies such as a natural heritage evaluation or environmental impact study (EIS), visual impact assessment (VIA), vegetation protection plan (VPP). In these situations, the Landscape Plan shall be consistent with study recommendations regarding impact mitigation. Where a municipality or conservation authority has identified specific landscaping objectives, the Landscape Plan shall also address these requirements.

Consultation with NEC staff is encouraged prior to undertaking a Landscape Plan. The level of detail required on a Landscape Plan varies from basic to complex depending on the extent of the proposed development and objectives for the landscaping. For most applications, a basic Landscape Plan that includes planting layout and a plant list will suffice. In some cases, this information may be indicated on the final Site Plan.

For more complex applications, the Landscape Plan may require a series of detailed landscape construction drawings including specifications for site preparation, erosion and sediment control, vegetation protection, invasive species management, construction staging, planting, surfacing, lighting, furnishings, fencing, retaining walls, decks, lookouts, pools, tennis courts, signage, and monitoring and management plans.

## 5.0 LANDSCAPE DESIGN STANDARDS

This section outlines minimum standards that apply to proposed landscaping works. Applicants are encouraged to consult with NEC staff prior to submitting a Landscape Plan to ensure that the appropriate standards are applied.

* All proposed tree and shrub species shall be native to Ontario and representative of natural plant associations and plant community structure, subject to plant hardiness and availability, and resistant to pests.
* All trees and shrubs shall be nursery grown and meet the current standards set out by the Canadian Nursery Landscape Association: Canadian Standards for Nursery Stock. Field or bush dug material will not be accepted.
* Planting proposed for visual screening purposes is subject to direction by NEC staff and should be informed by the findings of a visual impact assessment (VIA), where applicable. Unless otherwise directed, plant selection shall include large trees, sized and spaced as follows:
  + Large deciduous trees: caliper size of 50 mm min., spaced 5 m on-centre
  + Tall coniferous trees: height of 1800mm min., spaced 3 m on-centre
* All other planting is subject to site conditions and restoration, rehabilitation, or reforestation objectives as outlined by technical studies, agency requirements, or restoration orders, where applicable. Unless otherwise directed, planting approaches may include clustering whips at 1.2-1.8 m apart within planting nodes that are less than 6 m apart or scattering trees at 2.5-3.0 m apart. Shrubs may be planted at 0.75-1.5 m apart.
* For the purposes of rehabilitation, areas between woody plantings shall be seeded and stabilized with native groundcover.
* All seed mixes should be locally native and well-suited for site conditions. Seeding of cover crops is encouraged where soil stabilization is required. Allelopathic or invasive cover crops will not be accepted in or adjacent to environmentally sensitive areas.
* Impervious surfaces (e.g., asphalt, concrete) can increase the volume and speed of stormwater runoff and limit natural infiltration. The use of impervious surfaces should be minimized, wherever possible.
* Exterior lighting on structures and other outdoor lighting should be downward-directed and shielded. Outdoor lighting that is improperly shielded allows light to shine into the eyes (glare), the night sky (skyglow), and into surrounding natural areas (light spill or trespass) resulting in a negative impact on the Escarpment’s scenic resources and natural environment. Professional expertise in lighting design may be required for more complex applications.

## 6.0 SUBMISSION FORMAT

The submission format will vary based on the complexity of the proposed works. Applicants are encouraged to consult with NEC staff prior to submitting a Landscape Plan to ensure that sufficient information is provided.

Unless otherwise directed by NEC staff, the Landscape Plan shall include, but not be limited to, the following:

* Title block with the following drawing information:
  + Written scale (i.e., 1:200) and bar scale
  + North arrow
  + Dates of the original drawing and any subsequent revisions
  + Project name, location and key map
  + Professional/company name, contact information, and qualifications
  + Comprehensive legend
* Proposed planting overlaid on a detailed Site Plan, labelled with species and quantities
* Plant list indicating the following information for each species proposed:
  + Botanical and common name
  + Quantity
  + Size (e.g., caliper of deciduous trees, height of coniferous trees, height or pot size of shrubs)
  + Condition (e.g., pot, balled and burlapped, wire basket, tree spade, bare root)
* Planting notes and details to specify correct planting installation; season, duration, and timing of proposed works; maintenance; replacement of dead or diseased plant material, and warranty – in some cases, a plan for monitoring and management may be required
* Seeding notes and details including seeding area, species, nurse crop, distribution method, application rate, and site preparation
* Layout, notes, and details may also be required for vegetation protection and erosion control measures, construction staging, lighting and furnishings, hard surfaces and retaining walls, fences and other landscape structures, and/or signage

A digital submission is acceptable provided that the drawing is legible when printed and/or viewed on a computer screen. A hard copy submission may be requested for review, particularly in the case of large format drawings or large drawing sets.

## 7.0 REVIEW AND APPROVAL PROCESS

An incomplete submission may delay review or decision on an application. Revisions and resubmission may be required to ensure that the appropriate criteria have been met. Other agencies may be copied on the submission where a coordinated review is required.

The approved Landscape Plan becomes part of the final Development Permit or other approval. All work shall be installed as specified including replacement of plant material, certification of completed works by a qualified professional, and NEC notification. Unless otherwise specified, planting and rehabilitation of all disturbed areas shall be completed by the end of the first growing season following the completion of site servicing, grading, and building construction; and all plant material shall be guaranteed for a minimum of 24 months following installation. Failure to implement a Landscape Plan in accordance with the Development Permit is a Provincial offence and could result in fines and/or prosecution.

## 8.0 TERMINOLOGY

**Caliper:** The diameter of nursery-grown trees in accordance with the Canadian Standards for Nursery Stock. Trees less than 100mm are measured at 15 cm above grade; trees more than 100mm are measured at 30 cm above grade.

**Development Envelope:** The total area required to complete all of the proposed works including tree removal, construction staging and access routes, building, site alteration, and servicing.

**Invasive Plant Species**: Harmful, non-native trees, shrubs, and herbaceous plants that invade natural ecosystems and pose a threat to native vegetation and wildlife. Resources are available through the Ontario Invasive Plant Council at [www.ontarioinvasiveplants.ca](http://www.ontarioinvasiveplants.ca), the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry at [www.ontario.ca/page/invasive-species-ontario](http://www.ontario.ca/page/invasive-species-ontario) and through local conservation authorities.

**Native Plant:** A plant that existed in an area for millenia and evolved in the presence of native soils and climate, forming part of a naturally-occurring plant community. Resources may be available through local conservation authorities.

**Site Plan:** A scaled drawing showing the existing conditions and proposed development overlaid on a survey plan or a recent air photo including property boundary, development envelope/limit of work, vegetation, structures, driveways, utilities, septic system, well, vegetation protection and erosion control measures.

## APPENDIX A: POLICY CONTEXT

### Provincial Policy Statement (PPS)

The PPS (2020) directs that natural features and areas shall be protected for the long term, and that the long-term ecological function and biodiversity of the natural heritage systems should be maintained. Part 2.1 identifies that development and site alterations shall not be permitted in significant woodlands, wetlands, valleylands, wildlife habitat or Provincially Significant Areas of Natural and Scientific Interest (ANSIs), and adjacent lands, unless it has been demonstrated that there will be no negative impacts on the natural features or their ecological functions.

### Niagara Escarpment Planning and Development Act (NEPDA)

The need to minimize or avoid impact of development is inherent in the NEPDA, including in the Act’s purpose (section 2) of providing for the maintenance of the Niagara Escarpment and land in its vicinity substantially as a continuous natural environment and ensuring compatible development; and in the Objectives (section 8 – which are also the objectives of the NEP), specifically those related to protection of unique ecologic areas (8.a); maintaining and enhancing natural streams and water supplies (8.b); and maintaining and enhancing the open landscape character through compatible farming, forestry and by preserving natural scenery (8.d).

### Niagara Escarpment Plan (NEP)

In addition to the Plan Purpose and Objectives, the land use designations and permitted uses contained in Part 1 of the NEP identify the types of development that may be permitted. The Development Criteria contained in Part 2 of the NEP set out how development should be implemented. Part 2.13 contains policies to ensure that planning, design and construction practices protect landforms and are compatible with natural scenery and the open landscape character. These Development Criteria also deal with new planting of native species for screening, grading, use of excavated materials on site, the need to minimize contour changes and providing a proper grading/drainage plan where necessary to address proposed grading and use of fill material.

Many other Development Criteria deal with matters that could be included within the scope of a Landscape Plan including: protection of natural heritage features; minimizing impact and disturbance; providing for site stabilization (during and after construction); and, establishment/maintenance of buffers and setbacks which may be required to protect natural features.

1. Niagara Escarpment Plan (2017); Ontario; Order in Council No. 1026/2017; Office Consolidation December 21, 2018. Available for download at [www.escarpment.org](http://www.escarpment.org). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ibid, page 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Niagara Escarpment Planning and Development Act; R.S.O. 1990, c. N.2. Available for download at [www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/90n02](http://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/90n02). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)