

**ACTON MUNICIPAL PROPERTIES  
AND NATURAL RESOURCES DEPARTMENTS**

**INTERDEPARTMENTAL COMMUNICATION**

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**To:** Don Johnson, Town Manager **Date:** July 31, 2001  
**From:** Dean Charter and Tom Tidman *(DTC)* *(T)*  
**Subject:** Brookside Shops ~ Revised Landscaping Review

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Pursuant to your request we have revisited the site of the proposed Brookside Shops and reviewed the submitted landscape plan that was revised 6/25/01. The 6/25/01 revisions were made by the developer's engineer in an attempt to comply with the draft agreement that required providing screening between Building A and the abutting neighbors. Those revisions were done in a cooperative fashion between the developer's engineer, Mr. Tidman and Mr. Charter.

During the design review the following issues were taken into consideration:

1. At present there exists a dense deciduous tree stand approximately 130' wide that runs between the intermittent stream crossing Esterbrook Road and the nearest abutter at 29 Esterbrook Road. This wooded area consists of an impenetrable understory of Viburnum, Honeysuckle, Elderberry and Sumac that is approximately eight feet in height. There is an additional overstory of Swamp White Oak, Red Maple, Silver Maple, Elm and Black Walnut that is up to 50' in height. This existing wooded buffer is within the wetlands and wetlands buffer area and will not be disturbed by the development. This existing buffer, in and of itself, provides an extensive buffer area between the abutter and the proposed shopping center.
2. The Conservation Commission has required that a split rail fence be installed to delineate the no-build setback between the shopping center and the wetland. This fence is strictly for delineation and protection of the buffer area and is not intended as a screening feature. The intent of the fence is to allow the area between the fence and wetlands to be completely naturalized.
3. The revised landscape plan shows extensive use of Norway Spruce. This is a fast growing conifer with an ultimate height of 150 feet. The trees at planting will be seven feet tall and approximately four feet wide. The landscape buffer close to Esterbrook Road consists of Norway Spruce planted in a staggered row 20 feet on center. In the location of the stone lined infiltration basin the spacing in the buffer has been increased to 40 foot intervals of Norway Spruce interspersed with Clump Shadbush six to seven feet in height and Clump River Birch eight to ten feet in height. In the area directly behind Building A, the River Birch and Spruce are planted ten feet on center. It is our opinion that this interspersed deciduous and coniferous planting provides screening for the building and a naturalized appearance that is consistent with the existing undisturbed buffer area.
4. The developer has proposed an additional screening area consisting of Arborvitae located between the stone lined infiltration basin and Building A, which should further screen the north end of Building A from the Esterbrook Road abutters.

5. We have noted that the Clump River Birch, which is shown on the plan, was planted in similar size last year at 16 feet on center in the parking lot island adjacent to the Memorial Library. It would be worth while looking at those trees for comparison purposes. There also is a large Norway Spruce planted between the two Arboretum parking areas that also could be inspected for comparison purposes.
6. If the Board of Selectmen so chooses, they could require further plan revision and dictate that a solid hedge be planted instead of the mixed buffer planting that has been proposed. However, a solid hedge would require frequent maintenance and trimming in order to assure that the lower branches don't die off due to shade. The design intent has been to provide a buffer that can be effective, aesthetically pleasing and more or less "self maintaining". It was our feeling that it would be best to minimize routine landscaping activities in this area, to limit impact upon the wetlands buffer. Moreover, it has never been the practice of the Town to mandate landscape maintenance standards for completed sites, due to the time requirements of periodic town inspections and the difficulty in enforcing landscape maintenance practices.
7. As noted above, it is not our recommendation that the developer be required to install a "hedge" in this location, due to the long term maintenance concerns. However, if the Board so chooses, I would submit the following options:
  - a. Arborvitae planted four feet on center, heights at time of planting to be six to seven feet. This will provide a very tight screen, but will have to be sheared annually, and will never be tall enough to obscure the roofline of Building A.
  - b. Norway Spruce planted ten feet on center, height at planting to be six to seven feet. Since the branch spread of these trees at planting will be about four feet, there will be six foot wide gaps. These trees will eventually grow up to block the roofline Building A, but will need to be pruned periodically or have every other tree removed at some point to keep the lower branches from dying out.
  - c. White Pine planted ten feet on center, height at planting to be six to seven feet. These trees will have to be maintained in a similar fashion as the Norway Spruce to prevent lower branch die-back.
  - d. Easter Red Cedar planted ten feet on center, height of planting to be six to seven feet. These will have a branch spread at planting of three feet, gaps at the time of planting will be about seven feet. Red Cedar will grow up to 30 feet and will obscure the roofline. These do not have to be sheered, but will need to be periodically maintained in order to be kept fully branched.

In summary, it is our feeling that the revised landscape plan as submitted will provide adequate naturally occurring and planted screening between Building A and the abutters. This combination of plantings will break up the site lines of the building and provide aesthetic beauty and wildlife habitat.