Acknowledgements:

Savannah Development and Renewal Authority
Downtown Neighborhood Association
Keep Savannah Beautiful, Inc.
Park and Tree Department

Produced by the Tourism and Film Services Department of the City of Savannah, March 2008

Savannah’s

Tree Lawns
creating a better environment
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Introduction

A great deal of the character and beauty of Savannah can be attributed to public landscaped open spaces and trees. While the squares, parks and medians, which are maintained by the City, are the primary elements of these landscaped open spaces, other important elements are tree lawns and tree wells found in public rights-of-way throughout the City of Savannah.

Although many tree lawns and tree wells are well kept and maintained by adjacent property owners, there are many that are not. Many are barren of vegetation and some have been paved over and used for parking. However, a well-maintained tree lawn or tree well brings beautiful trees and vegetation to the district, improves air quality, helps prevent flooding, improves pedestrian access and helps soften the urban environment. For these reasons, it is important to the entire community that they are used in an appropriate manner.

Property owners, residential and commercial, are better positioned to care for, improve and maintain these areas on a regular basis. For this reason, the City of Savannah encourages and supports property owners to make improvements to these areas bordering their property consistent with City requirements, and to provide an adequate level of care for these areas.

This brochure will provide city residents and commercial businesses with information concerning improvement and maintenance of tree lawns and tree wells adjacent to their property.
What is a Tree Lawn?

The most common green space element in Savannah is the tree lawn. A tree lawn, found in both residential and commercial areas, is usually defined as a linear space between the curb and sidewalks for planting trees, flowers and other landscaping elements. Because they are set aside for landscaping, tree lawns should not be used for sculptures, art work or parking.

What is a Tree Well?

A tree well is an opening in the sidewalk for tree planting, usually smaller than a tree lawn and associated more with commercial buildings.

Located within the tree lawn and well are the feeder and critical root zones for the trees in the immediate area. Due to the limited rooting space, the City of Savannah Park and Tree Department recommends that no major root disturbance occur within this area.
Who is responsible for Tree Lawns?

Although tree lawns and tree wells are within the City’s rights-of-way, individual property owners are responsible for providing maintenance or improvements. The City performs basic maintenance and other right-of-way improvements when necessary for the public’s safety and welfare.

Residential and commercial property owners are better positioned than the City to monitor the conditions and needs of these areas on a daily basis. For this reason, the City requests that residents and businesses provide the necessary maintenance and improvements required to keep these areas neat and attractive.

There are numerous benefits to a well-maintained tree lawn. Not only will the lawn improve the appearance of the street, but it can also increase a property’s market value, enhance civic pride and introduce an element of scenic and plant diversity into a neighborhood. City beautification not only improves the quality of life for those living within the neighborhood but also enhances the neighborhood’s appeal to visitors as well.

Please keep in mind the City of Savannah reserves the right to remove any plant material that was installed without a permit or poses a threat to public health, safety or welfare.

What About Renters?

Not every property within Savannah is owner occupied. In cases where the owner rents the property to others, the tree lawn or tree well remains the responsibility of the owner. In this case, arrangements or incentives can be made between the owner and the renter to maintain the green space in front of the property.

Since attractive and well-maintained tree lawns benefit the renter, the owner and the community as a whole, it is imperative that the responsibility for the tree lawn be assigned. Regardless of the situation, tree lawns of rental properties are expected to have the same level of maintenance and care as those of owner-occupied buildings.

The City of Savannah strongly recommends that renters obtain permission from the property owner, property manager or landlord before planning a tree lawn project since the project becomes the responsibility of the owner once the renter has moved on.

A Checklist for your Project

- Contact both Utility Line locating Services
- Survey Neighborhood
- Allow for Correct Amount of Walkway
- Observe Soil, Sun Exposure and Obstructions
- Consider Type of Project

  TREE PLANTING
  - Contact the Park and Tree Department

  FLOWERS
  - Use of Perennials
  - Refrain from Cutting Any Tree Roots Over 3/4” Wide

  SHRUBS
  - Use Low Growing Varieties
  - Keep Away from Trees and Intersections
  - Leave Space Between Plants

- Draw Plans
- Submit Plans to Park and Tree
- Obtain Right-Of-Way Permit from Traffic Engineering
**Implementing a Tree Lawn Project**

*Call Utility Line Locate*
Before one implements a tree lawn project, a utility line locate must be requested. The agencies normally respond to location requests within five working days. Utility lines are marked by the placement of small flags along the path of the line.

Private Utility Dig Line: 1-800-282-7411
Public Utility Dig Line: 651-6565

*Plans*
Before renovating or landscaping a tree lawn, property owners must submit plans to Park and Tree Department at 2500 Bull Street. Plans should consist of a scaled drawing done by either the property owner, tenant or someone with an understanding of landscape design, i.e., landscape architect. The drawing should depict the approximate size of the area, existing trees or other features and proposed improvements.

*Irrigation System*
A source for water in the tree lawn needs to be considered. While some areas allow for an irrigation system, others do not. Please consult the Park and Tree Department to discuss the best option for your project. If an irrigation system is the best option for your project, then you must have an approved backflow prevention device installed by a licensed plumber. Irrigation plans should be included with the drawing and attached to your application for a City right-of-way permit.

*Right-of-Way Permit*
By City Code, all persons, contractors, utilities and other agencies must obtain a right-of-way (ROW) permit from the Traffic Engineering Department to perform work in the City’s ROW. Application for the permit should be made with the Traffic Engineering Department located in the City Lot at the corner of Gwinnett and Stiles Avenue. One may also print a copy of the Right-of-Way application from the “Services” page of the City of Savannah’s website at:

[www.savannahga.gov](http://www.savannahga.gov)

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**Improving a Tree Lawn or Well**

Most improvements to a tree lawn or tree well come simply from daily or weekly maintenance. As mentioned in the previous section, those individuals, residential and commercial, immediately adjacent to the area are better postured to provide a level of care and attention. A neglected tree lawn or tree well is simply a blight to the area, neighborhood and community.

Below are some small but significant enhancements that one can make to improve a tree lawn or tree well:

*Mulch*
Adding a two to three inch thick layer of pine bark nuggets can be an immediate and cost effective improvement. Contact the City’s Keep Savannah Beautiful at 651-6948 for information on obtaining mulch at no cost.

*Weeding*
Weeding the area once a week or even daily prevents the appearance of overgrowth.

*Litter Prevention*
While litter cannot be prevented, one can control its accumulation. Removing litter, debris and cigarette butts on a frequent basis from a tree lawn or tree well keeps the area clean and more attractive.

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Illustration by Mallory Pearce
Reclaiming a Tree Lawn

Unfortunately, many tree lawns have been paved over or otherwise lost through the years. In this instance, the owner may want to restore the tree lawn area. This section focuses on the tasks associated with reclaiming a tree lawn.

Survey Tree Lawns in the Neighborhood
A survey of tree lawns in the immediate area should yield the proper dimensions for the proposed reclamation. As Savannah is based on a symmetrical plan, the tree lawns on either side of the street should always be the same size.

Utility Line Location
In many areas of the City, primarily the Historic Districts, utility lines are buried in the tree lawn space. A request for “Location of underground utilities in the Tree Lawn” for your address must be made by placing two phone calls. All privately owned electrical, telephone and gas utilities can be found by calling 1-800-282-7411. All municipally owned utilities such as water and sewer can be found by calling 651-6565. The agencies normally respond to location requests within five working days and will mark any lines by placing small flags along the path of the line.

Sidewalk Closing Permit Required
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The next section of the brochure focuses on the planting project once a tree lawn has been successfully reclaimed.

Flowers and plants not recommended for use in any of the open spaces include but are not limited to:

- Roses
- Oleander
- Poison Ivy
- Yucca
- Pyracantha
- Pointsettia

Alternatives to Planting
Due to roots, tree well grates, etc., plantings in a tree lawn or tree well may not be feasible. Therefore, the City recognizes that the use of certain public amenities including benches and free standing planters may esthetically enhance the area and improve the quality of life for Savannah residents.

Guidelines have been established to ensure that the use of free standing planters and benches are consistent with the underlying dedication of the public right-of-way, do not impede travel or interfere with public safety or the rights of adjoining property owners. For more information please contact Tourism and Film Services Department at 651-2360.
Recommended Plant Materials

**Ground Cover For Full Sun**

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Planning Your Project

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The following information is provided for your convenience.

**Call Utility Line Locate**

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**Neighborhood Survey**

Established tree lawns surrounding the project area should be surveyed to determine existing plant and ground covering materials already present in the neighborhood. Other indigenous landscaping characteristics should also be considered. Materials should be used which are compatible and consistent with the neighborhood. One should contact their neighborhood association to inquire if there are any established guidelines for planting. Contact Community, Planning and Development’s Community Services at 651-6520 to obtain the name of your neighborhood association.

**Walkways**

Care should be taken to designate a narrow walkway in the tree lawn between the curb and sidewalk as a pedestrian cross over for passengers exiting parked automobiles. This space, which should occur approximately every 15 feet, may include prefabricated step pavers or natural materials such as pine bark.

**Factors Affecting Plant Selection**

Before determining what to plant in an open space, one needs to consider specific factors that will affect growth and survival. A list of appropriate planting materials can be found beginning on page 8 of this brochure.

**Soil Composition**

Soil types vary throughout the City of Savannah. When planning a project, it is important to find out if the existing soil in the tree lawn will support plant materials in its current state. Issues such as pH balance, lime, sand content and soil depth needs should all be evaluated to improve the chances for survival of the plant material envisioned. Poor soil can be improved with the addition of new soil and/or replacing the existing soil. Soil testing can be performed for a nominal charge by nurseries, landscaping contractors and the Chatham County Extension Services.
**Sun Exposure**

Tree lawns receive varying amounts of sunshine. Careful consideration should be given to light exposure throughout an entire day before evaluating species for possible planting. Species should be chosen that are compatible with the amount of sunlight the area receives.

**Obstructions**

Tree lawns should be free from obstructions that may hinder the growth of new plants. Any new plantings should be clear of all overhead utility lines and street signs and away from surrounding buildings and street intersections. Any corner lot should use low growing plant materials that will not obstruct the view of signs or vehicular traffic.

**Spacing**

The distance between individual trees or plants is very important and the amount of that spacing depends on the species of plant being used. A good rule of thumb is to allow the distance of the spread (or crown) of a mature plant between each planting. Since trees and plants will spread as they mature and grow, one should also be concerned that limbs or brush will not obstruct the streets and/or sidewalks and that these plants will not grow into adjacent buildings.

**Maintenance**

Different plant species require different levels of maintenance. When evaluating plant materials, one should be concerned with issues such as pruning and leaf litter as well as with watering and fertilizing needs.

### Choosing Plant Material

Tree lawns can be dramatically improved with the planting of flowers, shrubs or other ground covers. If there is no tree planted in the tree lawn, the property owner has tremendous discretion in the planting material. Where trees exist however special care is needed for planting underneath and around trees. This section will focus on correct techniques for planting in these sensitive areas.

**Trees**

Trees should not be planted in tree lawns or tree wells without approval of the Park and Tree Department. The Department has a master tree planting plan as well as a tree planting program for the City. Approval from the City prior to planting will ensure the trees meet the City’s standards. Property owners can request that trees be planted by the Department.

**Flowers**

Many people plant blooming flowers in the tree lawn area. There are many species that can be planted which will produce a variety of color and texture. It is recommended that perennials, such as daylilies or Liriope be used when planting under and around trees. Because perennials are only planted one time and can be installed in smaller segments, the damage to tree roots can be minimized. One should also make certain that no tree roots over 3/4” wide are cut to accommodate the installation of the flowers or plants. Any reputable nursery can also recommend a variety of species to plant.

**Shrubs**

It is strongly recommended that shrubs not be planted underneath or around a tree. The size of the holes necessary to plant shrubs will cause damage to the feeder and critical root systems, while the roots from shrubs will compete for space and water with the trees. This competition will ultimately prove detrimental to both. In areas without a tree, shrubs may be effectively used if kept under two feet in height and away from street intersections. One should allow enough space between shrubs so there is adequate room for growth.

**Ground Cover**

Many other low-growing plant materials may be used in the tree lawn area that require very little maintenance. Periwinkle, Asiatic Jasmine and English Ivy are just a few of the recommended varieties. Some plants should be avoided., Including plants with an unpleasant odor and those that are poisonous. Plants that require constant maintenance and those with thorns or spiny leaves are also not recommended. When establishing a planting, the area should not be over-planted. The initial planting may look skimpy at first. However, this minimal planting method will allow plenty of room for the materials to grow.

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Please keep in mind the City of Savannah reserves the right to remove any plant material that was installed without a permit or poses a threat to public health, safety or welfare.

**What About Renters?**

Not every property within Savannah is owner occupied. In cases where the owner rents the property to others, the tree lawn or tree well is still the responsibility of the owner. In this case, arrangements or incentives can be made between the owner and the renter to maintain the green space in front of the property.

Since attractive and well-maintained tree lawns benefit the renter, the owner and the community as a whole, it is imperative that the responsibility for the tree lawn be assigned. Regardless of the situation, tree lawns of rental properties are expected to have the same level of maintenance and care as those of owner-occupied buildings.

The City of Savannah strongly recommends that renters obtain permission from the property owner, property manager or landlord before planning a tree lawn project since the project becomes the responsibility of the owner once the renter has moved on.

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**A Checklist for your Project**

- Contact both Utility Line locating Services
- Survey Neighborhood
- Allow for Correct Amount of Walkway
- Observe Soil, Sun Exposure and Obstructions
- Consider Type of Project
- **TREE PLANTING**
  - Contact the Park and Tree Department
- **FLOWERS**
  - Use of Perennials
  - Refrain from Cutting Any Tree Roots Over 3/4” Wide
- **SHRUBS**
  - Use Low Growing Varieties
  - Keep Away from Trees and Intersections
  - Leave Space Between Plants
- Draw Plans
- Submit Plans to Park and Tree
- Obtain Right-Of-Way Permit from Traffic Engineering
What is a Tree Lawn?

The most common green space element in Savannah is the tree lawn. A tree lawn, found in both residential and commercial areas, is usually defined as a linear space between the curb and sidewalks for planting trees, flowers and other landscaping elements. Because they are set aside for landscaping, tree lawns should not be used for sculptures, art work or parking.

What is a Tree Well?

A tree well is an opening in the sidewalk for tree planting, usually smaller than a tree lawn and associated more with commercial buildings.

Located within the tree lawn and well are the feeder and critical root zones for the trees in the immediate area. Due to the limited rooting space, the City of Savannah Park and Tree Department recommends that no major root disturbance occur within this area.
**Introduction**

A great deal of the character and beauty of Savannah can be attributed to public landscaped open spaces and trees. While the squares, parks and medians, which are maintained by the City, are the primary elements of these landscaped open spaces, other important elements are tree lawns and tree wells found in public rights-of-way throughout the City of Savannah.

Although many tree lawns and tree wells are well kept and maintained by adjacent property owners, there are many that are not. Many are barren of vegetation and some have been paved over and used for parking. However, a well-maintained tree lawn or tree well brings beautiful trees and vegetation to the district, improves air quality, helps prevent flooding, improves pedestrian access and helps soften the urban environment. For these reasons, it is important to the entire community that they are used in an appropriate manner.

Property owners, residential and commercial, are better positioned to care for, improve and maintain these areas on a regular basis. For this reason, the City of Savannah encourages and supports property owners to make improvements to these areas bordering their property consistent with City requirements, and to provide an adequate level of care for these areas.

This brochure will provide city residents and commercial businesses with information concerning improvement and maintenance of tree lawns and tree wells adjacent to their property.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quick Reference Phone Numbers</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>PARK AND TREE DEPARTMENT</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>City Arborist</td>
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<tr>
<td>Landscape Architect</td>
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| **UTILITY LINES LOCATION**   |          |
| Private                      | 800-282-7411 |
| Public                       | 651-6565   |

| **CHATHAM COUNTY EXTENSION SERVICE** | 652-7981 |

| **METROPOLITAN PLANNING COMMISSION** | 651-1440 |
| Historic District Review Board      |          |

| **TRAFFIC ENGINEERING DEPARTMENT** | 651-6600 |

| **COMMUNITY, PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT’S** | 651-6520 |
| Community Services                   |          |

| **KEEP SAVANNAH BEAUTIFUL, INC.**    | 651-6948 |

| **SAVANNAH DEVELOPMENT AND RENEWAL AUTHORITY** | 651-6973 |

| **TOURISM AND FILM SERVICES**         | 651-2360 |


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Tree Lawns
creating a better environment