

# City of Auburn Median Design & Maintenance Guidelines

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## 1. What is a Median?

In its most basic form and function the median is a raised surface landscaped with softscape or hardscape and located in the roadway between two opposing directions of travel.

While medians appear to be rather unremarkable street features, they are an important asset for aesthetic, environmental, and mobility purposes.

Specifically, medians:

- Beautify the street with attractive landscaping;



- Establish a sense of and/or serve as a gateway to a community;



- Absorb stormwater and decrease the burden on existing storm drainage;



- Improve air quality;
- Provide a mid-block refuge for pedestrians crossing streets; and



- Calm traffic speeds by creating a narrower-feeling street.

## 2. Glossary of Terms

**Bioswale:** Landscape features that filter and/or impound stormwater

**Concrete maintenance strip:** An area around the perimeter of the landscaped portion of a median providing safe access to the median for maintenance workers

**Hardscape:** Landscape features that are non-vegetative in nature, such as pavers, stones, and monument signs

**Landscape:** May consist of hardscapes, softscapes, or any combination thereof

**Median:** A raised surface landscaped with softscape or hardscape and located in the roadway between two opposing directions of travel

**Mid-block crossing:** A pedestrian crossing not located at roadway intersections

**Native species:** Plant species native to the Puget Sound lowland region of the Pacific Northwest or noninvasive species that have adapted to the climatic conditions of the region

**Performance assurance device:** A bond or similar financial agreement held by the City until the median landscaping has been satisfactorily installed and maintained for one year after acceptance of the project

**Shy distance:** The setback between the median curb and lane line of the roadway

**Softscape:** Landscape features that are vegetative in nature, such as trees, shrubs, and groundcover

### **3. Purpose of Design and Maintenance Guidelines**

Medians are located throughout the City, whether constructed as part of the City's capital projects or as required street improvements for development. The City's Parks, Arts, and Recreation Department is currently responsible for maintenance of 14 medians.

Median standards are addressed in Section 10.15.1 of the City of Auburn Engineering Design Standards. The goal for the design and maintenance guidelines contained herein is not to replace those standards, but to serve as an easy-to-reference, supplementary guide that illustrates median design options and maintenance practices in light of the City's existing standards.

The design and maintenance guidelines in the following chapters combine the City of Auburn Engineering Design Standards with experiences from the City and other municipalities. Each guideline is a component of design and/or maintenance that needs to be addressed by the City or private developer when improving current medians or constructing new medians within the City.



## 4. Design Guidelines

### Dimensions

Feature	Guideline
Width <sup>1</sup> (for hardscapes)	4' min.
Width <sup>1</sup> (for softscapes)	8' min.
Width <sup>1</sup> (for bioswales)	See City of Auburn Surface Water Management Manual (SWMM) Volume V, Chapter 7 and consult with Public Works Department at (253) 931-3010
Concrete maintenance strip width <sup>2</sup>	1'
Paved maintenance staging area <sup>3</sup>	50' with mountable curbs
Curb <sup>4</sup> height	Consistent with curbs in vicinity, typically 6"
Shy distance	1' min.
Median ends	Flared to allow for transitioning traffic

<sup>1</sup>Median width is measured from inside edge of curb to inside edge of curb.

<sup>2</sup>Required only for softscaped medians located in roadways with a speed limit of 35mph or above.

<sup>3</sup>Required only for softscaped medians located in roadways with a speed limit of 35mph or above and running the length of an entire block.

<sup>4</sup>For bioswale curb design, see City of Auburn Surface Water Management Manual (SWMM) Volume V, Chapter 7 and consult with Public Works Department at (253) 931-3010.

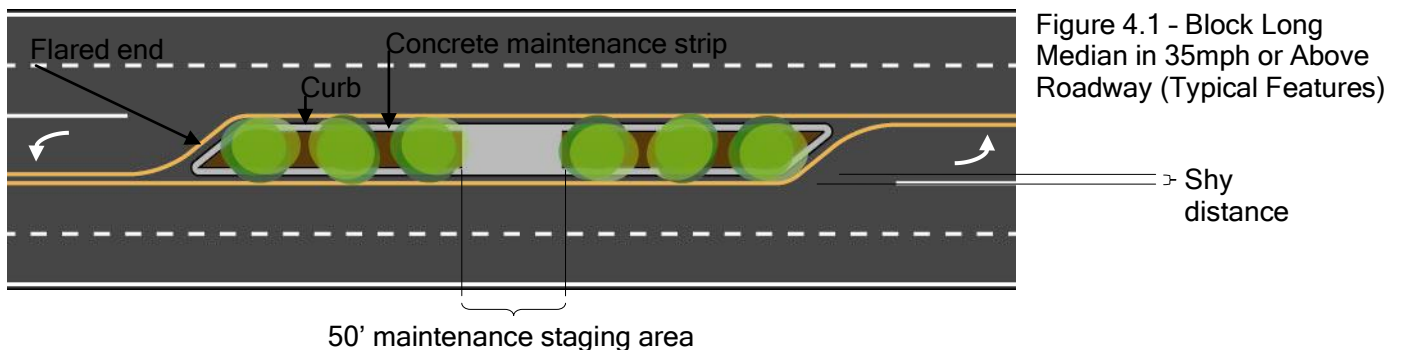


Figure 4.1 - Block Long Median in 35mph or Above Roadway (Typical Features)

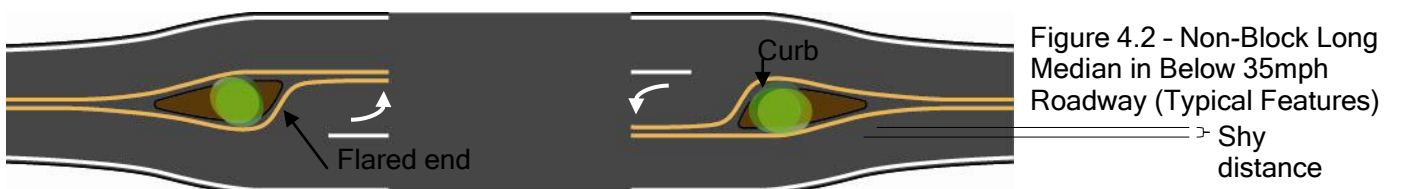


Figure 4.2 - Non-Block Long Median in Below 35mph Roadway (Typical Features)

Landscaping

Hardscaping	
Applicability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Lower cost (than softscaping) solution needed</li><li>• Success of vegetation impeded by location and/or lack of irrigation systems</li><li>• Roadway width is insufficient for 8' median</li><li>• Vegetation creates traffic and/or sight distance hazard</li><li>• Vegetation conflicts with utilities</li><li>• Location is especially suited for community identity features (ex. monument signs/stones and public art)</li></ul>

Figure 4.3(a-b) - Median Hardscape Examples

(Top) Public art and a monument sign work together to establish community identity for this City of Lacey median.

(Bottom) Stamped concrete leaves decorate an otherwise unmemorable traffic circle in the City of Seattle.





Figure 4.3(c) - Median  
Hardscape Examples

River rock bookend  
softscaping in this median  
from the City of Pleasant  
Hill.

Softscaping	
Applicability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Higher budget (than hardscaping) solution is available</li> <li>• Location is without vegetation in its surroundings</li> <li>• Stormwater runoff reduction is highly desired</li> <li>• Irrigation system is able to be installed to aid vegetation success</li> <li>• Sufficient sunlight and moist soil is available</li> <li>• Roadway width is sufficient for 8' median</li> <li>• Vegetation (canopy shape of trees, size/type of leaves, and root shape) creates no traffic and/or sight distance hazard, does not conflict with utilities, and does not damage street facilities as it matures</li> </ul>
Plant types	Combination of tree, shrubs, and groundcover. Trees are required for principal arterials, minor arterials, non-residential collectors, and local non-residential streets.
Plant species	<p><u>Generally:</u> 50% min. native to the Puget Sound lowland region of the Pacific Northwest or noninvasive species that have adapted to the climatic conditions of the region. See City of Auburn Engineering Design Standards 10.08.06 for plant species selection considerations.</p> <p><u>Trees:</u> Needled evergreens are prohibited unless median is significantly wider than mature spread of the tree. See City of Auburn Engineering Design Standards Table 10-5 for recommended <b>tree</b> species.</p> <p><u>Shrubs:</u> City or developer's discretion.</p> <p><u>Groundcover:</u> Consult with Parks Department at (253) 931-3027 for approval of specific <b>groundcover</b> species.</p> <p><u>Grass:</u> Sodded lawn and seed lawn are prohibited for any portion of the softscape design.</p>
Plant sizes	<p><u>Trees:</u> Min. 2" caliper, 2' above root ball. Max. height at maturity depends on median width (25' if in proximity to utility wires); see City of Auburn Engineering Design Standards 10.08.5. Min. 7' at time of planting. Min. 14' of clearance above roadways must be maintained at maturity.</p> <p><u>Shrubs:</u> Min. 1 gallon at planting. Max. 3' tall at maturity.</p> <p><u>Groundcover:</u> Min. 4" pots. Max. 3' tall at maturity.</p>
Plant spacing	<p><u>Trees:</u> Depends on spread. Distance from center of tree to a streetlight must be min. 20' and <math>\geq \frac{1}{2}</math> mature spread width.</p> <p><u>Shrubs:</u> City or developer's discretion, as appropriate for species.</p> <p><u>Groundcover:</u> City or developer's discretion, as appropriate for species.</p>



Figure 4.4(a-c) - Median Softscape Examples

(Top) Shy distance maintained and concrete strips allow for safe maintenance access to the vegetation in this City of Olympia median.

(Middle) Trees in this New York City median are the only noticeable green features in the median's immediate surroundings.

(Bottom) A lush mixture of trees, shrubs, and groundcover nevertheless provide the necessary clearance for the roadway.



Other Features

Feature	Applicability
Bioswale	Encouraged, if feasible, due to stormwater filtering and/or storage capabilities. See City of Auburn Surface Water Management Manual (SWMM) Volume V, Chapter 7 and consult with Public Works Department at (253) 931-3010.
Pedestrian crossing	Encouraged, if feasible, due to increased pedestrian mobility by allowing mid-block crossings on highly trafficked streets. See City of Auburn Engineering Design Standards Section 10.02.9.5(6), 10.15.5, 10.15.5.1, and consult with Public Works Department at (253) 931-3010.
Irrigation	Required for high-visibility medians. Consult with Parks Department at (253) 931-3027 for applicability and Public Works Department at (253) 931-3010 for design.
Illumination (Street Lighting)	Required (dual arm posts) for medians $\geq 8'$ wide. See City of Auburn Engineering Design Standards Section 10.10 for min. light level requirements.
Root direction device	Required for all medians with trees, to deflect roots downward into the soil, away from adjacent roadway. Consult with Public Works Department at (253) 931-3010 for exceptions.

## 5. Maintenance Guidelines

The City's Parks, Arts, and Recreation Department is responsible for maintaining 14 medians in the ROW. The following components are required as part of the maintenance plan for any new median constructed within the City:

<b>Maintenance Standards</b>
<b>Applicability - Hardscapes</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Litter control (per month)</li></ul>
<b>Applicability - Softscapes</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Litter control (per month)</li><li>• Weed control (per month)</li><li>• Pre-emergent weed control schedule</li><li>• Pruning schedule</li><li>• Leaf removal schedule</li><li>• Irrigation schedule and method</li><li>• Adding bark (when new plants installed)</li></ul>

### Maintenance Responsibility and Assurance Device

Maintenance of the median shall be the sole responsibility of the contractor for one year after acceptance of the project, and a performance assurance device is required.