Scenic City
CERTIFICATION PROGRAM
A Program of Scenic Texas and its Program Partners

Assessment Standards
Applications accepted annually from January 1 - March 31
The Scenic City Certification Program recognizes municipalities that implement high quality scenic standards for public roadways and public spaces. Cities with strong scenic standards reflect civic pride, benefit from a solid sense of community character and are well-positioned for economic growth.

**HOW DOES THE SCENIC CITY CERTIFICATION PROGRAM WORK?**

Any Texas city may apply to the *Scenic City Certification Program* for an objective review of existing municipal infrastructure ordinances as they relate to public roadways and public spaces. The evaluation compares these standards to the Scenic City model devised by 18 Scenic City Program Partner organizations. Assessment is points-based, and every city applicant receives a detailed, scored evaluation. Official certification can be earned by cities that score in the upper range and verify threshold standards for landscaping, tree planting and sign regulation.

The evaluation reviews every applicant’s existing ordinance and code language in these areas:

- Streetscape enhancements
- Parks, trails and open spaces
- Lighting standards
- Design integrity
- Landscaping and screening
- Sign control
- Litter and graffiti prohibition
- Utility and cable line programs
- Unique municipal features
- Special programs

**Benefits of participation**

- Provides expert third-party evaluation of existing standards
- Forms a basis for continual review and analysis of development plans
- Serves as a platform to educate citizens on the impact of local regulations
- Supports economic development efforts
The Program was developed by Scenic Texas and 17 statewide Program Partners
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Pathway to Certification

The Scenic City Certification Program application period opens January 1 - March 31.

Set up a required phone orientation with Scenic City staff.

Complete and submit application by end of March.

Application reviewed. Preliminary scores released by end of June.

APPEAL or ACCEPT preliminary score. Final scores released by end of July.

Certified cities awarded during the Annual Texas Municipal League Conference in October.

Ready to get started?
Explore the Program and review Program standards
www.sceniccitycertification.org

E-mail or call us with additional questions
info@sceniccitycertification.org | 713-979-4374
There are three types of Scenic City Certification Program applicants:

**First Time Applicant**
If you are a first-time applicant, you will complete the 2020 application in full. Follow all instructions listed in the How to Apply section.

**Rank-Up Applicant**
Certified Scenic Cities may re-apply to the Program to try for an increased certification level (we call it “ranking up”). This is allowed for Certified Cities that use their initial scoresheet results to make improvements to their scenic infrastructure standards. Cities who do this during the first two years of certification will remain in their five-year certification class. Ranking up involves a less-detailed application – only updated information needs to be provided. For criterion where there are no changes, enter “No change to standards” in the response box.

**5th year Re-Certification Applicant (Renewing 5-year certification)**
To retain Scenic City certification, a current certified Scenic City must re-apply to the Program during its fifth year of certification. In 2020, all 2015 certified Scenic Cities must re-apply to the Program and complete the 2020 application in full. This means that evidence must be provided for every criterion that applies to a city. Credit will not be awarded for answers that state, “No change from 2015.”

Your city must schedule a phone orientation with Scenic City staff before proceeding with the application.

To schedule a phone orientation call: 713-979-4374 or email: application@sceniccitycertification.org

Access the online application by going to www.wsceniccitycertification.org

After your city’s phone orientation, you will be provided with login credentials to the online application to begin the application process. You may login and out as you please. Be sure to save your work each time.

A PDF version of the application is available upon request, which can be provided after your city’s phone orientation.

Note: You must have Adobe Acrobat Pro or Adobe Reader XI to view and save your information. If using Adobe Reader XI, you must Save As each time you add new information.
How to Apply

In order to provide proper evidence of your city’s existing ordinance language, responses must include:

- Relevant link(s) from an online codification database (Municode, FranklinCode, etc) or scanned copies of relevant ordinance language uploaded into your application.

- Specific page number or title, section and subsection where the information is located. See example below.

  ![Example](http://www.municode.com/resources/gateway.asp?pid=10123&sid=43)
  
  see Chapter 39, Article VI, Sec 39-101 item (c)

If you wish to supply additional documents that are not accessible via links, we can provide you with DropBox information. See instructions below on how to properly save your documents in DropBox:

- What to name an additional document:
  - City name, section the document supports. (Example: Houston, Section 1.3)

- What to include in the response box:
  - In the response box, use the following language, “See name of document in Dropbox.” Be sure to include page numbers, chapters, sections, etc. to help locate the support in the response box.

Payment Information

The cost of the application is $749 for all new applicant cities and 5th year re-certification and $300 for all applicants who are certified and would like to rank up during the two-year window following initial certification.

Payment methods accepted include checks, credit card and PayPal. Please call us at 713-979-4374 to pay via credit card or PayPal. Checks should be made payable to Scenic Texas and mailed to:

**Scenic Texas**
5615 Kirby #645
Houston, TX 77005
Section 1: Streetscape - protection of native and established trees, landscaping and sidewalks

1.1 (Mandatory requirement) Trees and/or landscaping along major roadways, city streets, street medians or in parking lots are required.

1.2 Require upkeep of landscaping to ensure viability of plants.

- All required landscaped areas shall include an irrigation system to ensure the health and growth of the landscape. Medians, rights-of-way, visibility clips and other common areas that are landscaped shall be irrigated, with irrigation plans for such landscaped areas approved by the town prior to the acceptance of public improvements for the development.

- Landscaped areas shall be reasonably maintained by the owner or the lessee of the property, including pruning, trimming, watering and other requirements necessary to create an attractive appearance for the development.

- Any plant material not surviving shall be replaced within 60 days of its demise. Variances because of seasonal requirements can be granted by the City’s Designee.

1.3 Landscape requirements apply to all public, private and institutional developments and must be installed in a sound manner and in accordance with accepted good planting procedures.

1.4 All construction (new as well as redevelopment) requires landscaping and/or screening to be installed as a part of project construction. Existing landscaped areas to be retained shall be protected from vehicular encroachment and damage during and after the construction phase by appropriate barriers.

1.5 Sidewalks required to be a minimum of 5 feet in width; 8 feet in transit corridors; 10 feet in downtowns and high-density areas. Sidewalks must be maintained in good condition and have pedestrian buffers with a minimum width of 2 feet.

1.6 Enforcement exists for the implementation of every standard. Applicant: Please provide official language describing enforcement methods, including staffing, regulations and provide current budget.

Section 2: Parks, Trails and Public Spaces

2.1 There exists a comprehensive system of parks, greenbelts and open space that is compatible with the environment and conducive to residential neighborhoods (A map or diagram is acceptable.) Park system meets national standards of 10 acres per 1,000 population.

2.2 Parks contain a significant number of amenities including trees, benches, playgrounds, etc. which are maintained to good condition and have security features (anti-theft devices, safety for parking areas and trails, etc).

2.3 There exists a park set-aside ordinance for development.

2.4 Provide for a comprehensive and connective multi-use trail system and map. Trails are clearly marked with appropriate signage, and there are established measures for upkeep and maintenance.

2.5 The boundaries of existing open space and recreational areas are clearly delineated as public spaces with future development prohibited or permanently designated for public use if on private property.

2.6 Any new development site must permanently set aside open space for public or private use which will not be developed. Open space may be used as community open space or preserved as green space.

2.7 Impervious cover is limited to no more than 20% of an open space area unless the need/purpose of the additional impervious cover is documented.

2.8 The following areas are considered high priorities when designating open space: conservation buffers, high-quality native trees, critical habitat areas, and high-quality soil resources.

2.9 Enforcement exists for the implementation of every standard. Applicant: Please provide official language describing enforcement methods, including staffing, regulations and provide current budget.
Scenic City Standards

Section 3: On-premises sign ordinance

3.1. [Mandatory requirement: The more restrictive, the more points will be awarded] Strict limits on size, placement, and quantity of signs per business. All permanent signs require permits separate from the building permit.

1.a Minimum requirement: signs require permits separate from the building permit.

1.b Strict limits on quantity of signs per business and quantity of signs per side/property frontage.

1.c Strict limits on size (both square footage and height) and placement.

3.2 Banned signage: All wind devices, roof signs and portable signs.

3.3 Restricted digital signage: All electronic changeable message (digital) signs should be banned outright or restricted to special districts within city limits. If digital signs currently exist, clearly-stated regulations must strictly limit size, height, and brightness of such signs, and prohibit moving images and frequent rotation of fixed images on such signs. Regulations written so that signs are designed to be in context with the natural and built environment.

3.4 A mechanism exists to bring existing (grandfathered) signs into conformity with the municipality’s current sign code.

3.5 A process exists to enforce removal of any sign that is significantly damaged, destroyed or abandoned.

3.6 Enforcement exists for the implementation of every standard. Applicant: Please provide official language describing enforcement methods, including staffing, regulations and provide current budget.

Section 4: Off-premises signage

4.1 [Mandatory requirement] No permits are allowed to be issued for new outdoor general advertising off-premises signs or devices.

4.2 Specific ordinance language states that existing, non-electronic billboards may NOT be modified, upgraded or in any way converted to an electronic, changeable message (digital) billboard format. If digital billboards currently exist, clearly-stated regulations must strictly limit brightness of such signs, and prohibit moving images and frequent rotation of fixed images on such signs.

4.3 Policy prohibiting the relocation of billboards, or allowing relocation only when required by the construction of a project using public funding, provided that such relocation is restricted to a limited period of time.

4.4 Parked motor vehicles and/or trailers are not allowed to be intentionally located so as to serve as an advertising device for a use, product or service.

4.5 Moving motor vehicles and/or trailers may not be employed primarily for the purpose of displaying commercial advertising messages. Commercial advertising messages are prohibited on any vehicle if the messages are unrelated to the primary business or activity for which the vehicle is utilized; this includes but is not limited to transit vehicles and school buses.

4.6 No advertising allowed on right-of-way amenities (bus shelters, park benches, transit stations, trash receptacles, directional kiosks, etc).

4.7 Ban on posting of advertising signs on public property. Any advertising signs found upon any public property may be removed by the city.

4.8 Law prohibiting tree-cutting or similar clearing of vegetation on public rights-of-way to provide better view of off-premises signs.

4.9 A process exists to remove nonconforming outdoor general advertising devices (i.e. billboards) that are not on federally-funded roadways.

4.10 Enforcement exists for the implementation of every standard. Applicant: Please provide official language describing enforcement methods, including staffing, regulations and provide current budget.
Section 5: Lighting standards for streetscapes and public spaces

5.1 Street lighting program that emphasizes the selection of lighting equipment and the location of street lighting, in order to provide visibility, safety, and security for pedestrians and vehicles.

5.2 Adequate illumination that meets the level-of-use standards set for the municipality is required.

5.3 Outdoor lighting program that emphasizes directional lighting, limits glare and misdirected or unnecessary outdoor lighting, and curtails and reverses any degradation of the night sky, in order to decrease light pollution effects and preserve the nighttime visual environment.

5.4 Cost-sharing program exists between the city and power provider(s) to upgrade light fixtures.

5.5 Enforcement exists for the implementation of every standard. Applicant: Please provide official language describing enforcement methods, including staffing, regulations and provide current budget.

Section 6: Landscaping in parking lots

6.1 Incorporate appropriately-scaled, well-graded and planted earth berms, shrubs, or other landscaping on parking area perimeters to screen the parking area from streets and other facilities.

6.2 Require that planted islands be protected from vehicular encroachment.

6.3 Integrate groundcovers and small shrubs at island ends to add interest while maintaining visibility of pedestrians and vehicles; minimize the use of medium to tall shrubs on internal islands.

6.4 If paving around a tree is required, use porous pavements such as cast-in-place, monolithic turf and concrete combinations over specimen tree roots to allow water and air exchange.

6.5 Require that plants are selected for climate such as regionally native, drought-tolerant and extreme temperature-tolerant species and are used whenever possible. Plants installed in or around parking areas receive proper irrigation to encourage deep root growth.

6.6 Enforcement exists for the implementation of every standard. Applicant: Please provide official language describing enforcement methods, including staffing, regulations and provide current budget.
Section 7: Protection of landscaping during construction activities

7.1 Require that protective barricades are installed around all protected trees and grand trees prior to any construction activities on a development site.

7.2 Barricades are to be installed a minimum of 10 feet from a protected tree or at the designated protective root zone.

7.3 Materials used for protective barricades shall be made of wood, fencing or solid material.

7.4 Barricades shall be no less than 3 feet in height with horizontal and vertical structural members designed to prevent damage to existing landscaping.

7.5 Protective barricades removed only to prepare the development site for final landscaping activities.

7.6 Parking or storing of vehicles, equipment or materials is not allowed within the protective root zone.

7.7 Enforcement exists for the implementation of every standard. Applicant: Please provide official language describing enforcement methods, including staffing, regulations and provide current budget.

Section 8: Unity-of-Design

Clearly-stated design standards exist, with the intention to coordinate individual efforts and create unity-of-design, a positive city image, and a high quality public environment.

Provide documentation that clearly defines if all of the city or specific areas fall within the guidelines. Must document the percent of the city and the percent of commercial (all types) where the code applies.

Provide copy of design standards and evidence of enforcement program: a) methods, b) budget, and c) staffing.

Examples of unified-design areas include but are not limited to:

- Storefront design standards in terms of shapes and materials for awnings, storefront lighting, entries, doors, windows, and building appurtenances.
- Signage limitations for permitted on-premises signs and specific guidelines for display window signage, window graphics, plaque signs, and entry paving.
- Exterior furnishings / landscape - requirements regarding allowed exterior furnishings, landscaping, sidewalk grade, and ADA compliance.
Section 9: Litter and graffiti

9.1 Littering is defined, expressly prohibited, and penalized by city ordinance, including pedestrian trash as well as that thrown from motor vehicles.

9.2 Graffiti (writing or drawings scribbled, scratched, painted, or sprayed illicitly on a wall or other surface in public view) is expressly prohibited and penalized by city ordinance. A program exists to enforce effective removal.

9.3 Publicly supported cleanup efforts and education program for trash and graffiti.

9.4 Public trash receptacles have a protective covering to prevent trash from blowing out of can.

9.5 Trash can only be placed for collection on certain designated days, and not before or after within a period of 15 hours.

9.6 Strict prohibition on dumping.

9.7 Enforcement exists for the implementation of every standard. Applicant: Please provide official language describing enforcement methods, including staffing, regulations and provide current budget.

Section 10: Utility and cable line program

10.1 a- Install utility lines (including individual service lines, transmission lines and distribution lines) underground, below the finished grade of the right of way. Remove (if appropriate) all related above ground utility structures.

10.1 b- If your city has a special circumstance, i.e., it is located in a flood prone area, please describe your methods to minimize the visual impact of required above ground utilities.

10.2 For new construction that requires additional infrastructure, all new utility infrastructure must be mounted on pads at ground level; if within the right of way, does not block sidewalks or visibility at intersections.

10.3 For a major roadway reconstruction or public improvement project, all utility services located within the boundaries of the project are placed underground.

10.4 For future individual utility service, lines which originate in a public road right of way and extend to any building or structure constructed after a certain date (including residential, commercial, or industrial) are installed underground. All new construction must require utility services to be underground.

10.5 Once utility service lines have been installed underground, the installation of new above-ground lines in that location is prohibited by ordinance.

10.6 If above ground utilities are being replaced on side streets with above-ground utility services which intersect with a roadway with underground utility lines, the first pole supporting the above ground service is placed on such side street at least 100 feet from the center of the roadway with the underground utilities.

10.7 Enforcement exists for the implementation of every standard. Applicant: Please provide official language describing enforcement methods, including staffing, regulations and provide current budget.
Section 11: Dumpster screening

11.1 The dumpster area is screened on three sides using material consisting of stone, brick, block, wood or a continuous planting of evergreens.

11.2 The opening for removal of the dumpster for collection is a minimum of 12 feet to allow for proper access when it is serviced. For every additional dumpster in an enclosure, an additional 10 feet in width is required. Openings should be concealed by a non-transparent gate.

11.3 All dumpster enclosures are approved by the city prior to construction.

11.4 Require that the dumpster enclosure is constructed of durable materials that complement the primary building.

11.5 Require that the owner incorporate landscaping to make the screen more effective.

11.6 Require that location of the opening to the area be away from the sidewalk and street.

11.7 Enforcement exists for the implementation of every standard. Applicant: Please provide official language describing enforcement methods, including staffing, regulations and provide current budget.

Section 12: Bonus

Your city may have adopted infrastructure standards or programs that contribute to community character and place-making but fall outside the boundaries of the application standards. If so, please provide a detailed description and links to supporting materials for review and possible additional points.

These projects are not limited to, but might include:

- historic districts or historic preservation programs
- a scenic program related to a unique geographic feature
- a natural environment enhancement program
- celebrated greenway, waterway or street corridor
- effective flood management
- revitalized habitat
- plantings in detention basins
- landscaping along a body of water
- a vegetated area bordering a stream or established to protect a stream system
- innovative programs above and beyond the criteria in any of the certification categories
- Affiliation or membership with a Scenic City Program Partner organization.