

# Historic Downtown District Overlay & Design Guidelines City of Corsicana, Texas



## Historic Downtown District Overlay & Design Guidelines

### SECTION I: Statement of Purpose

The *Historic Downtown District* encompasses approximately 25 blocks of historic commercial buildings near the geographic center of the community. The rows of commercial buildings in the district exhibit similar scale and materials. Built along a uniform setback line, the continuous frontage of historic commercial buildings, define a uniform street space. The historic buildings were primarily erected between 1880 and 1925 to house retail concerns. Most fall into the classification of 1-part or 2-part commercial blocks, with load-bearing brick construction methods predominating. Renewed economic prosperity in the 1920s fostered a cycle of new construction and remodeling that resulted in an eclectic mix of commercial architecture influenced by the Italianate, Romanesque Revival, and Classical Revival styles typical in Texas during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. A handful of historic institutional buildings, service stations and lumberyard facilities also contribute to the district's character, with surviving brick streets weaving the properties into a cohesive whole. Therefore, it is the intention of these guidelines to:

- **Preserve** the historic character and visual identity within this district. The previously built fabric should be restored, renovated, and perpetuated in all development activities within this district.
- **Infill** the remaining vacant properties and encourage adaptive re-use of existing buildings while perpetuating the historic character of the downtown core.
- **Enrich** the street as a place for pedestrian comfort, beauty, and convenience.
- **Revitalize** investment interest in the District, encouraging greater retail, service, and commercial activity on the street.

Architectural design guidelines shall apply to work not begun before the effective date of this Ordinance and shall apply to exterior work done on an existing building or new commercial development respectively, which is located within the Historic Downtown District. The *Historic Downtown District* is defined by the Main Street Project boundaries map found in the Appendix.



*Historic Downtown District Streetscapes in Corsicana*

## SECTION II: Street Interface Guidelines

- 1. Decorative Landscaping:** Landscaping for any premise is limited to pots and planters that do not encroach upon the sidewalk space more than 3 feet, unless those planters are used to define the area of encroachment for restaurant activities. Where encroachment serves a restaurant, it cannot cause the operational portion of the sidewalk space to be reduced to less than 4 feet. Plants that evidence stress or are no longer alive cannot remain in such condition for more than 7 days and must be replaced with healthy plants within 7 days of property owner notification. The placement of other street furniture, such as newspaper boxes, planters, benches, mailboxes, and telephones, shall be reviewed by the City of Corsicana to determine public safety and appropriateness.

*Healthy potted plantings enhance the building entry*



- 2. Sidewalk Restaurants:** Sidewalk Restaurants are allowed in the Historic Downtown District and shall be permitted as such by the Planning & Zoning Department. Sidewalk Restaurants within or encroaching upon the sidewalk space can only be spatially defined at the corners. No fences, railings, or barriers that would subdivide the sidewalk shall be permitted within the sidewalk space. Encroachment cannot cause the operational portion of the sidewalk space to be reduced to less than 4 feet. When sidewalk, retail, or restaurant activity is located within a building offset and outside the public sidewalk, a wrought iron rail is permitted.



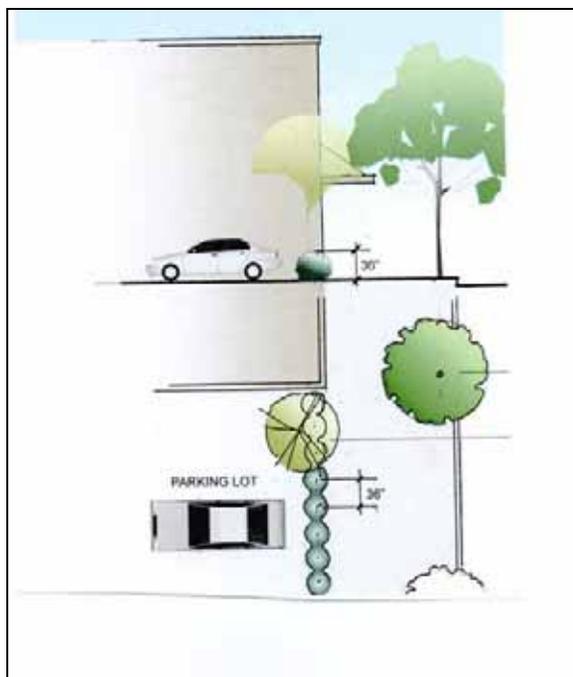
*Restaurant sidewalk seating that allows for pedestrian walkway*

3. **Displays:** Outdoor retail displays will be limited to visually appealing items displayed in an attractive manner. Merchandise will be displayed during store business hours and will be removed to the inside of the store at the close of each business day. Merchandise may be displayed within a 32 square feet area for every 25 linear feet of storefront and will not reduce the sidewalk space to less than 4' for the pedestrian. Merchandise with the sole purpose of outdoor use will be exempt from display restrictions, but must maintain 4' pedestrian walkway. Compliance with this section will be reviewed by the Main Street Design Committee.



*Examples of conforming outdoor retail merchandise display*

4. **Parking Lot Screening:** On-site parking fronting a street within the Historic Downtown District will be a paved surface lot, screened by a continuous line of evergreen screen shrubs. These shrubs will be at least 30 inches tall at the time of planting, and shall be planted at 36 inches on center. Corner islands for ornamental trees are also required to enhance the appearance of the screen. Parking lots where the lot capacity exceeds 15 cars shall contain trees planted so that no parking space is more than 100 feet from a canopy tree. The trees and shrubs used for parking lot plantings shall be selected from the list of acceptable landscape materials listed in the Appendix.



*Example of Parking Lot Landscape*

5. **Parking:** On-Street parking in the Historic Downtown District is to be maximized to attract retail investment, with Beaton and Collin Streets currently designated as “Two Hour Customer Parking” and is effective during business day hours of 9am until 5pm. Temporary storage, overnight business and residential vehicle parking will require permission through the Planning & Zoning Department. The Department will assign vehicle stickers designating their status. A semi-trailer, wheeled vehicle pulled by a trailer towing device, truck tractor, or 18-wheeler is prohibited from parking on any public street, public right-of-way, private lot, parcel, or easement within the Historic Downtown District at anytime, except for the purposes of loading or unloading, or by Special Permit through the Planning & Zoning Commission.
6. **Loading:** Front-service loading is permitted during off-peak hours (typically mid-morning and mid-afternoon). New construction of loading doors, bays, and docks, as well as other features that are considered architectural loading facilities, are prohibited on the building planes of the Beaton, Main, and Collin Streets.
7. **Accessory Buildings:** Storage buildings separate from the main structure will not be permitted in the Historic Downtown District.

*Restaurant successfully interfacing with the Street*



*Appropriate Adaptive Use of an historic building on Beaton Street*

### SECTION III: Architectural Design Guidelines - ALTERATIONS, ADDITIONS, and ADAPTIVE USE



*Appropriate use of historic color palette and sign placement*

The *Historic Downtown District* contains a significant number of structures that are important to the original fabric of the community. Special consideration should be given to preserve these buildings. Utilization of historic buildings often requires additions and alterations to adapt the structure to a current use. Alterations, Additions, and Adaptive Use should be done carefully so not to visually impact the significant nature of the original building and shall be subject to review by the Corsicana Landmark Commission before work commences. Historic buildings located in the Historic Downtown District are landmarked by the City of Corsicana, therefore any exterior construction, reconstruction, alteration, restoration, or relocation requires a “Certificate of Appropriateness” approved by the Corsicana Landmark Commission.

1. **Storefronts:** Windows and doors are important character-defining features of the historic commercial building. They give scale to the building and provide visual interest to pedestrians by providing views to goods and activities inside the building. Original entries, doors, transoms and display windows should be maintained where they are found. Original materials of construction should be maintained when possible, such as; employing wood mullions rather than aluminum.
2. **Canopies and Arcades:** Every building fronting the street in the Historic Downtown District is encouraged to provide one of the following:
  - a. A **canopy** projected from the building between the first and second floor, supported by tension rods anchored to the masonry structure above. This feature should be at least 6 feet wide and extend 6 feet from the building. Building materials should be of wood, metal as roofing deck and flashing. Fabric awnings may also be used when applicable, the geometry shall fit the architectural opening and fabric should be consistent with the District’s color palette.
  - b. An **arcade** that dedicates a portion of the first floor space to sidewalk use and that is greater than 5 feet deep.

- 3. Lighting:** Storefronts within the Historic Downtown District are strongly encouraged to illuminate the interior side of the storefront system to facilitate window shopping and for security purposes at night.
- 4. Signage:** Signs should be located above the awning or canopy between the first and second floors, attached flush to the building. The height of the sign should be no greater than 32 inches and should not extend past the width of the awning. In addition, one pendant sign is recommended at pedestrian level suspended from the awning. Lettering featuring the name of the current or historic residing establishment may be applied to the glass panels of the storefront. Any additional permanent signage, including novelty signs must be permitted by the Planning & Zoning Department upon review and approval by the Corsicana Landmark Commission.

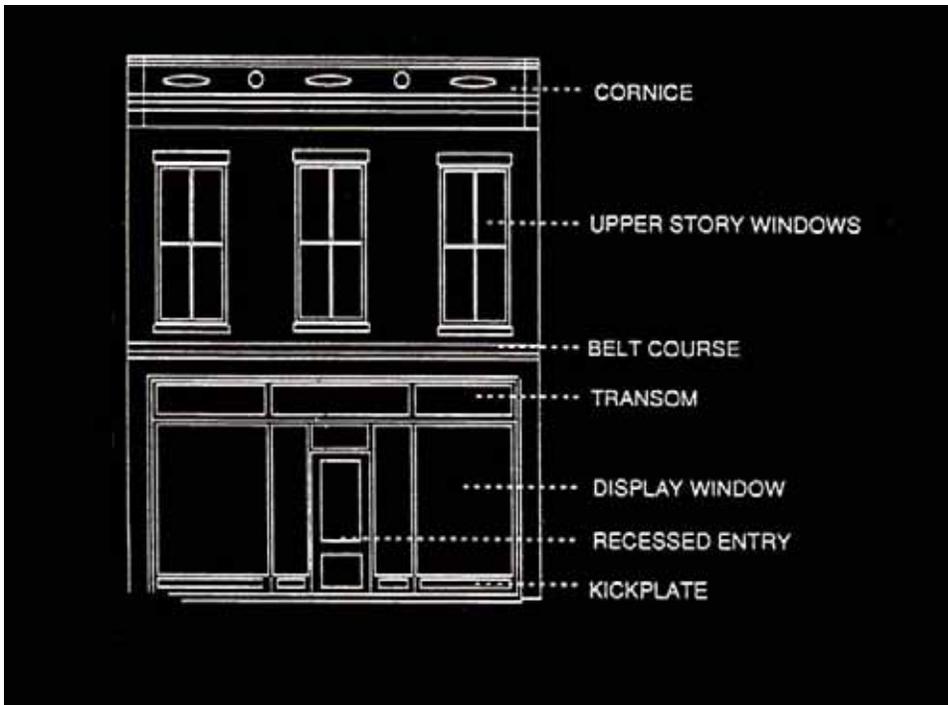
Marquee signs, lighted sign structures mounted and projected vertically from the building façade, are allowed where suitable. If an historic marquee or evidence thereof exists, that sign should be preserved and maintained.

Sandwich boards as temporary signage maybe used in the Historic Downtown District during regular store business hours and removed to inside the store at the close of each business day. Sandwich signs may not exceed the dimensions of 30 x 48 and must maintain 4' of pedestrian walkway.



*Attractive sandwich sign promotes the "Special of the Day"*

- 5. Color Palette:** Brick color should be selected from the historic architectural style of the buildings found in downtown Corsicana, which were rich dark reds in the late 1890's and lighter tan bricks in the early 1900's. Storefront colors were traditionally chosen in a contrasting shade lighter or darker than the primary building color. If more than 10% of the painted storefront requires painting, than building colors should be selected from the approved color palette. Paint colors should pull together all building elements, including the cornice, upper façade, windows, storefront, and doors. Limit trim paints to three compatible shades chosen from the color palette provided by the local Preservation Officer.



*Typical Historic Downtown Commercial Storefront in Texas*

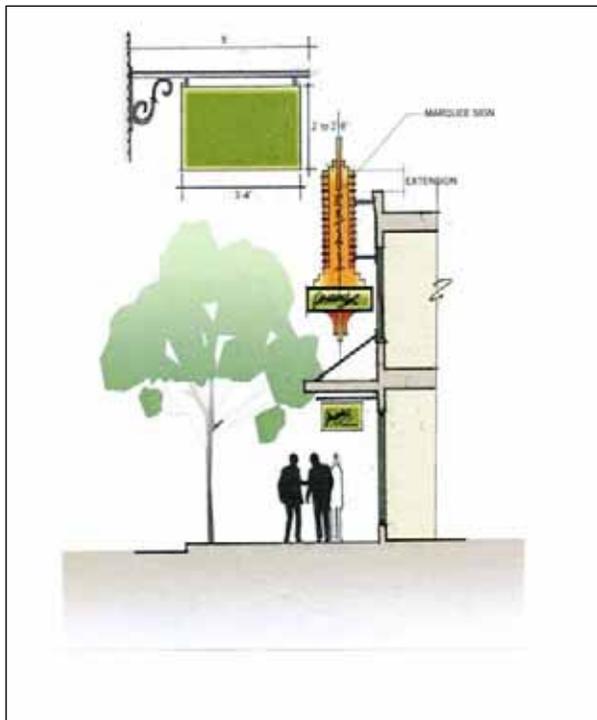
#### SECTION IV: Architectural Design Guidelines - NEW COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT

New commercial development and new infill construction should relate to existing historic buildings found in the *Historic Downtown District*. The use of traditional building materials, architectural elements, and building size and mass should be continued and evident in all new construction. All new commercial development, new construction, and storefront reconstruction shall require design approval by the Corsicana Landmark Commission. An approved “Certificate of Appropriateness” is required before construction may commence.

1. **Storefronts:** Newly constructed storefront systems used within the Historic Downtown District must sit on a masonry curb at least 12 inches tall and no greater than 18 inches tall. The glass must be modulated so that glass panels between vertical supports are not greater than 4 feet wide. Where possible, construction of a historically appropriate storefront system is required, employing wood mullions rather than aluminum.
2. **Canopies and Arcades:** Every building fronting the street in the Historic Downtown District is encouraged to provide one of the following:
  - a. A **canopy** projected from the building between the first and second floor, supported by tension rods anchored to the masonry structure above. This feature should be at least 6 feet wide and extend 6 feet from the building. Building materials should be of wood, metal as roofing deck and flashing. Fabric awnings may also be used when applicable, the geometry shall fit the architectural opening and fabric shall be consistent with the District’s color palette.
  - b. An **arcade** that dedicates a portion of the first floor space to sidewalk use and that is greater than 5 feet deep.

3. **Building Height:** Portions of any building taller than two stories must be setback from the street-facing façade a minimum of 10 feet. The maximum permitted height of the buildings facing the street in the Historic Downtown District is 45 feet.
4. **Lighting:** Storefronts within the Historic Downtown District are strongly encouraged to illuminate the interior side of the storefront system to facilitate window shopping and for security purposes at night.
5. **Signage:** Signs should be located above the awning or canopy between the first and second floors, attached flush to the building. The height of the sign shall be no greater than 32 inches and shall not extend past the width of the awning. In addition, one pendant sign is recommended at pedestrian level suspended from the awning. Lettering featuring the name of the current or historic residing establishment may be applied to the glass panels of the storefront. Any additional permanent signage, including novelty signs must be permitted by the Planning & Zoning Department upon review and approval by the Corsicana Landmark Commission.

Marquee signs, lighted sign structures mounted and projected vertically from the building façade, shall be allowed where suitable. If an historic marquee or evidence thereof exists, that sign should be preserved and maintained.



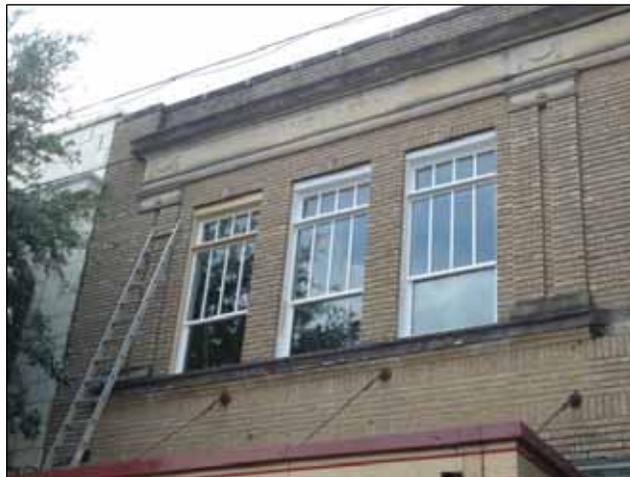
*Example of appropriate placement of Pendant and Marquee Signage on a Downtown Commercial Building*

Sandwich boards as temporary signage maybe used in the Historic Downtown District during regular store business hours and removed to inside the store at the close of each business day. Sandwich signs may not exceed the dimensions of 30 x 48 and must maintain 4' of pedestrian walkway.

6. **Elements of Style:** The prevalent architectural style in the Historic Downtown District is commercial style renaissance, predominantly evidencing Romanesque, Classical, or Italianate

detailing. This style is expressed through the elements that follow, and all restoration, reconstruction, and new development must therefore embody these design guidelines.

- a. **Materials:** 100% of any street-facing façade shall be brick, excluding windows, doors, and storefronts, consistent with all respective guidelines contained herein. The architecturally-enclosed portion of any arcade or recessed entry is excepted from the use of brick, if it is veneered in a decorative tile.
- b. **Color Palette:** Brick color will be selected from the historic architectural style of the buildings found in downtown Corsicana, which were rich dark reds in the late 1890's and lighter tan bricks in the early 1900's. Storefront colors were traditionally chosen in a contrasting shade lighter or darker than the primary building color. Paint colors should pull together all building elements, including the cornice, upper façade, windows, storefront, and doors. Limit trim paints to three compatible shades chosen from the color palette provided by the local Preservation Officer.
- c. **Openings:** The ratio of opening to solid wall (expressed as a void-to-solid ratio) in any street-fronting wall shall not be greater than **0.4:1**. This ratio does not take storefront or the wall space that it occupies into account. Where buildings are taller than three stories, this void-to-solid ratio may be increased to **0.6:1**. All openings, including building entries (but excluding storefronts), must align vertically and horizontally. The glazing of all street-fronting openings (excluding storefronts) provided in accordance with this standard shall be primed wood frame, double-hung windows. Mullion patterns may vary, but any subdivision in the windowpane shall not result in lites that are smaller than 8 inches wide by 10 inches tall. Where buildings are taller than 3 stories, non-wood window units may be incorporated in the upper stories.



*Example of varying sizes of lites in an historic second story window with restoration in progress*

- d. **Parapets and Cornices:** All flat roofs shall be concealed behind a standing parapet that is at least 18 inches above the roof membrane. The street-fronting portions of the parapet shall have offsets in the cap profile that give greater visual articulation of corner, entry, and decorative elements of style. The top of all parapets must be capped by a decorative mould or brick detail that projects out from the exterior wall plane at a minimum of 1 inch. When a pitched roof is provided for one-story

structures and/or residential structures over one story, the cornice shall include at least 1 inch of decorative relief and meet a closed soffit.

- e. **Roofs:** All roofs for any structure over one story that is not a residential structure shall be flat with 1:12 pitch to alley. One-story stand alone residential structures may have a pitched roof when the roof.
- f. **Horizontal Expression:** It is typical that the distribution of openings and decorative detail maintain a horizontal expression. Therefore decorative window heads and sills must align horizontally. Floor separations must be expressed by horizontal belt courses and canopies must maintain a constant horizontal reference from one building to another unless such alignment is prevented by grade changes.
- g. **Edges:** Building corners, whether actual or established by a shared lot line, must have visual expression by one of the following means:
  - Pilaster columns
  - Columns
  - Quoins
  - Fluting
  - Panels/Coffers
  - Common Vertical Reference

Any building that is wider than the building width typical to the block in which it is located must have designed building corners that modulate the street façade by creating architectural elements that give the appearance of building edges spaced consistent with the block modulation. Other edges are opportunities for decorative expression and should be incorporated into the building design typical of a Commercial Romanesque style; opportunities for articulation of edges include windows, parapets, frieze, and projections. In every street-facing façade, the window heads must be decoratively expressed as a minimum compliance with this guideline.

- h. **Entries:** New storefronts should place the building entry in the middle of the front façade, or sometimes at the corner when the façade is on a corner lot. The entry is reinforced by a vertical continuity with the second floor openings, an architectural form or element, and a canopy. Corner entries on corner lots must be reinforced by a canopy that visually articulates the location of entry apart from other canopies along the block. The doors used for entries must be compatible with the storefront system, be an actual historic commercial door restored for re-use, or be a reconstruction of a door that likely existed on the premise.

The area bound by the railroad to the east, south by 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, west by 9<sup>th</sup> Street, and north by 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue, will be given special consideration as an industrial area. Alternate industrial building design and materials will be allowed in this area. Industrial buildings constructed in the area should reflect design features of surrounding industrial buildings.

These guidelines shall apply to all work not commenced before the effective date of this Ordinance. It shall apply to all exterior work done on an existing building, or a new commercial development, respectively, which is located within the Historic Downtown District.

## SECTION V: Appeals Process

Decisions of the Planning & Zoning Department, Planning and Zoning Commission, Board of Adjustments, and the Corsicana Landmark Commission maybe appealed to the City Council.

## SECTION VI: Definitions

**Accessory Building** means a subordinate or secondary building or structure on the same lot as the main building and devoted exclusively to an incidental or ancillary use.

**Arcade** means an outdoor area of the first floor of a building that is protected by projecting the upper floor or roof.

**Building** means a structure for the support or shelter of any use or occupancy.

**Building Line** means a line marking the minimum distance a building may be erected from a street, alley, or lot line.

**Canopy** means a projected cover that extends from the building façade, usually over a portion of the public sidewalk.

**Floor Area** means the total square feet of floor space in a building measured to the outside faces of exterior walls or to the omitted wall lines.

**Floor Area Ratio** means the ratio of floor area to lot area. (Note: A 1:1 FAR is stated as “1.0,” 2:1 is stated as “2.0,” 2.5:1 is stated as “2.5,” etc.)

**Frontage** means the length of property along one side of a street between property or lease boundary lines.

**Height** means the vertical distance measured from grade to:

- a. for a structure with a gable, hip, or gambrel roof: the midpoint of the vertical dimension between the lowest eaves and the highest ridge of the structure;
- b. for a structure with a dome roof, the midpoint of the vertical dimension of the dome; and
- c. for any other structure: the highest point of the structure.

**Interior Lot Line** means a lot line not adjacent to a street or alley.

**Lot** means a building site that fronts on a public or private street, except that in the case of a planned development district, the building site may front on an access easement, and in the case of a shared access development, the building site may front on a shared access area.

**Lot Area** means the total square feet contained within lot lines.

**Lot Depth** means the average distance between the front and rear lot lines.

**Lot Line** means a property line bounding a lot, excluding any street or alley dedicated in fee simple.

**Lot Width** means the distance between side lot lines measured along the front setback line.

**Main Building** means a building on a lot intended for occupancy by the main use.

**Occupancy** means the purpose for which a building or land is used.

**Opening** means any penetration of a building wall for windows, doors, or storefront.

**Outside Display** means the placement of a commodity outside.

**Parking** means the standing of a vehicle, whether occupied or not. Parking does not include the temporary standing of a vehicle when commodities or passengers are being loaded or unloaded.

**Party Wall** means a wall built on an interior lot line used as a common support for buildings on both lots.

**Person** means any individual, firm, partnership, corporation, association, or political subdivision.

**Right-of-Way** means an area dedicated to public use for pedestrian and vehicular movement.

**Right-of-Way Line** means the dividing line between a right-of-way and an adjacent lot.

**Screening** means a visual barrier.

**Setback Line** means a line marking the minimum distance a building may be erected from street, alley, or lot line (also called the “building line”).

**Story** means that portion of a building between any two successive floors or between the top floor and ceiling above it.

**Street** means a right-of-way that provides primary access to adjacent property.

**Structure** means that which is built or constructed, an edifice or building of any kind, or any piece of work artificially built up or composed of parts joined together in some definite manner.

**Street Level** means, in a multi-level building, the level having the floor closest in elevation to the adjacent street; if the floors of two levels are equally close in elevation to the adjacent street, the level with the higher elevation is the street level.

**Temporary Storage** means a non-permanent, unfixed enclosure or edifice for the purpose of housing merchandise associated with a particular business.

# APPENDIX

**Additional Planting recommendations by the Navarro County  
Extension Agent, Derrick Scasta**

*As collected by Jeanne Kaster*

Additional Tree types suggested:

Cedar Tree

Mexican Plum

Crepe Myrtle

Desert Willow

Suggested Dwarf varieties of the following shrubs:

Dwarf Indian Hawthorn

Dwarf Nandina

Dwarf Rosemary