

Parking Lot Design Tied to Safety

Tax Deductions Available for Accessibility Alterations

By Dan Georgen

SAFETY IS A KEY PRIORITY when designing or retrofitting a parking lot for a business, residence or public establishment. Clearly visible and easily understood signage is important, but many properties fall short in meeting these basic criteria.

Some property managers are facing liability that they could have avoided, particularly in Ontario where new Regulations came into force in 2007 to dictate parking space size, driveway clearance and many other considerations. Pavement markings, traffic control and accessibility are three main areas where parking lots can be deficient.

PAVEMENT MARKINGS

Line markings are paramount for the safety of both pedestrians and drivers. Walkways for pedestrians should be clearly marked with diagonal striping known as hatching so that drivers of approaching vehicles are aware and can yield within a safe distance.

Further hatching can be used to mark off hazards and obstructions that may pose risks to drivers and the structure of a building. Keeping line paint fresh and clean from debris is important and highly recommended.

The minimum acceptable aisle width is six metres. Parking space widths and clearance requirements can vary depending on the location of possible obstructions such as walls, poles etc.

Inadequate laneway access for emergency vehicles can result in large fines. Fire truck access lanes must be clearly marked and wide enough to accommodate emergency vehicles. Signs should indicate that parking is prohibited in the lanes, and the lanes must allow enough clearance for traffic to move through.

Signage and markings should be as similar as possible to the public roadway so that

drivers understand what is required of them. The location of the sign can be critical to preventing accidents and mishaps. Easily visible and understandable signs will help prevent or minimize liability issues.

TRAFFIC CONTROL

High volume traffic and high volume parking lots generally have issues pertaining to speed. Large arrows on the pavement or on walls of underground garages can help control speed and direct traffic movement.

Rubber or plastic speed bumps can be installed with bright, reflective colours for optimal visibility. These speed bumps will help slow vehicles in parking lots that have high pedestrian traffic and effectively minimize personal injuries or vehicle damage due to pedestrian-vehicle contact. In addition to calming traffic, there are also speed bumps designed specifically for sheltering temporary power cables or water hoses from traffic.

Installing rubber curbs in the place of concrete curbs can be an extra step to ensure the safety of parking facilities. These sturdy, durable rubber curbs are bright and reflective for optimal visibility and sit lower to the ground to prevent bumper contact, thus stopping the wheels before contact can occur with a wall or sidewalk. They do not chip, crack or require paint like traditional concrete curbs and are secured in place with heavy-duty rebar spikes.

ACCESSIBILITY

It is mandatory that most parking facilities be equipped to accommodate people with special needs. According to

the Ministry of Community and Social Services, one in every seven people living in Ontario has a disability. As that number grows, the requirements for the number of handicapped parking stalls and the guidelines for the proximity to buildings will inevitably become more stringent. Failure to meet these guidelines may result in fines and penalties.

The width of handicapped parking stalls must be increased to meet new regulations, and most properties are taking the extra step to ensure accessibility and safety by allotting space for a marked walkway between handicapped spaces. This proactive approach can ensure that the property is on par with current regulations, and ensure the safety of those who require additional space to manoeuvre their modified vehicles and possible support equipment.

Markings on handicapped stalls must have maximum clarity and visibility to ensure that all drivers are aware that these spaces are reserved for those with permits, and to ensure that these spaces are left vacant for those who legitimately require them.

The Canadian government allows businesses and commercial building owners to deduct costs to make renovations or alterations that enable individuals with disabilities to gain access to business or residential properties. It is the responsibility of the property owner/manager to ensure that these requirements are being met, maintained and kept up to standard. ■■

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