

New Haven Historic District Commission

Design Review Guidelines

The purpose of these guidelines is to assist property owners, builders, architects, and developers in designing and completing improvements to properties within New Haven's local historic districts. The goal of the Historic District Commission (HDC) is to ensure that renovation and new construction within the Districts are harmonious with their architectural and historical character.

These guidelines set out the broad areas of concern of the HDC, and are by no means an exhaustive description of appropriate procedures for renovation or restoration of historic structures. They should be seen as general principles rather than rigid rules.

The guidelines are divided into four sections: followed by a brief description of special characteristics or special considerations applicable to each of the three local districts and a summary of the:

- Section A: Renovation and Rehabilitation
- Section B: Additions to Existing Buildings
- Section C: New Construction
- Section D: Special Considerations
 - Wooster Square
 - Quinnipiac River
 - City Point

Following the four main sections that comprise the guidelines is a summary of the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and a listing of sources for additional information.

Section A. RENOVATION AND REHABILITATION

Since many aspects of the design of an existing structure are already established with regard to the site, size, massing, proportion, and architectural period, much of the attention of the HDC focuses on the treatment of details, materials, and finishes.

1. Foundations and Masonry Walls: Repointing work should be done so as to match the appearance of the original mortar joints, particularly in color and joint tooling. The new mortar should also approximate the strength and hardness of the original mortar and building materials, since hard mortar may destroy soft masonry. Patches or partial replacement of masonry work should use stone or

brick, which matches the original material. Avoid harsh cleaning methods such as sandblasting or acid washing. Avoid removing paint or stucco from brick walls which were never meant to be exposed.

2. Siding: Wood shingles or clapboards establish the exterior texture on New Haven's frame buildings and are an important component of historic integrity. Avoid wholesale removal or covering of original siding; limited replacement or repair of decayed, warped, or missing siding pieces is always preferable. If new siding must be applied, use materials that match the original in appearance and scale; on many frame buildings in New Haven, that would be narrow-lap cedar or pine clapboards. Avoid aluminum or vinyl siding, and asbestos or asphalt shingles: all forms of synthetic siding are inappropriate to the character and spirit of New Haven's historic resources.

3. Roofs: Roof shape, appearance and features define a building's external appearance and overall character. In addition to this design role, the roof is essential for the preservation of the entire structure and should be maintained to provide a weather tight cover. Retain the original roof form and surface appearance. Avoid introducing new features such as dormers, skylights, or monitors, especially if the elevation is visible from a public way. Repair or replace original roof features such as finials, iron cresting, dormers, cornices, patterned slate or tile. Repair original slate whenever possible. Patch or replace deteriorated asphalt roofing with material that matches the original roofing material as closely as possible in color, texture, and overall appearance.

4. Chimneys: Retain the original size, form, material, location and number of chimneys. Avoid adding new chimneys, especially on facades visible from a public way.

5. Windows: Window dimensions, type, arrangement, detailing and ornamentation are highly significant in representing a building's character and style. Retain existing sash whenever possible. Deteriorated windows may usually be repaired by removing old paint and reglazing. If replacement is required, respect the dimensions, configuration and stylistic detail of the window. Avoid synthetic materials such as vinyl-clad sash or false muntins. Do not use shutters if the building did not originally have shutters. Wooden storm windows are historically accurate and provide excellent thermal efficiency. When choosing a replacement storm window or screen consider installing interior-type storm windows.

6. Entrances and Porches: Entrances and porches are often a focal point of a building's façade. In addition to their function and decorative features, they define a building's historic character. Respect the main entrance to the building and its relationship to the façade, side elevations, and the site. Retain doors, entry surrounds, porch floors and steps in their original form. Repair handrails, balusters, columns or posts, cornices, and any other decorative elements. Those

elements considered beyond repair should be replaced with like materials matching the original design. Storm doors should be non-decorative, competing as little as possible with the design of the main door. Proposals for new entrances, porches, or decks should be confined to the sides or back of a building.

7. Ornamental Details: Respect both original decorative elements and trim and those that may have been added later. Missing details may be replaced based on physical, pictorial and/or historical evidence. Avoid new details that do not match the architectural style of the building.

8. Outbuildings: Carriage houses, garages, barns and sheds contribute to the historical and architectural interest of a property. They should be treated with as much respect as the main structure on the lot. Preserve these structures whenever possible, and apply these guidelines to their restoration and rehabilitation. Proposals for new outbuildings, especially those visible from the public way, should exhibit compatibility with the main building in terms of size, scale, color, materials and location.

9. Non-contributing Structures: Structures or additions to structures which are less than fifty years old and are incompatible with surrounding structures in size, scale, color, materials and location, may be demolished or modified with prior approval of the HDC and the Office of Building Inspection and Enforcement.

10. Ornamental Details on Non-contributing Structures: Details such as pediments and cornices should not be added to a non-contributing or otherwise incompatible building just to achieve an “historic look”. Imitation details, such as snap-in window muntins, clapboard chimneys, and improperly sized shutters, detract from the integrity of the Districts and are unacceptable.

11. Documentation: Property owners are strongly encouraged to photograph buildings or features proposed for demolition or modification, and to provide copies of such photographs to the HDC. Because of the short life span of color photographs, black and white photographs are preferred for archival purposes.

Section B. ADDITIONS TO EXISTING BUILDINGS

An exterior addition attached to a historic building creates a new profile for the original structure. Such expansion has the potential to radically change the historic and architectural integrity of the property. Additions should be designed so that the character-defining features of the contributing resource are not removed, changed, obscured, damaged or altered. Consider the following when planning a new addition: massing, scale, style, material, rhythm and location.

1. Massing: Avoid single massive forms that detract from the building's original size. Relate the proposed addition to the type and variety of original forms and their composition.
2. Scale: Avoid additions that distract from the original building. Relate the addition to the original building's size and proportion, and its relationship to the lot.
3. Style: Additions need not mimic the style or period of construction of a particular building. An addition should be planned and designed to respect its context; that is, the predominant stylistic features of the house and its neighbors.
4. Materials: Usually it is preferable to avoid the introduction of exterior materials (roofing, windows, cladding, etc.) that differ from those of the original structure.
5. Rhythm: Avoid a change in rhythm between the addition and the original building. Rhythm is affected by window and door placement, size, shape, symmetry or asymmetry, ratio of voids to solids, and overall composition.
6. Location: Avoid additions which may have an adverse effect on existing elevations and the grade of the property, property boundaries and the lot-to-building ratio typical of the district. Locate additions on non-character defining sides, set back from the building or out of view from the public way.

Section C. NEW CONSTRUCTION

Consider the following when planning new construction:

1. Building Rhythm and Streetscape Patterns: Avoid siting new construction in a way that breaks the rhythm or pattern established by the siting of existing structures. The rhythm expressed by the spacing of buildings along the street should be continued in new construction. Front and side setbacks should be consistent with neighboring structures. The relationship of building size to lot size should be maintained.
2. Orientation: Entrances are typically oriented toward the street. The front door should be given strong visual emphasis. Historic sight lines and views of significant buildings or features should be respected.
3. Grade: New construction should maintain the natural grade of the lot as much as possible. Existing topographical features of the site should be preserved.

4. Massing and Proportion: The height, width, mass, and volume of new buildings should be within the range found in existing contributing structures in the immediate neighborhood. The proportion of height to width should also be similar.
5. Roof Shapes: Roof configuration and slope should relate to neighborhood structures.
6. Windows and Doors: The ratio of window and door area to wall area (voids and solids) on elevations visible from public ways should be similar to that found in nearby historic buildings. Similarly, the rhythm, spacing, size and proportion of façade openings, including windows and doors, should relate to those found in the vicinity. Window and door types should be compatible with those in neighboring properties and be appropriate to the style and massing of the building in which they are to be installed.
7. Materials: Building materials should be similar to or compatible with those found in historic buildings in the vicinity of the proposed new construction. Synthetic siding, vinyl-clad windows, or other materials that detract from the character of the Districts are unacceptable.
8. Style: While new construction may reflect the historic character of an area and adapt the forms of existing buildings, a new building or addition need not replicate the appearance of original structures. Roof shapes, porches and windows should be compatible with neighboring buildings.
9. Utilities: Where possible, utilities should be placed underground or to the rear of the building. Utility meters should be installed inside the building or effectively screened from public view.
10. Parking: Parking should be behind or next to the building, not between the building and the street. Driveways and sidewalks should be treated in a similar way to others existing in the neighborhood. Large paved parking areas visible from a public way are discouraged.
11. Fences and Site Work: Site fences and walls should be similar in material and scale to those existing in the district. Cast and wrought iron fences and brownstone retaining walls are usually appropriate. Chain-link (“Page”) and stockade fences and brick walls are usually inappropriate in the Districts. New signage, lighting and landscaping should harmonize with existing. Minor structures such as sheds and mechanical enclosures should relate in material and scale to primary structures.
12. Replication: In case of reconstruction of a property on the site of a demolished contributing resource, it may be acceptable to replicate the

demolished resource. Plans and specifications for such replication shall provide precise details of window and door openings, siding, roof slope, etc.

Section D. SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS:

1. Wooster Square

- a. The neighborhood was originally focused on both Wooster Square and the New Haven Harbor. Today, the defining open space in the District is Wooster Square. New construction on nearby lots should follow precedent with main entries facing the Square.
- b. Walls of continuity are created by common-walled row houses, by the standard setback to which most buildings adhere, and by fences framing the house lots and park. These elements should be recognized and preserved.
- c. Freestanding buildings are usually situated on small lots with small, simply landscaped front yards. Parking areas should be situated behind houses or in separate surface parking lots.
- d. Entry porches are a major focus of visual interest. Variations consist of fairly elaborate porches that frame doorways, colonnaded single-story verandas extending across facades, and two-story porticos.
- e. Decorative cast-iron fences and hedges on yards surrounding the Square are important character-defining elements of the District. These date largely from the mid-19th century and are of various styles. New construction or site work in the vicinity of the Square should include fencing of a type and style compatible with the District and immediate neighbors. Reuse of old fences is particularly encouraged.

2. Quinnipiac River

- a. The Quinnipiac River is considered a public way. Therefore, the relationship to the River of buildings on riverfront lots is as vital as their relationship to the street. The historic development of buildings around the River has created certain patterns and open views, which should be addressed whenever new construction is proposed. The placement of utilities, utility meters, and parking areas should take account of the appearance from the River.

- b. The District is generally characterized by structures of individualistic design on fairly large lots; the placing of identical buildings one after another is not appropriate.
- c. Wood picket fences are popular and usually appropriate. Although chain-link fences proliferated in Fair Haven after 1900, their use is discouraged.

3. City Point

- a. New Haven Harbor and the waterfront that form the southern border of the district are considered to be a public way. Therefore, the relationship to the waterfront of buildings on waterfront lots is as vital as their relationship to the street. The historic development of buildings along the waterfront has created certain patterns and open views that should be addressed whenever new construction is proposed. The placement of utilities, utility meters, and parking areas should take account of the appearance from the waterfront.
- b. The tree-lined streetscapes appear much the same today as they did in the early twentieth century.
- c. Rows of gabled houses are commonly set on deep narrow lots with uniform setbacks.
- d. Welcoming porches that are found on nearly every home present a deep sense of time and place. Most homes still retain their original historic fabric and architectural details even though some porches have been enclosed.
- e. Many distinctive houses found at the waterfront were built by oystermen between 1850 and 1890. Although some buildings have lost their stylistic details all have retained their functional form. Constructed over a high cellar where oysters were stored and processed, the living space is accessed by a steep stairway, often leading to an elevated first floor porch.

SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR'S STANDARDS FOR REHABILITATION:

Revised 1983 and published by the National Park Service

The Secretary of the Interior's Standards are widely accepted guidelines for historic preservation on the federal, state and local levels. Projects must adhere to these standards to be eligible for federal tax credits. The significance or character of a structure is generally regarded as the character it acquired fifty or more years ago, as opposed to more recent changes or additions.

1. Every reasonable effort shall be made to provide a compatible use for a property, which requires minimal alteration of the building structure, or site and its environment, or to use a property for its originally intended purpose.
2. The distinguishing original qualities or character of a building, structure, or site and its environment shall not be destroyed. The removal or alteration of any historic material or distinctive architectural features should be avoided when possible.
3. All buildings, structures, and sites shall be recognized as products of their own time. Alterations that have no historical basis and that seek to create an earlier appearance shall be discouraged.
4. Changes that may have taken place in the course of time are evidence of the historical development of a building, structure, or site and its environment. These changes may have acquired significance in their own right, and this significance shall be recognized and respected.
5. Distinctive stylistic features or examples of skilled craftsmanship, which characterize a building, structure, or site, shall be treated with sensitivity.
6. Deteriorated architectural features shall be repaired rather than replaced, wherever possible. In the event replacement is necessary, the new material should match the material being replaced in composition, design, color, texture, and other visual qualities. Repair or replacement of missing architectural features should be based on accurate duplication of features, substantiated by historic, physical, or pictorial evidence, rather than on conjectural designs or the availability of different architectural elements from other buildings or structures.
7. The surface cleaning of structures shall be undertaken with the gentlest means possible. Sandblasting and other cleaning methods that will damage the historic building materials will not be undertaken.
8. Every reasonable effort shall be made to protect and preserve archeological resources affected by, or adjacent to, any project.
9. Contemporary design for alterations and additions to existing properties shall not be discouraged when such alterations and additions do not destroy significant historical, architectural, or cultural material, and such design is compatible with size, scale, color, material, and character of the property, neighborhood, or environment.
10. Wherever possible, new additions or alterations to structures shall be done in a manner that, if such additions or alterations were to be removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the structures would be unimpaired.

SOURCES FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

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Hommann, Mary. Wooster Square Design, New Haven Redevelopment Agency, 1965.

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