

York, Maine Historic District Commission

Design Guidelines for Historic Districts and Sites July 2005

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Introduction

The specific design guidelines in this booklet are, as their name implies, guidelines intended to encourage appropriate design by applicants and foster predictability in Commission actions. While the Commission has the authority, in its exercise of discretion, to permit applicants to depart from the Guidelines, applicants are encouraged to follow them to the greatest extent possible and should not expect that the Commission will permit applicants to depart from them in most circumstances. The Commission does not anticipate departing from certain of the Guidelines, such as that regarding artificial siding. Further, it should be understood that certain properties, and the specific features of certain properties, may have greater than usual architectural or historic significance.

Purposes of Local Historic Districts

Local historic districts have three purposes:

1. To preserve and protect the distinctive characteristics of buildings and places significant to the history of the Town of York;
2. To maintain and improve the settings of those buildings and places; and
3. To assure that new construction is compatible with existing buildings and their historic relationship to other buildings in their vicinity.

What Changes Are Reviewed

All changes to the exterior of a building that are visible from a public way, park or body of water must be reviewed and approved by the Commission. Such changes include, but are not limited to, replacements and alterations to windows, doors, roofs, building materials, new construction, additions, fences, walls and landscaping. For the purposes of determining visibility, existing and proposed wooden fences and landscaping are considered impermanent and are deemed not to block sight lines from a public way. If there is a question regarding visibility, the final determination will be made by the chair of the Commission or the chair's designee.

What Changes Are Not Reviewed

The Commission does not review paint colors and ordinary like-kind (exact duplicate) repairs and replacements of existing historic fabric. Shutters are exempt from review. However, shutters (and blinds, to use the correct term when they have louvers) are important historical features on a house. They also became important decorative features with the advent of the Colonial Revival style in the late nineteenth century. Property owners are strongly urged to retain wood shutters and blinds, and to have them mounted with hardware as they would if operable. Storm doors and storm windows are

also exempt as easily reversible. Care should be taken not to damage or remove historic trim in their installation.

Design Review Principles

When reviewing individuals applications, the Commission will be guided by the following design principles, which have been adapted from the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties (1995) See www.cr.nps.gov/hps/hli/introguid.htm for entire documentation. This document has long provided a coherent set of standards for historic district commissions, preservationists and architectural historians all over the country:

The historic character of a property should be retained and preserved. The removal of distinctive materials or alteration of features, spaces and spatial relationships that characterize a property should be avoided.

Each property should be recognized as a physical record of its time, place and use. Changes that create a false sense of historical development, such as adding conjectural features or elements from other historic properties, should be avoided.

Changes to a property that have acquired historic significance in their own right should be retained and preserved.

New additions, exterior alterations or related new construction that destroy historic materials, features and spatial relationships that characterize the property should be avoided. New work should be differentiated from the old and should be compatible with the historic materials, features, size, scale, proportion and massing to protect the integrity of the property and its environment.

New additions and adjacent or related new construction, which, if removed in the future, would impair the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment, should be avoided.

General Guidelines

Although the points listed in these General Guidelines are covered in detail in the Specific Design Guidelines that begin on the following page, nine general guidelines are listed here to highlight their importance:

Ornamental and decorative detailing should not be removed.

Deteriorated ornamental, decorative and characteristic architectural features should be repaired, rather than replaced.

No artificial siding should be installed.

Wood windows should be retained.

There should be no new openings on primary façades, except to restore original or pre-existing openings.

Missing architectural features should be documented as authentic by photographic, physical or historical evidence before they are reproduced.

Historic outbuildings, such as barns and automobile garages, should be preserved on their original sites..

New fences should not act as visual barriers from public ways.

Traditional building materials should be used when available.

Specific Guidelines

Walls and Trim

Historic trim and detailing should not be removed.

Replacement wood clapboards or siding should replicate original dimensions and exposure.

Wood shingles should replicate original shingles in exposure and patterns. Wood shingle “shakes”, which convey a rough corrugated appearance, are not historically appropriate for York architecture.

Artificial siding, including, but not limited to, vinyl, aluminum, asphalt, and artificial brick and stone, should not be used.

Awnings should be fabricated of canvas or like-kind material and mounted to be retractable.

Windows

Existing windows should be repaired, not replaced.

If an applicant believes that an existing window cannot be repaired, the applicant’s proposal for replacing window[s] will be reviewed on a window-by-window basis.

If a replacement window is proposed, the material and design of the existing window, including the casing, size, number of panes and type of window, should not be changed, unless the a more historically accurate design can be documented. If the window is not a character-defining feature of a primary façade, the Commission may approve minor changes in the proposed replacement window.

If a replacement window is proposed, it should not have muntin bars greater than 7/8" wide unless otherwise historically documented.

If a window in new construction has insulating glass, it should have (i) permanently applied muntins no wider than 7/8" and (ii) dark colored internal spacer bars, but it should have neither flat muntin grids applied to the inside or outside panes, nor removable muntin grids.

New and replacement windows should not be clad in non-historic materials. Vinyl-clad and metal-framed sash should not be used.

Wood frames should not be metal panned and the dimensions of window openings, jambs and sashes should not be changed.

Stained glass or decorative windows should be retained.

Masonry and Stucco

Unpainted masonry should not be painted.

Sealants should not be applied to masonry as a “maintenance” measure, unless a sealant is necessary to prevent further deterioration of damaged brick and stone.

Re-pointing masonry (sometimes referred to as tuck pointing) should be appropriate in terms of the type, color and aggregate of the mortar to be used and the width and profile of the joint. Joints should not be widened when cutting out old mortar. New mortar should be kept off the face of masonry.

Sandblasting should not be used to clean brick.

Variegated bricks should not be used, unless to match an existing condition.

Stucco should be repaired with a mixture that matches the original as closely as possible. Non-traditional resin based stuccos should not be used.

Roofs, Chimneys and Gutters

Wood shingle roofs are encouraged as historically appropriate, except for fake historic “shakes” with their rough corrugated appearance.

Slate and terra cotta tile roofing should be repaired or replicated in kind, including color, decorative patterns and style. Synthetic slate or tile should not be used.

Rubber membrane roofing should not be used except in minimally visible locations.

Roof trim, such as cornices, fascias and rakeboards, should be maintained.

Historic dormers should not be removed or enlarged. New dormers should be added to unobtrusive locations, such as rear elevations, and should be designed in a scale to match the period of the house.

Skylights should be installed only where minimally visible and a flat low profile in a dark color to blend with the roof.

The height and dimensions of chimneys should be maintained, along with any decorative brickwork patterns.

All decorative metal, such as iron cresting, finials and weathervanes should be retained.

Wood gutters, when an integral part of an ornamental cornice or roof edge design, should be repaired and maintained. Copper gutters, which duplicate the original molding profile of wood gutters, may be considered as a replacement for wood gutters. Aluminum gutters should not be used.

Roof top HVAC and other mechanical elements, including soundproofing elements, should be placed out of view from a public way.

Roof ventilation with a continuous low profile ridge vent extended fully to the ends of the roof is recommended over box ventilators.

Roof decks and enclosures should not be added, unless historically documented.

Doors and Steps; Porches (including sleeping porches and decks)

Existing doors and door openings, including transoms and sidelights, should be repaired, not replaced.

If an applicant concludes that an existing door cannot be repaired or is an inappropriate door, the proposed replacement door should be made of wood and, if glazed with muntin bars, have true divided lights.

Porches and entrance porticos, including ornamental details, should be retained.

Open porches and porticos should not be permanently enclosed or glazed.

Porch and roof railings should be maintained in their historic design, including height.

Sleeping porches should be retained if original or historic additions.

Decks should be located on less visible elevations and should be constructed of wood with painted railings, posts and balusters consistent with the style of the structure. Elevated decks should be furnished with an authentically fabricated lattice or vertical board skirting below the floor.

Exterior HVAC Equipment

When possible, ground units should be located unobtrusively and screened with vegetation and/or fencing (including lattice fences.)

Outbuildings

Outbuildings are integral to the historic character of many York buildings and should be maintained in their original physical relationship to the main building. As important and often rare historic structures, outbuildings are governed by the same guidelines used for principal structures.

Conversions for other uses should respect character-defining features, such as irregular fenestration patterns and large barn or garage door openings.

Fences and Walls

Historic masonry walls and iron fences should be maintained.

New fences and walls should not prevent or restrict views of buildings from a public way. Tall solid fences and walls should not be constructed as noise or headlight barriers. The design of fences should be appropriate in scale and architectural style to the building, its site and the surrounding properties.

New street front fences and the front yard portion of side fences should be open in character so as not to create visual barriers.

New fences and walls running along property lines with street frontage, as well as any section of a side yard lot line fence or wall that is forward of the main body of (i) the applicant's house or outbuilding or (ii) adjacent houses or outbuildings, should not exceed 42 inches in height. Other new fences and walls should not exceed 72 inches in height.

If a new fence or wall is on or within two feet of the front of a retaining wall, then the height of the new fence or wall should be measured from the grade on the lower side of the retaining wall. If a new fence or wall is on or near a retaining wall, then the visual impact of the combined height from the lower side should be taken into account.

Fences running from the side of a building to a side yard fence should not be more than 42 inches high if a higher fence would obscure significant features on the side of the building or site.

Brick walls should use historically appropriate brick. Bricks and mortar joints should be compatible in color, aggregate and joint profile with the building.

Stone walls may be dry laid or set in a mortar that is historically appropriate in color, aggregate and joint profile.

The following should not be used for residential properties: (i) plastic fences, (ii) chain link fences, unless minimally visible, (iii) stockade fences, unless minimally visible and (v) lattice fences, except as a side or rear yard garden element.

Storefronts

Storefronts (i.e., the ground story) have typically been remodeled many times over the years. Historic storefronts should be retained, including later remodeling that have acquired architectural significance as part of the history of the building.

New storefronts should be compatible with the style of the building in design and materials. Unless documented through historic photographs, avoid non-historic “Colonial” features such as small paned windows, pediments and shutters. Similarly, wood shingles, “shakes”, wood, vinyl or aluminum siding and brick or stone veneer treatments should be avoided. Simplicity is usually the best approach in order to avoid having the storefront compete with the design of the upper floors of the façade.

If converting from a commercial to residential use, retain character-defining features such as storefront display windows.

Street Furniture

Street furniture, including benches, lighting, paving, trash receptacles, and planters, should respect the historic character of the urban or rural surroundings of buildings. Generally, historic materials are the most compatible.

Lighting

While lighting is a modern reality and a necessity for traffic safety and security reasons, its use in historic districts should be limited. Lighting should be kept at low levels, discretely designed to harmonize with the structure or landscaping and shielded to prevent glare or overspill of the light off the property.

The style and materials of light fixtures when visible from the public way should be appropriate to the historic character of the district.

Parking

Large expanses of paving are inconsistent with the character of York’s historic districts. Landscaping, such as plantings and/or fencing, should be employed for screening the cars and pavement from public view.

Landscaping

The existing, natural contours and topography of the landscape should be preserved to the fullest extent possible. The preservation of mature trees is strongly encouraged. Native trees, plants and flowers should be given preference over other (exotic) varieties.

Demolition

Structures, including historically significant additions and outbuildings, should not be demolished.

New Construction

The Commission will review all proposed alterations of, and additions to, existing structures and all new construction.

Alterations and additions should be compatible with the character of the building and earlier additions in terms of size, scale, massing, material, location and detail. The original portion of the building and earlier additions should continue to be recognizable apart from the addition by means of massing, articulation of setbacks, trim and ornamental detail. Additions should be designed so that the primary elevations of the original building remain clearly delineated.

New construction should respect the existing historic streetscape. The historic relationship of buildings to the street, including setbacks and open spaces, should be maintained.

The Commission will consider the appropriateness of the size and shape of the building or structure both in relation to the land area upon which the building or structure is situated and to buildings and structures in the vicinity. The Commission may impose dimensional and setback requirements in addition to those required by the Zoning By-laws.

Please refer to <http://www.yorkmaine.org/Portals/0/article%2012.pdf> for additional information.

Amendments and Severability

The York Historical Commission reserves the right to amend these Guidelines.

If any section of these Guidelines is deemed to be invalid, illegal or unconstitutional, then that section shall be severed from the text, and the remaining sections of these Guidelines shall continue to be in full force and effect.