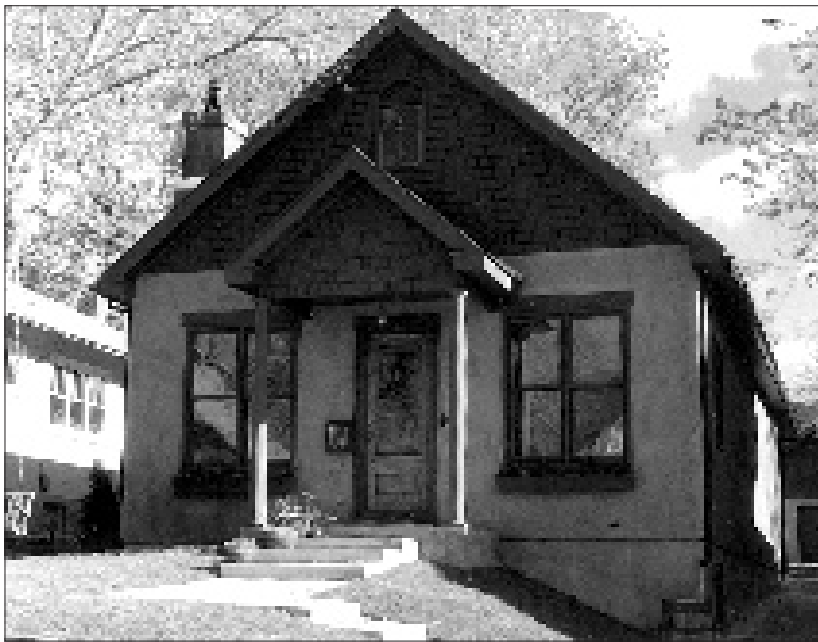


Standards for New Construction in Historic Districts



This house, constructed in 1994, blends in well with the traditional Avenues streetscape because of the fenestration pattern, the roofline and the materials. In addition, the porch complements the design of the house and serves as an important transitional element between the house and the street.

11.0 NEW CONSTRUCTION IN HISTORIC DISTRICTS

These standards apply to the design of new buildings in locally-designated historic districts. They apply in addition to specific district standards provided in chapters that follow later in the book.

Creative solutions that are compatible with the desired character of a historic neighborhood are strongly encouraged, while designs that seek to contrast with the existing context simply for the sake of being different are discouraged. This guidance will help protect the established character of each neighborhood, while also allowing new, compatible design.

DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

Basic approach

Designing a building to fit within a historic district requires careful thought. First, it is important to realize that, while a historic district conveys a certain sense of time and place associated with its history, it also remains dynamic, with alterations to existing structures and construction of new buildings occurring over time.

Designating a district does not freeze it in time, but it does assure that, when new building does occur, it will be in a manner that reinforces the basic visual characteristics of the area. This does not mean, however, that new buildings must look old. In fact, imitating historic styles found in a historic district is generally discouraged; historians prefer to be able to “read” the evolution of the street, discerning the apparent age of each building by its style and method of construction. They do so by interpreting the age of a building, placing its style in relative chronological order. When a new building is designed to imitate a historic style, this ability to interpret the history of the street is confused.

Rather than imitating older buildings, a new design should relate to the *fundamental* characteristics of the district while also conveying the stylistic trends of today. It may do so by drawing upon basic ways of building that make up a part of the character of an individual historic district. Such features upon which to draw include the way in which a building is located on its site, the manner in which it relates to the street and its basic mass, form and materials. When these design variables are arranged in a new building to be similar to those seen traditionally in the area, visual compatibility results.

These basic design relationships are more fundamental than the details of individual architectural styles and, therefore, it is possible to be compatible with the historic context of the district while also producing a design that is distinguishable as being newer than the historic buildings of the area.

NEW CONSTRUCTION IN HISTORIC DISTRICTS, continued...

Some people may be confused about this concept; for many, the initial assumption is that any new building in the historic district should appear to be old. On the contrary, the design standards that follow encourage new buildings that can be distinguished as being of their own time. At the same time, they do promote new building designs that would relate to the more fundamental similarities of the historic district.

Some of the more fundamental design features that would help a building relate to its context in any historic district in the city are described in the section that follows. (More specific concerns about the unique character of each of the local historic district follow in separate chapters.) These are features that should be considered when one is planning new construction in a historic district.

District Street Patterns

Historic settlement patterns seen in street and alley plans often contribute to the distinct character of a historic district and therefore they should be preserved. The details of street layouts may vary for each district and even for sub-areas within an individual district but these are nonetheless very important features that should be respected. These street plans influence the manner in which primary structures are sited and they also shape the manner in which secondary structures and landscape features may occur on the site.

Building Orientation

Traditionally, a typical building had its primary entrances oriented to the street. This helped establish a “pedestrian-friendly” quality, which encouraged walking. In most cases, similar entry ways were evenly spaced along a block, creating a rhythm that also contributed to the sense of visual continuity for a neighborhood. This characteristic should be maintained where it exists. Locating the entrance of a new building in a manner that is similar to those seen traditional is a means of doing so.

Mass and scale

The mass and scale of a building is also an important design issue in a historic district. The traditional scale of single-family houses dominates many of the neighborhoods, and this similarity of scale also enhances the pedestrian-friendly character of many streets. In frequent cases, earlier buildings were smaller than current tastes support; nonetheless, a new building should, to the greatest extent possible, maintain this established scale. While new buildings and additions are anticipated that may be larger than many of the earlier structures, this new construction should not be so dramatically greater in scale than the established context such that the visual continuity of the historic district would be compromised.



This Avenues house was constructed in 1993. The builders rotated the garage so that the doors would not be a dominating streetscape feature, thus maintaining the traditional "pedestrian-friendly" quality of the street.

NEW CONSTRUCTION IN HISTORIC DISTRICTS, continued...

Building Height

A similarity in building heights is also an important factor that contributes to the visual continuity to an individual district. In this context a new building should not overwhelm historic structures in terms of building height, but rather should be within the range of heights found historically in the vicinity. Similarities in heights among prominent building features, such as porches and cornices, are equally important. These features often appear to align along the block and contribute to the sense of visual continuity.

Building Width

In many of the districts, people constructed buildings that were similar in width to nearby structures. This helped to establish a relatively uniform scale for the neighborhood and, when these buildings were evenly spaced along a block, a sense of rhythm resulted. In such a case, the perceived width of a new building should appear similar in size to that of historic buildings in the neighborhood in order to help maintain this sense of visual continuity. For example, if a new building would be wider than those seen historically, should be divided it into modules that appear similar in width to traditional buildings.

Building form

In most districts, a similarity of building forms also contributes to a sense of visual continuity. In order to maintain this sense of visual continuity, a new building should have basic roof and building forms that are similar to those seen traditionally. Overall facade proportions also should be in harmony with the context.

Solid to Void Ratio

In most historic residential districts, a typical building appeared to be a rectangular solid, with small holes “punched” in the walls for windows and doors. Most buildings had relatively similar amounts of glass, resulting in a relatively uniform solid to void ratio. This ratio on a new building, the amount of facade that is devoted to wall surface, as compared to that developed as openings, should be similar to that of historic buildings within the neighborhood.

NEW CONSTRUCTION IN HISTORIC DISTRICTS, continued

Rhythm and spacing of windows and doors

The manner in which openings are distributed across a facade also can be an important feature in a district. When similar distribution patterns occur among buildings in a block, a sense of visual continuity also results. When such characteristics occur, this sense of similarity should be preserved.

The following section presents specific design standards that relate to the design features described above.

STANDARDS FOR NEW CONSTRUCTION IN HISTORIC DISTRICTS

SITE DESIGN STANDARDS

District Street Patterns

11.1 Respect historic settlement patterns.

Site new buildings such that they are arranged on their sites in ways similar to historic buildings in the area. This includes consideration of building setbacks, orientation and open space, all of which are addressed in more detail in the individual district standards.

11.2 Preserve the historic district's street plan.

Most historic parts of the city developed in traditional grid patterns, with the exception of Capitol Hill. In this neighborhood the street system initially followed the steep topography and later a grid system was overlaid with little regard for the slope. Historic street patterns should be maintained. See specific district standards for more detail.

The overall shape of a building can influence one's ability to interpret the town grid. Oddly shaped structures, as opposed to linear forms, would diminish one's perception of the grid, for example. In a similar manner, buildings that are sited at eccentric angles could also weaken the perception of the grid, even if the building itself is rectilinear in shape. Closing streets or alleys and aggregating lots into larger properties would also diminish the perception of the grid.

Building Orientation

11.3 Orient the front of a primary structure to the street.

The building should be oriented parallel to the lot lines, maintaining the traditional grid pattern of the block. An exception is where early developments have introduced curvilinear streets, like Capitol Hill.

These standards apply to all new construction in historic districts. In addition, standards in the General section may apply, as well as relevant standards in the specific historic district.

STANDARDS FOR NEW CONSTRUCTION IN HISTORIC DISTRICTS, continued...

BUILDING SCALE STANDARDS

Mass and Scale

11.4 Construct a new building to reinforce a sense of human scale.

A new building may convey a sense of human scale by employing techniques such as these:

- Using building materials that are of traditional dimensions.
- Providing a one-story porch that is similar to that seen traditionally.
- Using a building mass that is similar in size to those seen traditionally.
- Using a solid-to-void that is similar to that seen traditionally, and using window openings that are similar in size to those seen traditionally.

11.5 Construct a new building to appear similar in scale to the scale that is established in the block.

Subdivide larger masses into smaller “modules” that are similar in size to buildings seen traditionally.

11.6 Design a front elevation to be similar in scale to those seen traditionally in the block.

The front shall include a one-story element, such as a porch. The primary plane of the front should not appear taller than those of typical historic structures in the block. A single wall plane should not exceed the typical maximum facade width in the district.



Appropriate: Design a front elevation to be similar in scale to those seen traditionally in the block.

Height

11.7 Build to heights that appear similar to those found historically in the district.

This is an important standard which should be met in all projects.

11.8 The back side of a building may be taller than the established norm if the change in scale will not be perceived from public ways.

Width

11.9 Design a new building to appear similar in width to that of nearby historic buildings.

If a building would be wider overall than structures seen historically, the facade should be divided into subordinate planes that are similar in width to those of the context.

STANDARDS FOR NEW CONSTRUCTION IN HISTORIC DISTRICTS, continued...***Solid-to-void ratio*****11.10 Use a ratio of wall-to-window (solid to void) that is similar to that found on historic structures in the district.**

Large surfaces of glass are inappropriate in residential structures. Divide large glass surfaces into smaller windows.

BUILDING FORM STANDARDS**11.11 Use building forms that are similar to those seen traditionally on the block.**

Simple rectangular solids are typically appropriate.

11.12 Use roof forms that are similar to those seen traditionally in the block.

Visually, the roof is the single most important element in an overall building form. Gable and hip roofs are appropriate for primary roof forms in most residential areas. Shed roofs are appropriate for some additions. Roof pitches should be 6:12 or greater. Flat roofs should be used only in areas where it is appropriate to the context. They are appropriate for multiple apartment buildings, duplexes, and fourplexes. In commercial areas, a wider variety of roof forms may occur.

Proportion of building facade elements**11.13 Design overall facade proportions to be similar to those of historic buildings in the neighborhood.**

The “overall proportion” is the ratio of the width to height of the building, especially the front facade. See the discussions of individual districts and of typical historic building styles for more details about facade proportions.

Rhythm and spacing**11.14 Keep the proportions of window and door openings similar to those of historic buildings in the area.**

This is an important design standard because these details strongly influence the compatibility of a building within its context. Large expanses of glass, either vertical or horizontal, are generally inappropriate on new buildings in the historic districts.



This building is an example of one approach to new design in a historic district—that of purely contemporary design. This house is reminiscent of the International Style, of which a few examples can be found in the Avenues. It reflects the eclectic architectural development of this neighborhood.



This attached garage is minimized by setting it back several feet from the wall plane of the house.



The proportions of window and door openings should be similar to those of historic buildings in the area.

STANDARDS FOR NEW CONSTRUCTION IN HISTORIC DISTRICTS, continued...

BUILDING DETAILS

Materials

11.15 Use building materials that contribute to the traditional sense of scale of the block.

This will reinforce the sense of visual continuity in the district.

11.16 New materials that are similar in character to traditional materials may be acceptable with appropriate detailing.

Alternative materials should appear similar in scale, proportion, texture and finish to those used historically. They also must have a proven durability in similar locations in this climate. Metal products are allowed for soffits and eaves only.

Architectural Character

11.17 Use building components that are similar in size and shape to those found historically along the street.

These include windows, doors, and porches.

11.18 If they are to be used, design ornamental elements, such as brackets and porches to be in scale with similar historic features.

Thin, fake brackets and strap work applied to the surface of a building are inappropriate uses of these traditional details.

11.19 Contemporary interpretations of traditional details are encouraged.

New designs for window moldings and door surrounds, for example, can provide visual interest while helping to convey the fact that the building is new. Contemporary details for porch railings and columns are other examples. New soffit details and dormer designs also could be used to create interest while expressing a new, compatible style.

11.20 The imitation of older historic styles is discouraged.

One should not replicate historic styles, because this blurs the distinction between old and new buildings, as well as making it more difficult to visually interpret the architectural evolution of the district. Interpretations of historic styles may be considered if they are subtly distinguishable as new.



In new construction, use building components that are similar in size and shape to those found historically along the street.



Contemporary interpretations of traditional details are encouraged in new construction.

STANDARDS FOR NEW CONSTRUCTION IN HISTORIC DISTRICTS, continued...

Windows

11.21 Windows with vertical emphasis are encouraged.

A general rule is that the height of the window should be twice the dimension of the width in most residential contexts. See also the discussions of the character of the relevant historic district and architectural styles.

11.22 Frame windows and doors in materials that appear similar in scale, proportion and character to those used traditionally in the neighborhood.

Double-hung windows with traditional depth and trim are preferred in most districts. (See also the rehabilitation section on windows as well as the discussions of specific historic districts and relevant architectural styles.)

11.23 Windows shall be simple in shape.

Odd window shapes such as octagons, circles, diamonds, etc. are discouraged.



Windows and doors should be framed in materials that appear similar in scale, proportion and character to those used traditionally in the neighborhood.

