

Design Review Guidelines

**Watertown Historic District Commission
Watertown, Massachusetts**

Adopted July 27, 2005

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	3
-------------------	---

Background	3
What Changes Are Reviewed	4
Certificate Process	5
Design Review Principles	6
General Design Guidelines	7
Specific Design Guidelines	8
1.0 Doors	8
2.0 Windows	8
3.0 Shutters	9
4.0 Awnings	9
5.0 Roofs	9
6.0 Dormers	10
7.0 Chimneys	10
8.0 Gutters	10
9.0 Masonry and Stucco	11
10.0 Painting Wood Exteriors	11
11.0 Siding	12
12.0 Steps, Stairways, Railings	12
13.0 Walkways	12
14.0 Stone and Masonry Walls	13
15.0 Fences	13
16.0 Lighting	14
17.0 Light Fixtures	14
18.0 Signs	15
19.0 Fire Escapes	15
20.0 Modern Equipment	16
21.0 Outbuildings	16
22.0 Additions and New Construction	17
23.0 Demolition	18
24.0 Amendments and Severability	18
Application and Instructions - Attachment A	19

Introduction

Watertown has been a significant contributor to our country's political, economic and social history. Evidence of this rich past can be found in the buildings that continue to survive, including those in the Mount Auburn Street Historic District.

The Historic District Commission works with property owners when changes to buildings are being proposed, to ensure that our historic buildings continue to reveal our past, while meeting our present needs and allowing us to plan for the future.

Background

The Mount Auburn Street Historic District was established in accordance with Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 40C, the Historic District Act.

The Act has three purposes:

- 1) To promote public welfare through the preservation and protection of the distinct characteristics of buildings and places of historic or architectural significance;
- 2) To maintain and improve the settings for such buildings and places; and
- 3) To encourage compatible design.

Under Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 40C and Watertown Ordinance 16 of 2002, the Watertown Historic District Commission ("the Commission") is required to review the architectural appropriateness of most proposed exterior changes, whether they be a minor alteration, new additions, or removal of trim or structures. Property owners in an Historic District are required to obtain a certificate from the Commission prior to starting any exterior work on buildings or structures. Please note that, by Town Ordinance, the Building Department cannot issue a building permit for exterior work or demolition without the necessary certificate from the Commission. Anyone contemplating exterior work should contact the Commission and property owners are encouraged to present preliminary plans to individual Commissioners or at informal Commission meetings to better understand Commission requirements.

These Design Guidelines 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 the exercise of its 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. Moreover, it should be understood that certain properties, and the specific features of certain properties, may have greater than usual architectural or historic significance.

What Changes are Reviewed

All alterations (changes) to the exterior of a building that are subject to public view, whether from a public street, a public way, a public park, or a public body of water, must be reviewed and approved by the Commission. Such changes include, but are not limited to, repairs, replacements and alterations to windows, doors, roofs, gutters, building materials, new construction, additions, fences, walls and changes in grade. For the purposes of determining visibility, existing and proposed wooden fences and landscaping are deemed not to block sight lines from public view. If there is a question regarding visibility, the final determination will be made by the Chair of the Commission or the Chair's Designee.

The Commission does not review paint colors and will issue a Certificate of Non-Applicability (defined below) for ordinary like-kind (exact duplicate) repairs and replacements.

While landscaping is generally not subject to review by the Commission, the following are subject to review and approval by the Commission: changes to grade, outside HVAC equipment (excluding window units), and yard structures, including, but not limited to, fences, swimming pools, play houses, etc.

Certificate Process

Before beginning any work on an exterior element of a property or applying for a building permit, an owner of property in the Historic District must submit an application^[1] to the Historic District Commission in order to obtain one of the following three certificates:

Certificate of Non-Applicability: If the Commission or its designee determines that the proposed work is (i) not subject to public view or (ii) is a like-kind replacement of existing conditions, then the Commission will issue a Certificate of Non-Applicability and the applicant may apply for a building permit.

Certificate of Appropriateness: If the Commission determines that the proposed work is not entitled to a Certificate of Non-Applicability and must, therefore, go to the Commission for a hearing, then the applicant will be required to obtain a Certificate of Appropriateness from the Commission to obtain approval of alterations, additions and new construction before obtaining a building permit. For extremely minor work, the Commission may give its tentative approval by issuing a “Ten Day Letter of Approval”. If there are no objections from either abutters or Commissioners to the Ten Day Letter of Approval, the Commission will issue a Certificate of Appropriateness.

Certificate of Hardship: If the Commission determines that the proposed work is not entitled to a Certificate of Non-Applicability and must, therefore, be reviewed by the Commission at a public hearing, then in certain rare cases the Commission may, in its sole discretion, issue a Certificate of Hardship, if failure to approve the application would involve a substantial hardship, or otherwise, to the applicant and the proposed work will not result in a significant detriment to the Historic District.

Design Review Principles

When reviewing individual 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:

A property shall be used for its historic purpose or be placed in a new use that requires minimal change to the defining characteristics of the building and its site and environment.

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.

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

Distinctive features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a property shall be preserved.

Deteriorated historic features shall be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature shall match the old in design, color, texture, and other visual qualities and, where possible, materials.

Replacement of missing features should be substantiated by documentary, physical, or pictorial evidence.

New additions, exterior alterations or related new construction that destroys 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 Design Guidelines

Although the points listed in these General Guidelines are covered in greater 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 and metal casement windows should be retained.

There should be no new openings on visible façades, except to restore original or preexisting openings.

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

Historic carriage barns and automobile garages should be preserved.

New fences should not act as visual barriers.

Traditional building materials should be used.

Synthetic or imitation materials (such as vinyl, and in some cases, aluminum, etc.) are not appropriate and will normally not be approved. As new materials are developed that are indistinguishable from natural or traditional products, the Commission will consider their use on a case-by-case basis.

1.0 Doors

- 1.1 In general, existing original or later appropriate doors visible from a public way should be retained and repaired wherever possible, including fanlights, sidelights, surrounds, canopies, transoms, and other features which the doorway comprises. The original entrance design and arrangement of door openings should be retained. Enlarging or reducing entrance/door openings for the purpose of fitting stock doors (larger or smaller) will not generally be approved.
- 1.2 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.
- 1.3 Original hardware should be maintained, including locks, hinges, door knockers, mail slots, etc.

2.0 Windows

- 2.1 Original or later windows, trim and features should be retained and repaired except in cases when they are beyond repair. The complete replacement of all windows in a building in which only some are in disrepair will not generally be approved. Retrofitting original window sashes with weather-stripping and/or insulated glass is encouraged.
- 2.2 When a determination has been made that the window is beyond repair, the replacement must be based on physical, photographic, or documentary evidence. The replacement window shall be all wood, and of the same dimensions for muntin and frame, same design, and same number of panes as the original or existing window. For new construction, windows should be wood, true divided light. Single-paned, historically accurate, true divided light wood windows are most appropriate, but simulated divided light windows may be considered depending on age, significance, and prominence of structure. Windows with snap-in or removable muntins not supporting glass will not ordinarily be approved. Vinyl, aluminum or metal replacement sash, (including metal-clad or vinyl-clad) are not generally appropriate. No vinyl or clad windows shall replace wood windows. The number of lights within a window (e.g., 6/6, or 2/2) should be consistent with the original units, if present, or with the number of lights historically used in the period. The style of the window should be consistent with the architectural style of the building or addition.
- 2.3 Stained glass or decorative windows should be retained.

3.0 Shutters

- 3.1 If appropriate for the building, existing shutters and hardware shall be retained and repaired whenever possible. Shutter removal requires approval. Where replacement is necessary, new shutters shall match original or be of an appropriate type for the building. Shutters shall be made of wood. Vinyl, aluminum or metal shutters are not permitted.
- 3.2 Shutters should reflect their original use. Their size should be such that they cover the entire window when closed (arched windows should have arched shutters, etc.). Base shutter dimensions on window dimensions. Hang shutters so as to appear operable. The slats should point up when shutters are open, and down when closed over the window.

4.0 Awnings

- 4.1 Awnings may be allowed if appropriate for the style of the building.

5.0 Roofs

- 5.1 The roof shape and slope shall be preserved as integral to the period of the building.
- 5.2 In new construction, harmonious roof pitches are a major consideration. The roof shape, slope, and materials should be appropriate to the style of building or structure.
- 5.3 Slate is an important historical material. Its maintenance and repair is encouraged.
- 5.4 All roofing should be repaired or replicated in kind, including decorative patterns and style.
- 5.5 All decorative metal, such as iron cresting, finials and weathervanes should be retained.
- 5.6 Roof top HVAC and other mechanical elements, including soundproofing elements, should be placed out of view.
- 5.7 Skylights should be placed out of view. Skylights, if approved, should be minimized in both number and size. In no case will a “bubble-type” skylight be approved.

6.0 Dormers

6.1 Dormers are an important element contributing to the total architectural look and style of the structure. Changes should be undertaken carefully. Dormers that were part of the original design should not be altered in scale or form. New dormers should match existing ones and should correspond in style with the architectural features of the building. Dormers should be small in scale, and facades visible from the public way should not appear as though an additional story has been added. The original proportions of the roof should be retained.

7.0 Chimneys

7.1 Chimneys are distinctive roof features and should be retained in most cases. Chimneys should not be altered, shortened, or removed, but rather, repaired as necessary. Even if an interior fireplace is to be removed, every effort should be made to retain the existing exterior stack. Bricks and mortar should match the existing materials. Details of chimney work, to scale, and samples of brick and mortar must be submitted. The retention of original historic brick materials is encouraged.

8.0 Gutters

- 8.1 The preference is to replace like with like, such as wood gutters with wood. However, if gutters are being replaced it is preferred that the gutters be replaced with the material that would have been present when the structure was first built.
- 8.2 Gutters may be of wood, copper, painted aluminum, or galvanized steel. Unpainted mill-finished aluminum is generally not appropriate for flashing, gutters and downspouts.
- 8.3 In older buildings, gutters were often designed as part of the eave profile. In these cases, the gutters become a particularly important architectural feature and should be repaired whenever possible; if they are beyond repair, they should be replaced with like materials and design. Hung gutters (those not designed as part of the eave) should be as unobtrusive as possible. Downspouts should not obstruct the view of the structure's corner wall elements.

9.0 Masonry and Stucco

- 9.1 Original masonry and mortar should be retained, wherever possible, without the application of any surface treatment. Old mortar should be duplicated in composition, color, and texture. New mortar should reproduce original in joint profile and size.
- 9.2 Care must be taken in repointing to match the existing joint width and to avoid overcutting of the joints. Joints should not be overfilled with mortar onto the face of brick.
- 9.3 Replacement brick and mortar should be carefully matched in size and color to the originals, and follow traditional brick coursing if visible from a public way.
- 9.4 Foundations should be repaired or extended with the materials of the existing foundation.
- 9.5 Existing stucco should be repaired with stucco mixture that duplicates the original in appearance, i.e., color and texture.
- 9.6 The applicant will be required to provide a sample of proposed masonry materials.
- 9.7 Sandblasting should not be used to clean brick because of the resulting “pitting” of the brick surface and potential other damage. Gentler cleaning methods shall be used.

10.0 Painting Wood Exteriors

- 10.1 A public hearing before the Commission is not required to repaint a wooden building or structure. We encourage you to consider color and finish compatibility with adjacent structures in choosing your colors and finish to promote visual harmony of the streetscape.

11.0 Siding

- 11.1 Appropriate siding materials are clapboard, brick, stucco, and on certain historical styles, wood shingles.
- 11.2 Original siding material should be retained whenever possible and deteriorated material repaired or replaced with new material that duplicates the original as closely as possible.
- 11.3 The removal of non-original siding materials, trim and imitation wood clapboards such as vinyl and aluminum is encouraged.
- 11.4 Artificial siding, including, but not limited to, vinyl, aluminum, asphalt, and artificial brick and stone, are not appropriate in the historic district.
- 11.5 Trim and detailing should not be removed.
- 11.6 Replacement wood siding or shingles should replicate the materials, dimensions, detailing and patterns of the original.

12.0 Steps, Stairways, Railings

- 12.1 Steps, stairways and railings are important features of entryways and porches. Where possible, original features and detailing should be retained or repaired in the same design and material. When existing features are not original, replacement design and materials should be appropriate to the style of the building.
- 12.2 Deteriorated or missing elements and decorative ornamentation shall be replaced with materials and elements to match original, or be appropriate to the original.
- 12.3 Stonework may be repaired, replaced or extended using the existing type of stone or brick. New work should be appropriate to the period and character of the building.
- 12.4 Railings may be wood or wrought iron. A drawing of railing design must be provided.

13.0 Walkways

- 13.1 The Commission recommends that brick, stone, gravel, plain concrete or exposed aggregate concrete are appropriate materials in most cases for walkways. Asphalt is discouraged and concrete and asphalt made to simulate other material is not acceptable. Although walkways at grade level do not require a public hearing, the Commission encourages you to follow the guidelines set forth above.

14.0 Stone and Masonry Walls

- 14.1 Stone and masonry walls are distinctive features of historic homes and should be maintained.
- 14.2 The design of new walls, including retaining walls, should be appropriate in scale, architectural style, and material, to the building, its site, and the surrounding properties. Walls should not prevent or restrict public views of buildings. Brick walls should use historically appropriate brick. Bricks and mortar joints should be compatible with the building in color, aggregate and joint profile. Stone walls may be dry laid or set in a mortar that is historically appropriate in color, aggregate and joint profile.

15.0 Fences

- 15.1 Architecturally significant fences should be maintained and repaired or restored whenever possible. Iron fences, and original ornate wooden fences should be maintained. Traditional materials (wood, cast or wrought iron, granite and stone) are recommended.
- 15.2 The following are not appropriate in the historic district when visible from a public way: (i) plastic or vinyl fences, (ii) chain link fences, (iii) split rail fences, (iv) stockade fences, (v) lattice fences, except as a side or rear yard garden element.
- 15.3 The design of fences should be appropriate in scale and architectural style to the building, its site, and the surrounding properties. New fences should not prevent or restrict public views of buildings.
- 15.4 Fences, which are subject to review and must have a Certificate of Appropriateness to be erected, should not obscure the view of the house from the street. New front fences and the front yard portion of side fences should be open in character so as not to create visual barriers.
- 15.5 When a fence is proposed in front of a building, it should be open and low so as not to block the public view. Fences should be compatible with the existing building in material, proportion, style and historic period and should enhance the streetscape.
- 15.6 More solid, taller fences may be appropriate to provide privacy or safety but should be located where they have minimal visual impact from public streets, ways or places.
- 15.7 Where privacy is an issue, we suggest a “living” fence or hedge. Plantings are not subject to review by the Commission.

16.0 Lighting

- 16.1 All lighting and lighting fixture changes visible from a public street, way or place are subject to review, including but not limited to:

- a) Lighting fixtures as an appurtenance to the structure (such as on a building exterior, porch, deck, pathway, driveway, post, and any area visible to the public), as elements of the landscape, and elements of architectural ornamentation;
 - b) Quality of illumination on the site and on building exteriors;
 - c) The intensity and distribution of light is also taken into account, particularly as it affects neighboring properties and the ambience of the district; and
 - d) Illumination of signs.
- 16.2 Any lighting plan and its total effect on the property should be carefully considered. Give thought to the task or activity that requires illumination and to the minimum amount of light needed.
- 16.3 Up-lighting, such as for facades, signs, fountains, and landscaping, are generally not appropriate.
- 16.4 Lighting of entire building facades is limited to special cases of buildings that are considered community landmarks. Lighting of the landscape or “wash” lighting of buildings or trees is not permitted. Planned “on-all-night” lighting is not appropriate in the historic district.

17.0 Light Fixtures

- 17.1 Original light fixtures, where they survive, can be important and rare architectural features, contributing significantly to the structure’s historic resource value. For this reason, original or later appropriate light fixtures should be retained, and if possible, repaired using recognized preservation methods. Deteriorated or missing elements should be replaced, if possible, with like materials. Replacement should be based, if possible, on physical or documentary evidence.
- 17.2 New light fixtures should be of a design and scale that is appropriate to the style and period of the building rather than imitate styles earlier than the building or structure. Historical style lighting fixtures may appear appropriate in the daylight, but many of these authentic-looking fixtures are among the worst in creating nighttime glare from their unshielded lamps or bulbs.

- 17.3 Lamps (light bulbs), in general, should be fully shielded inside the fixture so that the lamp is not visible from adjacent buildings, pedestrians, and motorists. It may be appropriate in some cases to have a low lumen lamp (25 watts incandescent) as an alternative. Many historic-style (non-original) fixtures can be easily altered to shield the lamp. In the best case, light is ordinarily directed below the horizontal plane of the fixture (typically referred to as a “full cut-off” fixture). Light should be maintained on the property, not spilling beyond the bounds of the property line.

18.0 Signs

- 18.1 New and additional signs are subject to review by the Commission. The basic design, color, size and scale of a sign will be reviewed to determine whether it integrates with the architectural character of a building and the streetscape. Wooden signs are appropriate in the historic districts. Synthetic signs are generally not appropriate. Sign lighting is rarely appropriate. If proposed, the lighting should be in keeping with the style of the sign and appropriate to the business it represents. Lighting should illuminate the sign with as little spillage as possible.
- 18.2 Signage for commercial properties is also subject to review by the Commission in addition to any other permitting requirements.

19.0 Fire Escapes

- 19.1 Fire escapes should be designed and constructed with the same attention required for other major alterations. The Commission recommends that to the extent possible, fire escapes be placed where least visible from a public way, and as necessary, landscaping be added for screening purposes.

20.0 Modern Equipment

- 20.1 Modern equipment includes utility and other mechanical equipment located outside a building and visible from a public way, including but not limited to, antennas, cellular towers, satellite dishes, propane and other tanks, dumpsters, utility meters, alarm systems, HVAC equipment (including but not limited to air conditioners, heating units, ducts, fans, and solar collectors) and associated mounting devices, strapping, fasteners, cables, and related equipment.
- 20.2 Modern equipment should, in general, be as small and inconspicuous as possible.
- 20.3 All modern equipment should be installed in locations which (a) create the least disturbance to the historical appearance of the building, (b) involve the least additional structural alterations, and (c) are screened, hidden or otherwise shielded from view to the extent possible.
- 20.4 Modern equipment placed on the ground should be sited in the rear of the building and may be screened by vegetation, walls or fences. Front yard locations are strongly discouraged. If modern equipment is mounted on a roof, it should be located behind chimneys, sloped roofs and parapets or placed in the central portion of flat roofs behind sight lines as seen from ground level or other portions of the roof not visible from any public way. Flues and vents should be concealed in chimneys or cupolas. Electrical wires and other cables should be run inside the building, underground, or along the foundation.
- 20.5 Modern equipment should be painted to blend in with the building and surroundings, when possible.
- 20.6 Utilities should be underground, where possible.
- 20.7 Seasonal air-conditioning units do not require a Certificate of Appropriateness, but the Commission encourages discreet placement at the rear or sides of the building.
- 20.9 Applications to the Commission for approval of modern equipment shall specify the location, dimensions, and describe outward appearance of all such equipment.

21.0 Outbuildings

- 21.1 Outbuildings, including but not limited to garages, sheds, greenhouses, gazebos and swimming pools, are subject to approval if they are visible from a public way or place. Visually filling the lot from side to side with house and outbuildings detracts from the landscape component of the historic streetscape, and is not appropriate. The Commission will consider size, scale and placement of the outbuilding(s) itself, as well as its/their relation to the lot size and other structures on the lot and adjacent and nearby lots.

22.0 Additions and New Construction

- 22.1 The Commission will review all proposed alterations of, and additions to, existing structures and all new construction.
- 22.2 The Commission will consider the appropriateness of the size, massing, scale, height, 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 set-back requirements in addition to those required by Watertown's Zoning Ordinance.
- 22.3 Individual features such as doors and windows should be compatible in proportion, size, shape, location, and pattern with similar features on other contributing structures in the District.

Additions

- 22.4 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.
- 22.5 New additions should be designed in a manner that makes clear what is historic and what is new. The original portion of the building and additions should continue to be recognizable. Additions should be designed so that the character of the existing building is not radically changed, obscured, damaged, destroyed, or rendered subordinate to the addition. Additions should be subservient to the original structure; be differentiated from the existing building (i.e., set back from the existing wall plane); not obstruct the visual integrity of the original structure; be in harmony with the original in size, scale, style and materials; and be located where least visible from public view. The streetscape should also be considered in the design of additions.

New Construction

- 22.6 New construction should respect the existing historic streetscape. The historic relationship of buildings to the street and to other properties in the District, including setbacks and open spaces, should be maintained.
- 22.7 The style of architecture, materials, the composition and the architectural details of new construction will be reviewed by the Commission.

23.0 Demolition

- 23.1 There is a presumption in favor of retaining all existing buildings and structures. Demolition or removal of a building or structure located in the Historic District (whether or not the structure is subject to public view) requires approval from the Commission prior to the issuance of a demolition permit. The Commission will consider approval only if the building or structure to be demolished has no historic or architectural merit or historic relationship to the Historic District. Removal and relocation shall be considered only as an alternative to demolition.
- 23.2 If an application for a demolition permit is based upon structural instability or deterioration, the applicant shall provide a technical report prepared by an architect or engineer registered in Massachusetts detailing the nature and extent of the problems and a reasonably adequate estimate of the cost to correct them.
- 23.3 Where a new building or structure will replace a building or structure to be demolished or removed, approval of the new structure by the Commission is required as a condition to demolition approval. In addition to the plans and specifications ordinarily required for a new building or structure, the applicant shall submit a timetable and such other guarantees and assurances for the completion and replacement of the building or structure as the Commission may require.

24.0 Amendments and Severability

- 24.1 The Commission reserves the right to amend these Guidelines.
- 24.2 If any part of these guidelines is deemed to be invalid, illegal or unconstitutional, then that part shall be severed from the text and the remaining section of the Guidelines shall continue to be in full force and effect.

^[1] A blank application and instructions are included on page 19 as Attachment A.