Design Review Guidelines

Historic Preservation Commission
Decatur, Alabama

Revised 21 August 2001

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Note: These guidelines were originally developed by the Decatur Historic Preservation Commission and Thomason and Associates. This edition has been substantially rewritten and illustrations have been added.

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Introduction

The Albany Heritage and Bank Street/Old Decatur Historic Districts are composed of several hundred frame and brick residences constructed prior to 1951. Both historic districts share similar architectural styles, historic detailing and streetscape features. The following design guidelines are based upon an analysis of each district's character and are specifically designed for these historic districts in Decatur. The guidelines are designed to assist in the protection and enhancement of Decatur's historic residential areas.

Historic Districts

Decatur's Historic districts have both been listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The National Park Service maintains the National Register as this country's official listing of places that are significant in American history and architecture.

Within each district, buildings can be classified as follows:

> *Contributing* - Contributing buildings are those which contribute to the district's overall historic character and that were constructed during the district's period of significance. Contributing buildings also retain integrity. A building has *integrity* if it retains sufficient historic fabric and features to continue to reflect the overall character it had during its period of significance.
>
> *Noncontributing* - Noncontributing buildings are buildings that do not contribute to the district's overall historic character. Typically, these buildings were either constructed after the end of the district's period of significance or are earlier buildings that have lost integrity through alterations.

Noncontributing properties can be either *compatible* with or *intrusive* to the character of the district in terms of scale, massing, materials and other architectural characteristics. The goal of projects involving compatible noncontributing buildings should be to retain those features that are consistent with the historic character of the neighborhood. When working with intrusive buildings, the goal should be to make the building compatible.

Decatur's historic districts contain historic buildings of varying styles and forms. When planning to rehabilitate or maintain a house in the district, work should be appropriate to its particular style or period and should respect the scale and character of the building and its neighbors.

Planning a Project

Since the overall intent of these guidelines is to maintain the character of the historic districts, it is essential that planning for all rehabilitation and maintenance work consider the impact of the work on the character of the building and its neighbors.

Understand the Style and Period of the Building. Numerous historic architectural styles and periods are found within the district. Since each has its own particular features, it is essential to understand the style of a particular building and the features that are appropriate to that style. In many cases, features that are appropriate for one style may not be appropriate for another. For more information about the architectural styles found within the district, please refer to A Field Guideto American Houses by Virginia and Lee McAlester.

Be Familiar With the Building's History. Most historic buildings have seen some degree of change over time. Some of these changes may be significant in their own right. Being familiar with the history of the building can help answer questions about appropriate rehabilitation and maintenance strategies.

Important Definitions

Adaptive Use: Adapting a building to a different use than that for which it was built or has historically been used.

Alteration: Any act or process that changes one or more of the exterior architectural features of a building, including but not limited to the erection, construction, reconstruction or removal of any building.

Appropriate: A proposed activity is consistent with the guidelines.

Certificate of Appropriateness. A document evidencing approval by the Historic Preservation Commission of an application to make a material change in the exterior appearance of a designated historic property or of a property located within a designated historic district.

Inappropriate: A proposed activity is not consistent with the guidelines and may result in the Historic Commission withholding a Certificate of Appropriateness.

Preservation: To sustain the existing form, integrity, and material of a building or structure.

Primary Elevation: An elevation of a building that faces either a front or side street or that is otherwise prominently visible from public vantages within the district.

Recommended: A proposed activity is recommended but is not required.

Rehabilitation: Returning a property to a state of utility through repair or alteration which makes possible an efficient contemporary use while preserving those portions or features of a property which are significant to its historical, architectural, and cultural values.

Restoration: Accurately recovering the form and details of a building and its setting as it appeared at a particular period of time by means of the removal of later work or by the replacement of missing earlier work to match documented conditions.

Secondary Elevation: An elevation of a building that faces a rear or side yard or that is otherwise not prominently visible from public vantages of or within the district.

Stabilization: To reestablish a weather resistant enclosure and the structural stability of an unsafe or deteriorated property while maintaining its essential form as it exists at present.

Please Note: The city ordinance that established the historic district contains additional definitions pertaining to the administration of the ordinance.

Additional Information

These guidelines reference other publications that may be useful in providing additional background information and explanation. *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and Illustrated Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings* and the National Park Service's *Preservation Briefs* series are available for review on the internet at the addresses listed below. They are also available for purchase from the National Park Service.

Secretary of the Interior's Standards: http://www2.cr.nps.gov/tps/tax/rhb/index.htm
Preservation Briefs: http://www2.cr.nps.gov/tps/briefs/presbhom.htm

Historic Conditions

While these guidelines are based on extensive documentation of the district and its resources, the wide variety of historic styles and building practices found throughout the city resulted in a rich collection of architectural details and features. The availability of accurate historical documentation should typically take preference in the application of these Guidelines to individual building projects.

Noncontributing Buildings/New Construction

The general provisions of the guidelines apply to the rehabilitation of existing noncontributing buildings and to new construction unless otherwise stated.

The Secretary of the Interior's Standards

The Secretary of the Interior's Standards form the basis for Decatur's Design Guidelines. *The Standards* were developed by the National Park Service and are generally accepted nationwide as standards for the rehabilitation of historic buildings. The basic purpose of the *Standards* is to maintain the primary character-defining elements of a building by: recommending that distinctive features be retained and repaired rather than replaced, historic alterations be respected, and, where new additions or other alterations are required, they be made in such a way as to be reversible in the future. The Standards generally do not require the restoration of missing elements; rather, they are designed to allow for changes that are needed to adapt a building to a new function.

Standard #1: 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.

Standard #2: The historic character of a property shall be retained and preserved. The removal of historic materials or alteration of features and spaces that characterize a property shall be avoided.

Standard #3: Each property shall 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 architectural elements from other buildings, shall not be undertaken.

Standard #4 Most properties change over time; those changes that have acquired historic significance in their own right shall be retained and preserved.

Standard #5 Distinctive features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a historic property shall be preserved.

Standard #6 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 shall be substantiated by documentary, physical, or pictorial evidence.

Standard #7 Chemical or physical treatments, such as sandblasting, that cause damage to historic materials shall not be used. The surface cleaning of structures, if appropriate, shall be undertaken using the gentlest means possible.

Standard #8 Significant archeological resources affected by a project shall be protected and preserved. If such resources must be disturbed, mitigation measures shall be undertaken.

Standard #9 New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction shall not destroy historic materials that characterize the property. The new work shall be differentiated from the old and shall be compatible with the massing, size, scale, and architectural features to protect the historic integrity of the property and its environment.

Standard #10 New additions and adjacent or related new construction shall be undertaken in such a manner that if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment would be unimpaired.

For a more detailed description of the *Standards* and how to apply them, please see *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and Illustrated Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Building*s (Washington D.C.: U.S. Department of the Interior, 1992). Additional information can be found on the internet at the following National Park Service websites:

http://www2.cr.nps.gov/tps/tax/rhb/index.htm
http://www2.cr.nps.gov/tps/index.htm

1. Exterior Siding

HPC Policy and Recommendations

The majority of buildings within the district are of frame construction. Wood siding or shingles are the most common exterior wall materials, although some have been altered by the application of artificial sidings.

1. Retain Original Materials. Original exterior siding, shingles, banding and/or cornerboards should not be removed unless it is demonstrated that replacement is necessary.

2. Repairs. All repairs should match the original work in material, color, texture, workmanship and character.

3. Painting. Please refer to section 8.

4 Replacement Materials. Where the replacement of exterior siding, shingles, banding and/or cornerboards is necessary, the replacements should match the historic conditions in design, material and workmanship.

5 Synthetic Siding. The historic visual character of wood sidings are defined by the profile of the material, the reveals and shadow lines they create, the surface texture of the material and the expression of the craftsmanship of the installer (nailing patterns, etc.). Applied synthetic sidings, such as vinyl or aluminum, change the visual character of a building and can conceal underlying problems (such as moisture penetration, decay and insect infestation). Likewise replacement of traditional siding with and composition board (wood fiber, cementious, etc.) or plywood type materials changes the visual character of a building. Therefore the application of synthetic sidings to historic buildings within the district is not permitted. Owners are encouraged to remove synthetic sidings where they exist and to restore the historic siding. Synthetic siding may be appropriate for use on ancillary buildings and for other new construction that is not readily visible from the street. Likewise, the use of other artificial siding products, such as boards composed of wood or cementious fibers, is not recommended but may be appropriate for new construction, ancillary buildings and additions to historic buildings that are not readily visible from the street. Such materials should generally match the visual character of traditional wood sidings found win the district.

For additional information, please see the following Preservation Briefs: #06 Dangers of Abrasive Cleaning to Historic Buildings; 08: Aluminum and Vinyl Siding on Historic Buildings: The Appropriateness of Substitute Materials for Resurfacing Historic Wood Frame Buildings; and #16: The Use of Substitute Materials on Historic Building Exteriors.

Special Considerations for Noncontributing Resources: Synthetic materials are generally not appropriate for primary elevations of noncontributing resources. Synthetic materials may be appropriate if used to replace previously existing nonhistoric materials and if the proposed replacement represents a closer visual approximation of historic materials that what is existing.

Left: Note the use of wood shingles and wood weatherboards on this Victorian style house. *Center:* Note the use of wood shingles on this bungalow. *Right:* Note the use of wood cut to simulate stone on this Victorian house.

Note: Many important visual characteristics can be lost through the application of synthetic siding including the width, shadow lines, nailing patterns and other features that define the character of historic siding materials.

Note: The application of synthetic siding materials can often conceal deterioration that is occurring to underlying conditions. By the time evidence begins to appear considerable damage may have already occurred.

2. Masonry

HPC Policy and Recommendations

Numerous historic buildings within the districts are constructed of brick. The use of concrete or stucco as a building materials is also found much less frequently. Most building foundations are constructed of brick or brick piers with some having been stuccoed.

1. Cleaning. It is recommended that *Preservation Brief #1: Assessing Cleaning and Water-Repellent Treatments for Historic Masonry Buildings* be reviewed prior to undertaking any masonry cleaning. Historic masonry should only be cleaned when necessary to halt deterioration or to remove heavy soiling. Always begin with the gentlest cleaning method possible and begin by cleaning a test patch in an inconspicuous area. The test patch should be observed over a period of time to assess both the immediate and longer term effects of the cleaning. Often a simple garden hose and soft bristle (nonmetallic) brush is sufficient. Low-pressure water cleaning should begin at a pressure of approximately 100 psi and never exceed 300-400 psi. Steam cleaning and the use of non-ionic detergents can also be effective. Chemical cleaning may also be acceptable for the removal of stains or paint. However, caution should be taken to insure that chemical cleaning methods are appropriate for the particular masonry surface. Cleaners such as muriatic acid, caustic soda, or lye should never be used on historic brick surfaces.

   Abrasive (such a sandblasting) or high pressure cleaning methods for masonry should not occur.

2. Details. Masonry details and ornamentation should never be removed or obscured.

3. Repairs. Masonry repair, replacement or repointing should match the original work in material, color, texture, workmanship and character. Repointing with inappropriate mortar can have both visual and physical consequences. The use of mortars with a high Portland Cement content or the use of most ready-mix mortars is inappropriate. Such mortars are typically harder than the surrounding masonry or stone materials and can result in considerable damage over time. Please refer to *Preservation Brief #2: Repointing Mortar Joints in Historic Masonry Buildings* prior to undertaking any repairs to historic masonry or stonework.

4. Do Not Cover. Masonry walls should never be covered with artificial stone surfaces, synthetic (metal, vinyl, etc.) siding, stucco or any other type of applied siding.

5. Painting. The painting of masonry which has not been previously painted is not appropriate. When repainting masonry that has previously been painted, care should be taken to prepare the surfaces for new finishes in a manner that does not damage the underlying material. Nonhistoric paint finishes that have been applied to historic

> *Inappropriate cleaning and coating treatments are a major cause of damage to historic masonry buildings. While either or both treatments may be appropriate in some cases, they can be very destructive to historic masonry if they are not selected carefully. Historic masonry, as considered here, includes stone, brick, architectural terra cotta, cast stone, concrete and concrete block. It is frequently cleaned because cleaning is equated with improvement. Cleaning may sometimes be followed by the application of a water-repellent coating. However, unless these procedures are carried out under the guidance and supervision of an architectural conservator, they may result in irrevocable damage to the historic resource.*
>
> **Preservation Brief #1**
> **Assessing Cleaning and Water-Repellent Treatments for Historic Masonry Buildings**

masonry may be only removed in manner that will not damage the underlying material. Please refer to section 8 for additional information.

6. Sealants. Masonry sealants such as silicone based products or the application of stucco over existing surfaces are typically not appropriate. Please refer to *Preservation Brief #1: Assessing Cleaning and Water-Repellent Treatments for Historic Masonry Buildings* for additional information.

For additional information, please see the following Preservation Briefs: #01 Assessing Cleaning and Water-Repellent Treatments for Historic Masonry Buildings; #02 Repointing Mortar Joints in Historic Masonry Buildings; #06 Dangers of Abrasive Cleaning to Historic Buildings; #15 Preservation of Historic Concrete: Problems and General Approaches; 38: Removing Graffiti from Historic Masonry; and 39: Holding the Line: Controlling Unwanted Moisture in Historic Buildings

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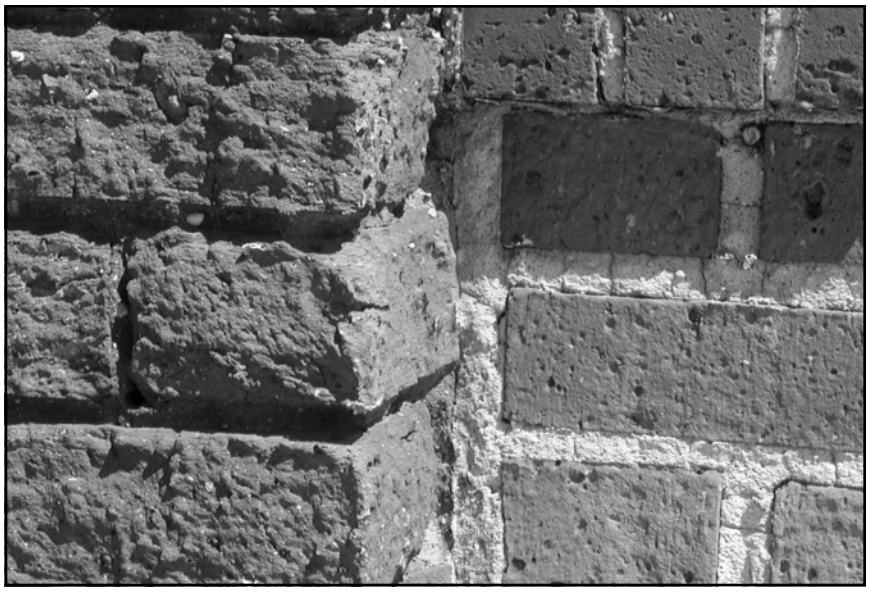
Special Considerations for Noncontributing Resources: The general provisions of this section apply to existing buildings that are noncontributing to the district. Where masonry on such buildings is not visually compatible with the character of masonry typically found on historic buildings within the district (due to color, texture or other visual properties), painting or the application of appropriate materials may be appropriate provide the work is visually compatible with the character of the surrounding neighborhood.



Abrasive cleaning of brick can remove the hard-fired surface coating that protects the brick resulting in accelerating deterioration.

3. Porches

HPC Policy and Recommendations

Over 80 percent of the district's residences have either partial width or full width porches on the main facade. Most porches retain their historic appearance, while a limited number have been altered with wrought iron porch columns, etc..

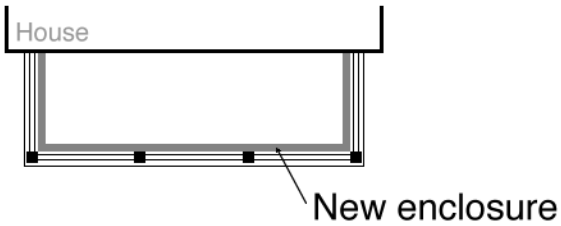
1. General. Original porches should never be removed from a principal elevation.

2. Retain Historic Components. Historic porch columns, railings or other details should be retained and repaired as needed.

3. Replace Missing or Deteriorated Components in Kind. Where porch columns, railings or other details are deteriorated or missing, new components should duplicate the historic components in design and workmanship. In cases where historic components are completely missing, it is recommended that new components match documented historic conditions based on historical documentation (photographs, etc.). If such documentation is not available, components should be chosen that are appropriate to the building and the surrounding neighborhood. Appropriate new and salvaged historic porch components are readily available from several companies in the region or from other national suppliers. The use of wrought iron porch supports, fluted metal columns or other synthetic components that do not replicate historic conditions is not appropriate.

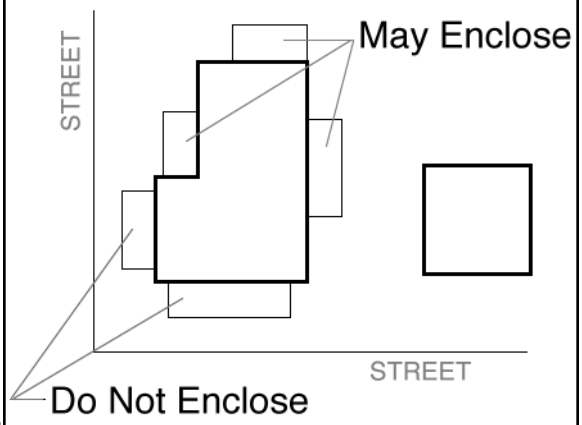
4 Enclosures. Porches on principal elevations or secondary elevations that are readily visible from the street should not be enclosed to create additional living space. When porches are to be enclosed at secondary elevations, remaining historic components such as columns, railings, etc., should be preserved and the enclosure recessed behind them (please see figs. 3.1 and 3.2).

Figure 3.1
Porch Enclosures, Screening and Glazing



Porch enclosures should be recessed behind existing historic porch supports, rails and other framing components.

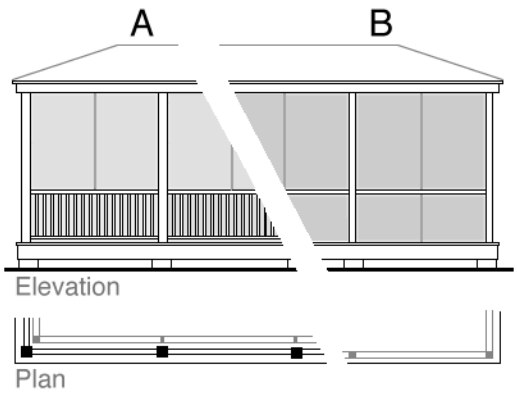
Figure 3.2
Porch Enclosures, Appropriate Locations



Enclosing porches that open onto principal streets is not recommended. Enclosures at secondary locations are acceptable.

5. Screening/Glazing. Porches on principal elevations should not be enclosed with glass. Screening should likewise be avoided at principal elevations. Where glazing or screening is installed, historic components such as columns, railings, etc., should be preserved and the enclosure recessed behind them (please see fig. 3.3). Where this occurs, new framing members should be concealed behind the historic components wherever possible (please see fig. 3.3). Where new framing members must be exposed, they should be of a dark color to help minimize their visual impact. Where screening or glazing occurs at secondary porches that do not retain historic components, new framing should approximate the visual pattern of appropriately-spaced supports and railings (please see fig. 3.3).

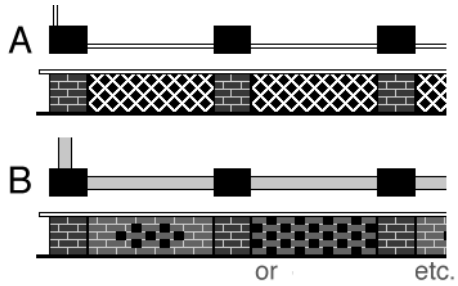
Figure 3.3
Porch Screening and Glazing



A: Where historic porch supports, rails and other framing components remain, recess screening behind existing components and hide framing behind them to the greatest extent possible.

B: Where no historic components remain, new screen or glazing framing should approximate the visual pattern of appropriately-spaced supports and railings.

Figure 3.4
Porch Foundation Infill



A: Lattice is an appropriate infill. It should be recessed slightly from the line of the face of the piers.

B: Brick is an appropriate infill if it is recessed from the line of the face of the piers and provides adequate ventilation.

8. New Porches/Decks. Porches should not be added to principal elevations on buildings which were constructed without porches at these locations. The addition of new porches or decks is allowable on rear elevations which are not readily visible from major streets.

9. Foundation Infill. Wood lattice is recommended for the enclosure of areas beneath most porches. Brick infill is also appropriate if it is recessed from back from the exterior line of the piers and if adequate ventilation is provided (please see Fig. 3.4). Brick patterns in decorative open weaves are appropriate on foundations for new construction.

10. Stairs. Existing historic porch stairs and railings should be retained and repaired as needed. Where porch stairs or railings are later additions or are missing altogether new elements should be based on documentation of historic conditions. Typically, wood stairs are appropriate for the porches of frame residences and brick stairs are appropriate for the porches of brick residences. Where new brick stairs are proposed, they should match the color and texture of the adjacent foundation. Modern pre-cast concrete stairs are not appropriate on primary elevations.

Special Considerations for Noncontributing Resources: The general provisions of this section apply to existing buildings that are noncontributing to the district. Where possible existing porches are not compatible with the overall character building and/or the district should be reworked to be compatible.

4. Entrances

HPC Policy and Recommendations

1. General. Original elements of entrances, including doors, door surrounds, transoms and sidelights should be maintained. Enclosing of transoms and sidelights should not occur.

2. Openings. Door opening should never be reduced, filled in or enlarged on principal elevations. Alterations at secondary elevations are discouraged but allowable if not readily visible from the street.

3. Doors. Original doors should be retained and maintained through continued repair and painting. Deteriorated or missing elements should be replicated in kind with new frame or glass to match the original. Locks and other hardware should be repaired as long as practical. Where retention is not possible, new locks based on historical designs should be considered.

4. Finishes. Historic finishes should be retained. The painting of stained doors should only occur if weathering has been extensive and good results from varnishing can no longer be expected. *Maintenance tips:* Doors which retain their original stained wood finish should be re-varnished periodically to prevent weathering. Recaulking of glass in the doors, sidelights and transoms every several years is recommended for energy conservation.

5. Replacement Doors. If replacement of an historic door on a primary elevation is necessary, it is recommeded that a new door be installed to match the design of the original door. Other appropriate alternatives include: 1) relocation of an original door from the side or rear elevations providing the doors match in appearance; or 2) replacement with an appropriate historic door. Many architectural salvage companies specializing in historic architectural features have and/or antique stores sell appropriate replacement doors. If a historic door is not available, a modern door is appropriate as long as it is compatible with the architectural character of the building. The installation of modern and flush doors, doors with ornate or elaborate metal designs or variations or other designs out of keeping with the character of the house should not occur.

6. Screen/Storm Doors. Screen or storm doors for entrances on primary elevations should be a simple wood design with as much open screen or glass area as possible. Screen or storm door framing should be painted to blend with color of the door and its surround. Likewise, dark anodized aluminum screen or storm doors, or those with factory applied color finishes may be considered if they are finished to blend in with the color of the door and its surround. If horizontal rails and vertical stiles are built into the door, they should be matched with the rail and stile design original door. Screen or storm doors on secondary elevations may have metal frames is so desired. Raw or unpainted aluminum frames should be primed and painted to match the surrounding trim.

7. Security Doors. Exterior metal security doors should not be added to entrances on primary elevations.

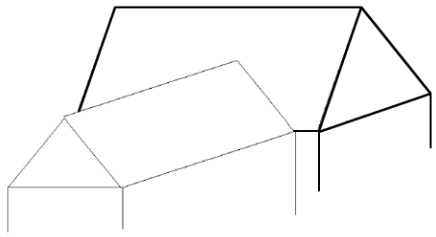
5. Roofs

HPC Policy and Recommendations

The majority of residences have gable or hipped roof forms or a combination of the two. Many roofs no longer retain their original roof materials and having been replaced with asphalt or composition roofs. Surviving historic roofing includes pressed metals shingle, standing seam metal, clay tile and slate.

1. Form. Historic roof forms should be retained intact at principal elevations. Where additions are considered at secondary elevations, the roof form should be similar to those of the building and should be constructed in such a manner as to not obscure the overall form of the historic roof (please see Fig. 5.1).

Figure 5.1
Roof Form



Roof forms for additions should be compatible with the historic roof and should be visually secondary to the principal roof.

2. Historic Materials. Historic roof materials, such as metal standing seam, pressed metal shingles cement asbestos shingles or slate, should be retained, maintained and repaired where necessary. A variety of products are currently available that can extend the useful life of metal roofing. If it can be demonstrated that roof surfaces are deteriorated beyond the point of reasonable repair, replacement is appropriate. Replacement materials should approximate the visual characteristics of the historic roofing to the greatest extent possible.

3. Replacement Materials.

   Composition Shingles. The application of composition shingles to replace deteriorated composition roofs is acceptable. Where documentation of original or historic roofing is not available, dark colors, including dark red, black and dark greens are recommended. Where documentation indicates that a building historically had wood shingle roofing, the use of a textured "architectural" grade composition shingles in a light gray or silver-gray color is appropriate. Where documentation indicates that a building historically had slate roofing, the use of a textured "architectural" grade composition shingles in a medium or dark gray or black color is appropriate. The use of patterned composition shingles based on historic patterns is appropriate (Please see Fig. 5.7).

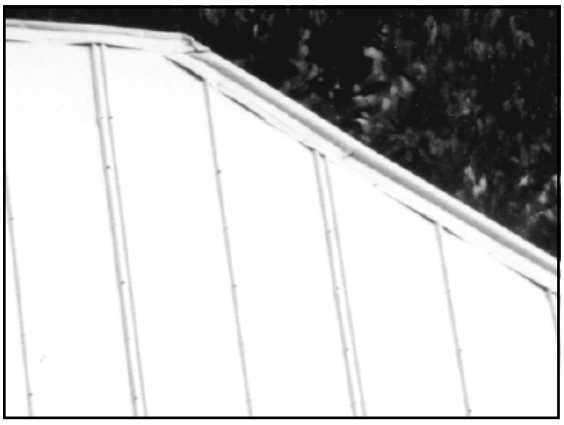
   Wood Shingles. Wood shingles or modern imitation wood shingles are typically not appropriate for buildings constructed after 1915 unless documentation for their original application exists.

   Metal Roofing. Metal standing seam or patterned metal roofs are typically not appropriate for buildings constructed after 1915 unless documentation for their original application exists [is this based on documentation?]. The use of modern factory-finished metal roofing systems is typically inappropriate, but may be considered where pan-width, ridge details, seam profile and eave details can be modified to approximate the appearance of traditional standing seam roofing (please see Fig. 5.3).The use of "V-crimped" or corrugated metal roofing is also typically not appropriate for residential buildings but may be considered for small-scale ancillary structures that are not readily visible from the street.

Membrane or Built-up Roofing. Modern membrane and built-up roofing is appropriate for flat roofs. Membrane systems may also be appropriate for use on low-pitched roofs at secondary elevations but should be either gray or red in color.

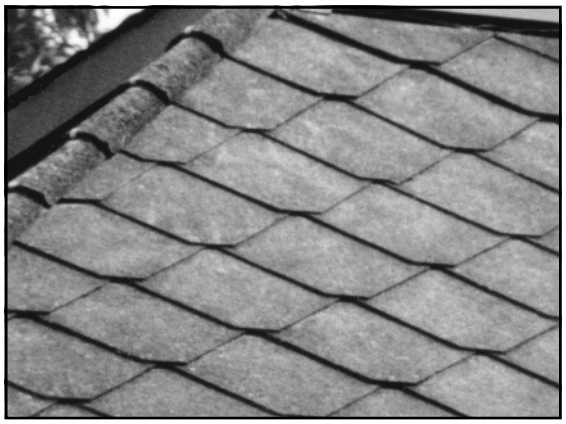
5.2 Note how the ridge and eave details on this traditional standing seam metal roof have been folded down and how the pattern created results in a softer visual character.

5.3 Note how the heavier ridge details and strong angular lines of this modern metal roof contrast with the softer appearance of the traditional roof.



5.4 V-crimp metal roofing like this and other similar roofing (including corrugated) are not appropriate for most buildings in the district.

5.5 Patterned metal roofing like this can still be purchased today.



5.6 Patterned asphalt roofing similar to this can also still be purchased today and is an appropriate alternative to shingles on many buildings.

3. Dormers. Original dormers should be retained and repaired as needed. New dormers should only be considered at secondary elevations that are minimally visible from the street. Where new dormers are added, their design should be compatible with the historic character of the building in terms of scale, design and materials.

4. Other Roof Features. Roof ornamentation such as finials and balustrades should be retained and repaired as needed.

5. Gutters. Historic gutters, box gutters, leaders and downspouts should be retained and maintained. The use of half-round gutters and round downspouts is recommended at all principal elevations. The use of architectural gutters and rectangular downspouts is discouraged at all but secondary elevations not readily visible from the street unless documentation exists of their historic use on the subject building. Gutters and downspouts should be painted to match the adjacent exterior house color.

6. Eaves & Soffits. Historic eave and soffits should be retained and repaired as needed to match adjacent historic conditions. Synthetic materials should not be applied and historic design features such as exposed rafter ends, moldings, etc. should be retained.

7. Skylights. Skylights may be allowable if they will not be readily visible from a principal street. In such cases, the use of low-profile flat skylights is recommended.

8. Antennas. Antennas should be located so as to be minimally visible from the street.

For additional information, please see the following Preservation Briefs: 04: Roofing for Historic Buildings; 19: The Repair and Replacement of Historic Wooden Shingle Roofs; 29: The Repair, Replacement, and Maintenance of Historic Slate Roofs; and 30: The Preservation and Repair of Historic Clay Tile Roofs .

6. Chimneys

HPC Policy and Recommendations

1. General. Historic chimneys should be retained. Repairs should be accomplished to match adjacent historic conditions in design, materials and workmanship. All masonry repairs should match the historic color, texture and composition of the historic masonry and its pointing materials. *Maintenance Tip*: Chimneys should be maintained and inspected regularly for deterioration.

2. New Chimneys. The use of metal chimneys or chimneys clad with wood or materials of similar appearance is not appropriate. The use of stone is only appropriate where its historical use on the building can be documented or where it is compatible with the style of the building. The addition of new chimneys to historic buildings should only occur at secondary elevations that are not readily visible from the street. Such chimneys should be constructed or faced with brick or other appropriate material that are compatible with the historic character of the building. For new construction or additions, it is recommended that chimneys be constructed or faced with brick. The use of stucco may be considered if it is compatible with the overall design of the new construction.

3. Caps. Chimney caps of brick, clay and slate are appropriate for Decatur residences. If they are minimally visible, small scale metal caps finished to approximate the color of the adjacent chimney material may be considered. Large metal caps are not appropriate.

7. Architectural Ornamentation

HPC Policy and Recommendations

Architectural ornamentation, such as gingerbread, moldings, etc., are important character-defining elements of many historic buildings and should be retained.

1. Repair. Architectural ornamentation should be retained and properly maintained. All repairs should match adjacent historic conditions in design, materials, and workmanship.

2. Replacement in Kind. Where architectural ornamentation must be replaced because it is missing or has deteriorated beyond reasonable repair, replacement components should match adjacent or documented historic conditions in design, materials, and workmanship. Conjectural restoration of missing architectural ornamentation is not appropriate. Likewise, the replacement or other installation of architectural ornamentation that is inconsistent with the style, period or design of the building is not appropriate.

3. Adding Ornamentation. Ornamentation should only be applied to a historic building where there is documentation that once existed. The ornamentation should be based on the documentation and should be appropriate to the particular style or period of he building.

8. Exterior Paint & Finishes

HPC Policy and Recommendations

1. Surface Preparation. All surfaces to be repainted should be carefully prepared by hand scraping, the use of appropriate chemical strippers or heat guns, and hand sanding. The use of abrasive cleaning methods such as sandblasting or the use of power rotary sanders is not appropriate and cause severe permanent damage to historic materials. In addition, the use of water should be carefully considered and should never be applied at a pressure in excess of 100 psi.

2. General. Historic materials that have historically been painted should remain painted, Likewise, historic materials that have not been previously painted should remain unpainted.

3. Color. Color schemes that are appropriate to the style, period or design of a historic building or that are generally consistent with the surrounding neighborhood or other buildings are recommended.

4. Exposed Wood. The use of unpainted wood is not appropriate at principal elevations unless it matches a documented historic condition. *Maintenance Tip:* Most modern pressure-treated lumber is intended to have an applied finish such as paint. Consult the manufacturer's specification for details.

For additional information, please see the following Preservation Briefs: 10: Exterior Paint Problems on Historic Woodwork and 37: Appropriate Methods of Reducing Lead-Paint Hazards in Historic Housing.

9. Windows

HPC Policy and Recommendations

The majority of windows in the district are rectangular in form and of double hung sash construction.

1. Retain Existing. Existing historic windows should be maintained and repaired with matching materials when needed. Repairs include replacing broken lights with new lights to match, repair and replacement of deteriorated frame elements with new frame to match and regular painting. Note: Modern epoxy consolidant and filling materials can often be used to repair deteriorated sash elements.

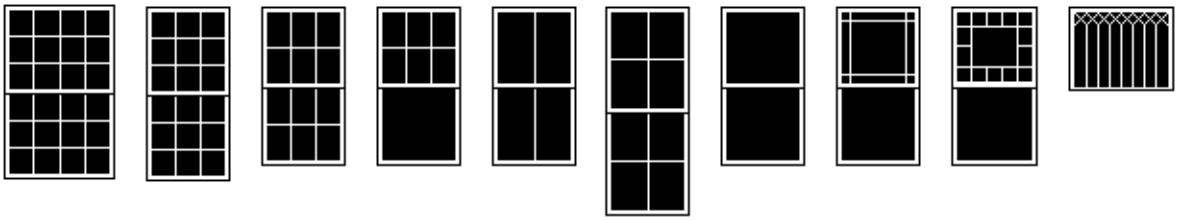
2. Replacement. The condition of windows should be evaluated on a window by window basis and replacement is only appropriate where the deterioration of historic window elements can be demonstrated to have exceeded the point of reasonable repair. New windows or window elements should match the historic windows in design and materials. Modern metal or vinyl-clad windows, different types of vertical or horizontal glazing arrangements and windows with snap-in muntins or muntins sandwiched within glazing are not appropriate on principal elevations and are not recommended on secondary elevations of historic buildings. Such windows are appropriate on secondary elevations of additions to historic buildings, additions to noncontributing buildings and new construction. When using such windows it is recommended that they approximate the visual character of windows in adjacent historic buildings in terms of their glazing pattern and the width, profile and finish of their framing members.

3. Oversized Windows. The addition of modern picture windows or other openings not in scale with the building should not be installed on principal elevations. Large windows may be installed on secondary elevations which are not readily visible from the street but their use is discouraged.

4. Decorative Glass. Historic stained glass, leaded glass or other decorative glass features should be retained, appropriately maintained or repaired as needed to match documented historic conditions. Where such features do not presently exist, their installation at principal elevations is not recommended unless they are being installed to match documented historic conditions.

5. Specialty Windows. Historic specialty windows such as bay window and bowfronts, should be retained, appropriately maintained or repaired as needed to match documented historic conditions. Where such features do not presently exist, their installation at principal elevations is not recommended unless they are being installed to match documented historic conditions.

Figure 9.1
Window Styles

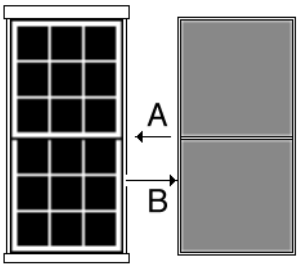


Windows are typically a major character-defining element of historic buildings. Each of these examples is appropriate for a particular style and period of house.

6. Glazing. Replacement window glass at principal elevations should typically be a clear glass. The use of modern mirror glass, smoked glass or other glass with non-traditional reflective characteristics is not appropriate at principal elevations and is discouraged at secondary elevations.

7. Storm Windows. The use of interior storm windows is recommended. Exterior storm windows are appropriate as long as they meet the following characteristics: 1) framing members are minimal in width and profile; 2) any horizontal bracing or other divisions line up visually with the meeting rails of the underlying window sash; and 3) the framing is finished to blend in or match the surrounding trim color. Storm windows should also allow for ventilation along their bottom edge to allow condensation to evaporate.

Figure 9.2
Exterior Storm Windows



A: Align intermediate support of storm window to visually line up with meeting rail of window.
B: Paint or finish storm window frame to match window trim.

Special Considerations for Noncontributing Resources: The general provisions of this section apply. The use of synthetic windows as replacements may be appropriate provided the new windows are compatible with the overall character of the building and the surrounding neighborhood. Windows should be finished to match adjacent trim. Windows should maintain the visual character of divided lights windows.

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10. Window Shutters, Blinds, and Awnings

HPC Policy and Recommendations

1. Shutters/Blinds. Historic wood shutters or blinds should be retained, appropriately maintained or repaired as needed to match documented historic conditions. Where shutters or blinds are extremely deteriorated, it is recommended that they be replaced with shutters or blinds to match the historic ones in design, material and workmanship. An alternative in such cases is to simply remove the deteriorated shutters or blinds.

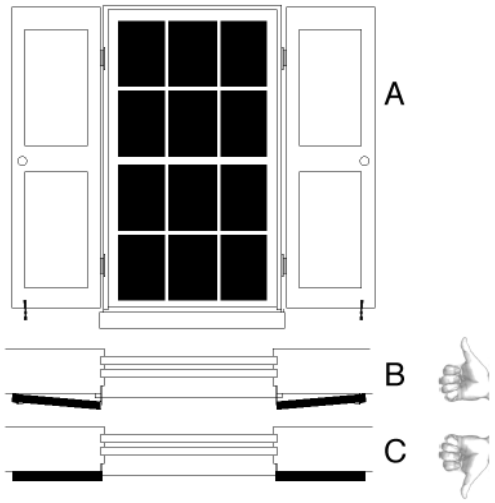
2. Materials. The use of synthetic materials such as aluminum or vinyl for replacement shutters on principal elevations is not appropriate. All replacement shutters should be sized to fit their corresponding opening. It is recommend that shutters or blinds at principal elevations be installed so as to be operable using appropriate hardware. An appropriate alternative is to mount the shutters or blinds so that the give the appearance of being operable. Typically, shutters or blinds at principal elevations should not be flush mounted to the adjacent wall surface.

3. Proportion. New shutters and blinds should be proportional to the window opening. They should be neither to wide nor to narrow to cover the window opening.

4. Replacement. Paneled wood shutters and louvered blinds are both typically appropriate for Decatur's historic residences. However, shutters or blinds should not be installed on principal elevation s of buildings where there is evidence that they never existed historically.

5 Color. Shutters and blinds should be painted a contrasting color to the body of a house. Dark paint colors were generally the rule for shatters in the 19th century and they were often painted the same color as window frames and sashes at the turn of the century.

Figure 10.1
Shutter/Blinds Should Match the Opening



A: Shutters should be sized to fit the opening.

B: It is recommended that the shutters be operable. If not, they should be fixed in place with spacers adjacent to the window to approximate the visual character of operable shutters.

C: Shutters should not be surface mounted unless this was a documented historic condition.

10.2 Note how these shutters do not relate to the size of the window opening and that they clearly appear to be inoperable.

10.3 Note how these shutters do not relate to the size of the window opening and that they clearly appear to be inoperable.

7. Awnings: Canvas awnings may be applied at window openings if desired. The design of the awnings should be compatible with the historic character of the building and the they should be sized and shaped to march the window opening. When installing shutters, care should be taken to minimize damage to the building. For example, farming should be bolted into mortar joints rather than into masonry surfaces, etc. Metal awnings should not be applied on the main facade or readily visible side facades.

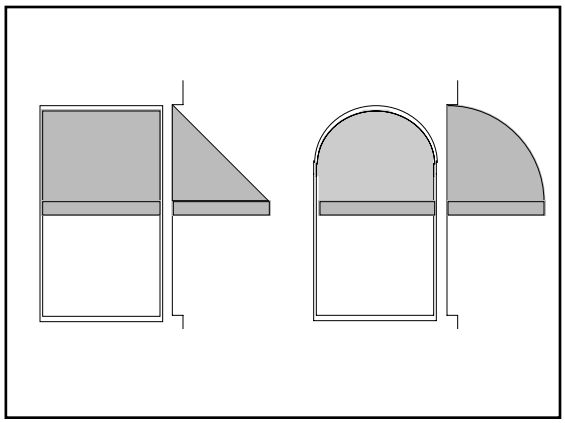


Figure 10.4. Awnings should match the overall shape and size of the window.

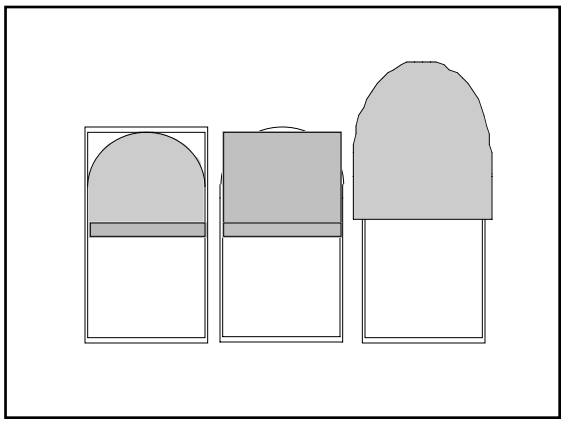


Figure 10.5. Awnings that do not match the overall shape and size of the window are not appropriate.

11. Landscaping

HPC Policy and Recommendations

Large shade trees such as oaks and maples along streets in both districts.

1. General. Landscaping should complement a building rather than overwhelm it. Buildings should not be completely hidden from sight by trees and bushes. Care should be taken not to plant a tree directly adjacent to a building which could cause moisture damage or infiltrate the foundation. Maintenance Tip: Trees should be properly trimmed to avoid damage to the building caused by branches or limbs either rubbing building surfaces or holding moisture against them.

2. Parking. Parking areas should be located at secondary elevations wherever possible. Parking lots and driveways should be screened by fencing or shrubbery to separate them from the streets and adjacent structures.

3. Trees. Existing trees on easements should be pruned as necessary and retained. The cutting or removal of trees on easements which have a base circumference of 20 inches or more shall not occur prior to review and accordance by the Commission. The planting of new trees to replace dead or diseased trees is recommended.

4. Plants. Plant materials should be native to northern Alabama or be compatible with climate requirements.

5. Sidewalks. Poured concrete sidewalks were introduced into the historic districts in the early 20th century and the continued repaired and reuse of concrete for sidewalks is appropriate.

6. Ornaments. Garden ornamentation such as statuary, birdbaths, and other freestanding elements shall not be restricted.

7. Garden Structures. Garden structures such as gazebos, retaining walls, trellises, and other such structures should be located so as to not be readily visible from public vantages unless documentation is provided indicating that such elements are historic conditions of the property.

12. Fencing

HPC Policy and Recommendations

Within the districts cast iron and wooden picket fences are typically found along principal street vantages. Brick, chain-link, wooden plank and other wood fences are generally located at secondary street vantages. For the purposes of this section, fencing includes all types of fences including decorative, security, garden, dog runs. etc.

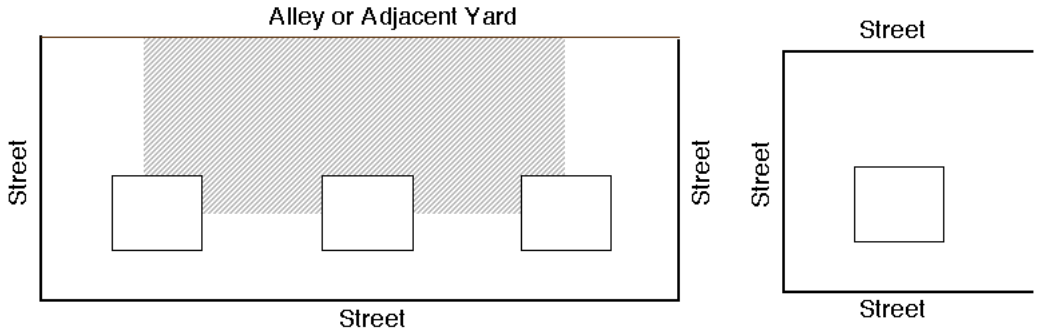
1. Height. Fences at principal street vantages should be no higher than three feet. Fences on readily visible secondary vantages should be no higher than six feet.

2. Cast Iron. Cast iron fences are found throughout Decatur's historic districts and should be retained and repaired as needed. New cast iron fences in historical designs are appropriate for the neighborhoods.

3. Wood Fences. The use of wooden picket fences on principal elevations is appropriate. Fences of cedar or redwood construction are more rot resistant than other common woods and should be considered for new wooden fences.

4. Other Fences. The use of chain-link, wire, wood plank, vinyl, solid brick or open weave fences along street vantages is not appropriate at principal street vantage. The use of these fence materials is appropriate at secondary vantages or where not visible from street vantages.

Figure12.1
Appropriate Locations for Other Fences



Nonhistoric fences should be limited to areas that are not readiliy visible from primary vantages. Right: Example of a tyical block. Right: Example where rear yard backs up to a street.

13. Exterior Lighting

HPC Policy and Recommendations

1. Historic. Historic exterior lighting should be retained.

2. Replacement. If retention of historic fixtures is not possible, contemporary fixtures that are compatible with the historic character of the building should be used. Lights which can be concealed in the porch ceiling or beneath eaves are appropriate. "Colonial" or carriage lights are not appropriate.

3. Walkway/Street Lighting. For walkways small footlights are preferable to a large free-standing gas lights.

14. Outbuildings and Ancillary Buildings

HPC Policy and Recommendations

1. Retain. Many garages, outbuildings and other ancillary buildings built in the early 20th century contribute to the character of the neighborhood and should be preserved and maintained following the general guidelines applicable to residences in the district.

2. Removal. Contributing garages, outbuildings or other ancillary buildings may only be removed if they are substantially deteriorated. Substantial deterioration shall be defined as requiring 50% or more replacement of exterior siding, 50% or more of roof rafters and surface materials, or major structural defects.

3. New Construction. New outbuildings should be simple in design to complement and blend with the main residence. Outbuildings constructed within street vantages should generally meet the guidelines for new construction or additions. While they are encouraged, the use of modern metal or frame prefabricated outbuildings is appropriate as long as they are not readily visible from the street. Where such buildings are used, the installation of landscape screening is encouraged.

15. Utilities and Accessory Structures

HPC Policy and Recommendations

1. HVAC Units. All heating and cooling mechanical units, including window air conditioning units, ground and roof condensers, and exterior conduits and ductwork should typically be placed away from principal elevations. Where mechanical units must be located in areas that are visible from the street, they should be screened with landscaping, framed lattice panels, brick opened weave walls or other appropriate screening.

2. Satellite Dishes/Solar Units/Other Antennas. Satellite dishes, solar energy collectors or other antennas and/or their towers are appropriate as long as they are not readily visible from the street. Typically, such structures should be located so as to be screened from street vantages by the building or in an inconspicuous location removed from the street. Screening can be used to mitigate visual impact but should be permanent and appropriate to the character of the building and/or its landscape setting. The use of small 18 to 20 inch diameter dishes is encouraged.

3. Swimming Pools Swimming pools are acceptable and rear facades with appropriate screening and fencing.

16. Additions

HPC Policy and Recommendations

1. General. Additions to all buildings within the districts shall be subject to review.

2. Size. New additions should be compatible with the size and scale of the building. The addition should be visually subordinate to the building, allowing the building to remain the principal focal point of the site.

3. Location. Additions should not be made to principal elevations. Additions at the rear of buildings, such as additional enclosed living space, wood decks, and porches, are appropriate providing they are minimally visible from the street. Side additions may be approved if located toward the rear of the building and not readily visible from the street.

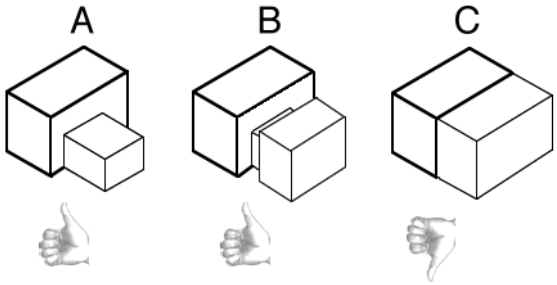
4. Design. Additions should be architecturally compatible with the historic character of the building but typically should not seek to replicate its historic design. The use of accurate period designs can actually compromise the character of the historic building by confusing the visual record of its historical development. Contemporary designs for additions that meet the guidelines of this section and that draw from the architectural vocabulary of the building are encouraged. The intent is that additions blend in with the character of the historic building while at the same time expressing their contemporary construction. It should be recognized that additions to historic buildings represent an important design challenge that will have a lasting impact on the character of the district.

5. Shape. Additions should be compatible in shape with the existing historic building. Typically buildings in the districts are rectangular. Likewise, the shape of the roof of the addition should be compatible with that of the historic building and should have a similar pitch.

6. Rooftop Additions. Rooftop additions are not recommended but may be appropriate if they are subordinate in size and scale to the historic rooftop, are located so as to not be readily visible from principal street vantages, are compatible in design with the historic building and meet all other requirements of this section. Skylights are only appropriate where they are minimally visible from principal street vantages.

7. Reversibility. New additions shoulb be constructed in such a manner that if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic building and its environment would be unimpaired.

Figure 16.1
Additions, Massing

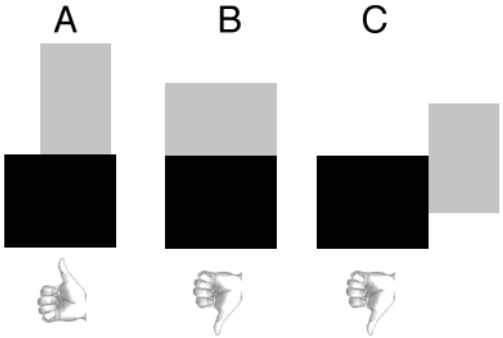


A: Additions that are clearly subordinate in size are appropriate.

B: Larger additions where mass is broken into smaller components are appropriate.

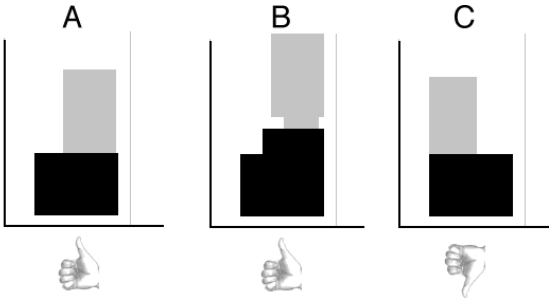
C: Additions that change the apparent mass of the building are not appropriate.

Figure 16.2
Additions, Size



All three additions are the same size. Note how different placements can affect the impact of the addition on the house.

Figure 16.3
Additions, Corner Lots



A & B: The addition is set back from the intersecting street thereby allowing it to visually recede from the building. These alternatives are appropriate.

C: Placing the addition closer to the intersecting street causes greater visual impact on the building and is not recommended unless site conditions make such a placement necessary and the addition is clearly smaller in scale.

17. Demolition and Relocation

HPC Policy and Recommendations

1. Not Recommended. Demolition of contributing buildings and outbuildings buildings is inappropriate unless warranted by structural conditions, economic hardship (as defined by city ordinance 90-2882A) or where the public safety is endangered.

2. Appropriate for Noncontributing Buildings. Demolition is appropriate if the building is noncontributing or has lost its architectural significance or integrity and if its demolition would have a positive effect on the overall appearance and character of a district.

3. Relocation. The relocation of a pre-1950 building into the district onto vacant lots or to replace a post--1950 building is appropriate providing the work completed on the building is in keeping with the overall design review guidelines. The relocation of contributing buildings within the district is not appropriate except as a last resort to prevent demolition.

For additional information, please see the following: National Register Bulletin 15: How to Apply Criteria Considerations, see Criteria Consideration B: Moved Properties.

18. Mothballing

HPC Policy and Recommendations

If a building becomes vacant or is abandoned, it is recommended that it be secured in order to prevent deterioration.

1. Security. Secure the building against vandalism, break-ins, and natural disasters. Apply temporary coverings to window and door openings in such a manner as to not damage historic features or materials.

2. Stabilize. Structurally stabilize the building as needed and provide and maintain a weather-tight roof. Temporary roofing may be installed if needed. Discontinue all utilities and remove flammable materials and debris from the building.

3. Ventilation. Provide adequate ventilation to the interior of the building through the use of vents in the window and door coverings.

4. Pest Control. The building should be treated to prevent termite infestation.

5. Monitor. Periodically monitor the building to insure the effectiveness of the mothballing program.

For additional information, please see the following Preservation Brief: #31: Mothballing Historic Buildings.

19. New Construction

HPC Policy and Recommendations

Existing buildings within the districts vary in massing and orientation to the street.

1. General. All new construction must conform with setbacks, density and other requirements as set forth in the zoning ordinance of the City of Decatur.

2. Height. The height of new construction in the district should be compatible with the historic buildings in the surrounding area. New construction typically should not exceed the height of the tallest adjacent historic building nor be of lesser height than the lowest adjacent historic building. It is recommended that new construction range between ten percent more or less than the average of the heights of the adjacent buildings. In some cases, such as the presence of noncontributing adjacent buildings, corner lots or lots where there are no immediately adjacent buildings, it may be necessary to examine the average heights other historic buildings within the immediate area of the proposed new construction.

3. Proportion. New construction should match in adjacent buildings in proportions of width to height.

4. Rhythm. It is important that new construction in the Decatur historic districts be consistent with adjacent historic buildings in rhythm of spacing and setback. This rythym includes the size and placement of openings on principal elevations and the exterior visual expression of floor to floor heights, the presence of porches and the heights and forms of roofs. New construction must maintain the rhythm of porch orientation on each block and follow the size, height, and, placement of adjacent buildings. Two-story porches are generally out of scale and should not be placed on principal elevations. Fences, landscaping and other elements should also be consistent with the overall character of the streetscape.

5. Setbacks. Setbacks for new construction throughout the district should be consistent with adjacent historic buildings. Generally, setbacks should be within more or less than ten percent (10%) of the average setback of the adjacent buildings. For new construction, setbacks at principal elevations should typically not be less than the smallest setback of an adjacent historic building.

6. Design. New construction should be architecturally compatible with the historic character of the district but typically should not seek to replicate historic designs. The use of accurate period designs can actually compromise the character of the district by confusing the visual record of its historical development. Contemporary designs for new construction that meet the guidelines of this section and that draw from the architectural vocabulary of the district are encouraged. The intent is that new buildings blend in with the character of the district while at the same time expressing their contemporary construction. It should be recognized that new construction within historic districts represents an important design challenge that will have a lasting impact on the character of the district. Decatur's historic districts derive their character from the assemblage of buildings representing a variety of historic periods and styles. New construction provides an opportunity to continue to add to this tradition while at the same time respecting the unique character of the district that this tradition had already created.

7. Materials. New construction should be compatible with adjacent historic buildings on the block in terms of the composition, texture and finish of materials and the design and appearance of architectural details.

   It is recommended that traditional materials be used for all new construction. However the use of synthetic siding may be appropriate in new construction that is not readily visible from the street. Likewise, the use of other artificial siding products, such as

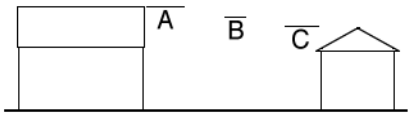
boards composed of wood or cementious fibers, may be appropriate for new construction provided the material generally matches the visual character of traditional wood siding.

The use of synthetic windows as replacements may be appropriate provided the new windows are compatible with the overall character of the building and the surrounding neighborhood. Windows should be finished to match adjacent trim. Windows should maintain the visual character of divided lights windows.

8. Roofs. Roof forms and pitches must be consistent with adjacent historic buildings.

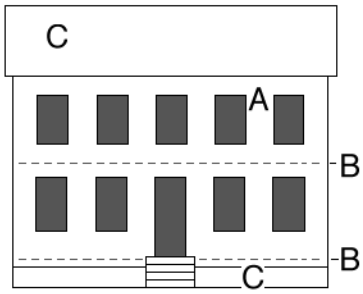
9. Porches. Porches are a common feature of residences within the district and the use of porches on new residences is recommended. The design and detailing of porches should be compatible with the design of historic porches found on historic buildings that are similar in character to the proposed building.

Figure 17.1
New Construction, Height



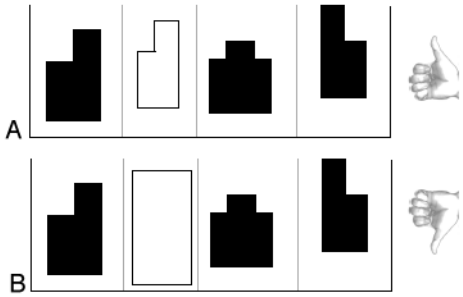
Height of new infill building (B) should be an average of surrounding houses (A) and (C).

Figure 17.2
New Construction, Scale



A: The overall ratio and relation of window and door openings within the facade should be consistent with surrounding buildings.
B: The floor to floor heights and elevation of the first floor should be consistent with surrounding buildings.
C: The proportion of the foundation and roof to the facade should be consistent with surrounding buildings.

Figure 17.3
New Construction, Size



A: New building footprint (A) is consistent with remaining houses on the block and is appropriate.
B: New building footprint (B) is larger than remaining houses on the block and is inappropriate.