DRAFT

CITY OF PITTSBURGH HISTORIC DISTRICTS

GENERAL DESIGN GUIDELINES

June 6, 2025

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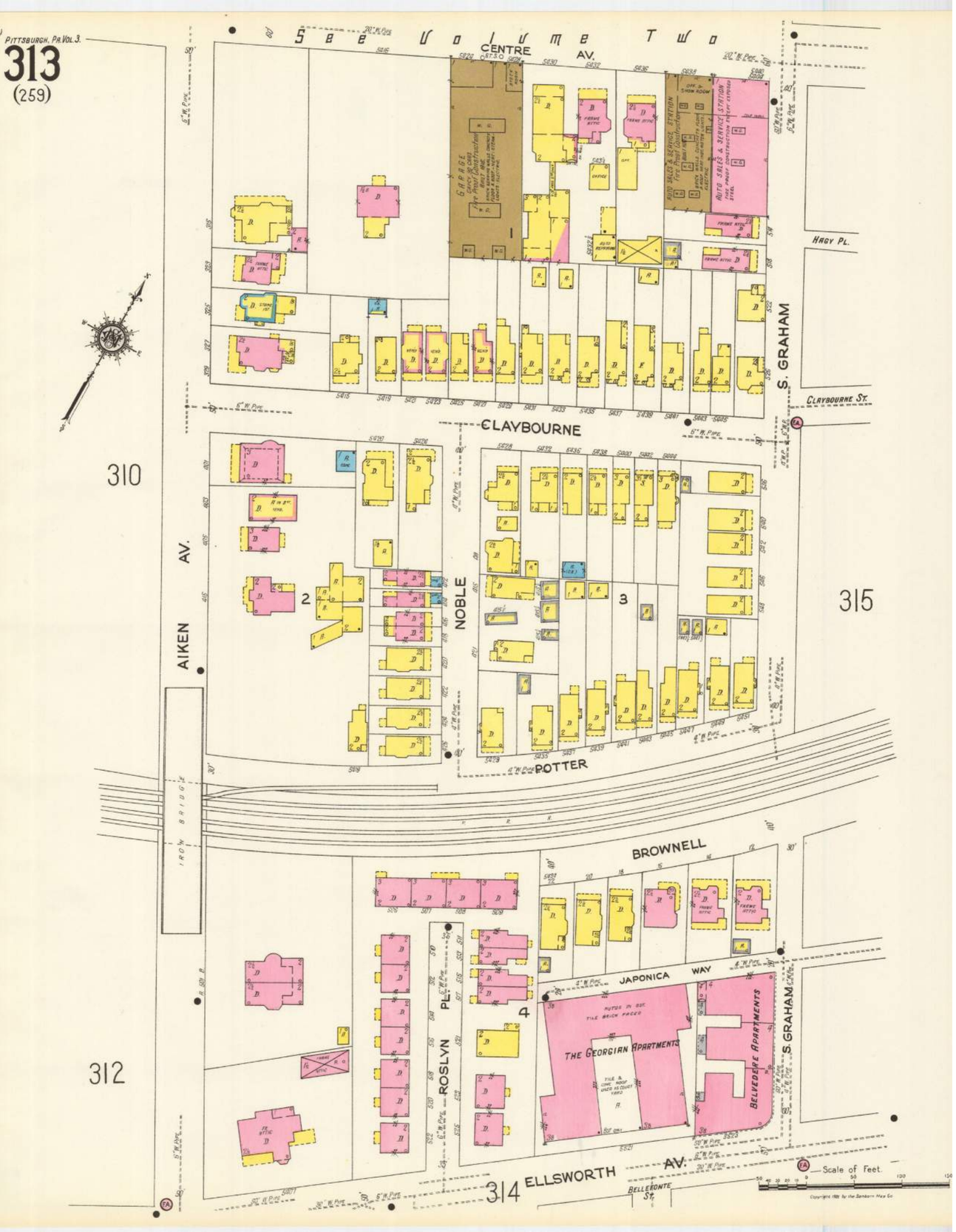


CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND

1.1 ABOUT THE HISTORIC DISTRICT GUIDELINES

ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

The Historic District Design Guidelines are a set of policies, approaches, and/or recommendations related to repairs, improvements, alterations, and additions to existing buildings as well as to new construction, site work, and other changes to the physical environment with the Historic Districts.

In addition to written policies and recommendations, the Design Guidelines include photographs, drawings, and graphics to illustrate the architectural features, concepts, and approaches described. The Design Guidelines seek to provide guidance to property owners with the Historic Districts in finding appropriate and compatible design solutions for their buildings and for any additions or new construction taking place in the Historic District.

PRINCIPLES AND STANDARDS FOR THE DESIGN GUIDELINES

The City of Pittsburgh has been a **Certified Local Government (CLG)** since 1990. The CLG program is overseen by the National Park Service and administered in Pennsylvania by the Pennsylvania State Historic Preservation Office (PA SHPO). Municipalities that participate in the CLG program are required to adopt and apply illustrated design guidelines when reviewing applications for Certificates of Appropriateness (COAs) and other permits/approvals for locally designated historic properties and properties in local historic districts.

Design guidelines developed and adopted by CLGs, as well as all design guideline projects funded through the CLG grant program, such as these Design Guidelines, must meet PA SHPO's *Principles and Standards for Design Guidelines in Pennsylvania Communities.*

PRINCIPLES FOR DESIGN GUIDELINES

1. The Design Guidelines reflect a community's shared design ethic, management philosophy, and desired future conditions.
2. The Design Guidelines are developed through a public process that involves residents, property owners, community stakeholders, and other interested parties.
3. The Design Guidelines are educational in nature and help stakeholders understand their community's history and built environment.
4. The Design Guidelines encourage stewardship and sensitive treatment of a community's identity and character.
5. The Design Guidelines help decision-makers reach consistent and defensible decisions about design issues and proposed changes to individual properties and the broader community.
6. The Design Guidelines are reviewed regularly and updated as necessary.

STANDARDS FOR DESIGN GUIDELINES

1. The Design Guidelines should be specific to the type of community and built environment they are intended to address.
2. The Design Guidelines should address the full scope of activities, projects, and issues that may be relevant to properties in the community.
3. The Design Guidelines should be clear and concise.
4. The Design Guidelines should use specific, non-technical language, and be organized in a logical manner that is user-friendly and easy to reference.
5. The Design Guidelines should avoid language that is rigid or prescriptive and allow for adaptation and design solutions that are responsive to and consistent with the community's design ethic.
6. The Design Guidelines should use a combination of text, photographs, and illustrations to effectively convey information.
7. The Design Guidelines should help property owners understand what actions, activities, and choices are consistent with the community's design ethic and management philosophy.
8. The Design Guidelines should be attentive and responsive to building and zoning codes and other relevant policies.
9. The Design Guidelines should be based upon commonly accepted preservation best practices, including the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties.

1.2 HOW TO USE THIS DOCUMENT

All exterior work in the Historic District visible from the public right-of-way must be reviewed by HRC staff. If you are looking to renovate or alter a property in the Historic District, and the changes to your building are visible from the street, then these Design Guidelines apply to you.

Buildings with local historic designation located outside of the Historic District are not subject to the Design Guidelines, though it is still recommended to follow the preservation principles in this document, as they are also relevant to such historic properties.

The design guidelines for each historic district are found in the appendices of this document, and each are divided into five parts, corresponding to five categories of projects undertaken on a building in the Historic District: Common Elements, Existing Buildings, Additions to Historic Structures, New Construction, and Demolition.

It is recommended that whichever category of project applies to you, that you first review the City of Pittsburgh's requirements and process for performing work in the Historic District.

After reviewing those sections, pick the chapter that most accurately describes the project that you are looking to undertake. Refer to the Table of Contents for more specific information included in each chapter.

- Chapter 1: Characteristics of the Historic District
- Chapter 2: Guidelines for Existing Buildings
  - Exterior Walls & Materials
  - Roofs
  - Doors
  - Windows
  - Porches & Stoops
  - Accessory Structures
- Chapter 3: Guidelines for Supporting Elements
  - Signage
  - Accessibility
  - Fences, Walls, Walkways, & Other Landscape Elements
  - Technology & Equipment
  - Energy & Sustainability
  - Utilities & Building Systems
- Chapter 4: Guidelines for Additions
- Chapter 5: Guidelines for New Construction
- Chapter 6: Guidelines for Demolition

THE MOST COMMON USERS OF THE DESIGN GUIDELINES

- **Property Owners** – Property owners should use the Design Guidelines to help them understand their building and its history, select appropriate materials, or make design decisions. Owners may seek information for their own education, because they need approvals or permits, or as a condition of seeking state or federal tax credits (in the case of income-generating commercial properties).
- **Historic Review Commission (HRC)** – The HRC, which reviews projects under the City's historic preservation ordinance, will use the Design Guidelines to determine whether a project should be recommended for approval.
- **Design Professionals** – Architects, engineers, and other design professionals may use the Design Guidelines to help their clients comply with approvals or permits, secure funding or to conform to the community's design philosophy.
- **Contractors** – Trades contractors and other skilled professionals may use the Design Guidelines to prepare estimates, scopes of work, or bid documents for clients, to increase their knowledge about historic buildings, to prepare for the design review process, or to comply with approval or permit requirements.
- **Real Estate Agents** – Real estate professionals may use the Design Guidelines to help their clients understand the programs, expectations, and requirements of owning an older or historic property.
- **City Staff** – City Staff who are responsible for reviewing projects and applying building and zoning codes may use these Design Guidelines to evaluate work done to buildings in the Historic District. City Staff issue building and zoning permits only after Certificates of Appropriateness (COAs) are approved.
- **Planning Commission** – The Planning Commission may use the Design Guidelines to implement design-oriented aspects of zoning, subdivision, or other land use codes.

1.3 PURPOSE OF THE DESIGN GUIDELINES

The purpose of the Design Guidelines is to preserve the integrity of the historic districts. Buildings that maintain the character of the Historic District will help to ensure that the district continues to contribute to each historic district's overall quality of life, economy, property values, and attractiveness to residents and tourists.

Communities such as Pittsburgh with historic preservation ordinances for local historic districts or individual landmarks require property owners to receive approval before making changes to existing buildings or constructing new ones within those designated areas. These proposals are reviewed by a Mayor-appointed seven-member Historic Review Commission (HRC).

The City of Pittsburgh has set forth these Design Guidelines as best practices for improvements to properties in the heart of the community, with the goal of guiding property owners toward a granting of a Certificate of Appropriateness by the HRC.

The Design Guidelines may also be used by the Planning Commission and zoning staff in the review of projects under zoning codes or other land development policies. In these situations, the Design Guidelines are used to help property owners understand the requirements they are expected to meet in order to gain approval for their project. In addition, decision-makers, including staff, advisory boards, and elected bodies may use these guidelines to decide whether a proposed project in the [insert name] Historic District is appropriate and should be approved.

1.4 SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR'S STANDARDS FOR REHABILITATION

The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Rehabilitation of Historic Properties are a set of ten overarching principles for the treatment, maintenance, and preservation of cultural heritage in the United States. The Design Guidelines are based on these principles, yet tailored to the unique key defining features of an historic district. The Standards were first published in 1977 after the passage of the Tax Reform Act of 1976.

These standards are issued by the National Park Service (NPS) and are required to determine if a rehabilitation project qualifies as a "certified rehabilitation" for Federal Historic Preservation Tax Incentive purposes (in which owners of income-producing properties may receive tax credits). In addition, they have been widely adopted and used by local historic review and planning commissions, local governments, non-profit organizations, design and building professionals, and the general public.

These Design Guidelines are intended to help property owners in the historic district understand how to implement the Standards in an appropriate and relevant manner, without prescribing a singular approach or solution for all projects.

For more information on the Secretary of the Interior's Standards, please visit https://www.nps.gov/subjects/taxincentives/secretarys-standards-rehabilitation.htm.

THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR'S STANDARDS FOR REHABILITATION OF HISTORIC PROPERTIES

1. A property will be used as it was historically or be given a new use that requires minimal change to its distinctive materials, features, spaces, and spatial relationships.
2. The historic character of a property will be retained and preserved. The removal of distinctive materials or alteration of features, spaces, and spatial relationships that characterize a property will be avoided.
3. Each property will be recognized as a physical record of its time, place, and use. Changes that create a false sense of historical development, such as adding conjectural features or elements from other historic properties, will not be undertaken.
4. Changes to a property that have acquired historic significance in their own right will be retained and preserved.
5. Distinctive materials, features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a property will be preserved.
6. Deteriorated historic features will be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature will match the old in design, color, texture, and, where possible, materials. Replacement of missing features will be substantiated by documentary and physical evidence.
7. Chemical or physical treatments, if appropriate, will be undertaken using the gentlest means possible. Treatments that cause damage to historic materials will not be used.
8. Archaeological resources will be protected and preserved in place. If such resources must be disturbed, mitigation measures will be undertaken.
9. New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction will not destroy historic materials, features, and spatial relationships that characterize the property. The new work should be differentiated from the old and will be compatible with the historic materials, features, size, scale and proportion, and massing to protect the integrity of the property and its environment.
10. New additions and adjacent or related new construction will 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.

1.5 BENEFITS OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION

A well-administered historic preservation program creates an economically viable and vibrant place to live and work, adding to a community's quality of life. Historic preservation enhances community character and fosters a sense of pride in residents and business owners. It also promotes sustainability, a concept that embodies economic, environmental, and cultural/social benefits. Below are just a few ways in which historic preservation benefits the Pittsburgh community, viewed through the lens of sustainability:

ECONOMIC BENEFITS

Historic preservation provides a variety of economic benefits to Pennsylvania communities such as Pittsburgh. Economic benefits include increased property values, revitalization of downtowns and neighborhoods, tourism activity, job creation, and tax revenue generation. These benefits are summarized below:

- **Increased property values:** An analysis of three Pennsylvania historic districts completed by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC) and Preservation Pennsylvania as well as studies from around the country have shown increases in property values in the historic districts relative to properties outside of the historic districts. Stabilization and enhancement of property values through historic preservation can help communities, particularly those that have experienced blight and disinvestment, generate household wealth and increases in property tax revenues.
- **Revitalization of downtowns and neighborhoods:** Historic preservation, including the rehabilitation of historic buildings, helps to preserve a community's unique identity and sense of place, enhancing the community's image and quality of life. It can also improve a community's housing stock and stabilize business districts and neighborhoods that would otherwise decline or continue to decline.
- **Tourism activity:** Distinctive communities with a unique character, beautiful architecture, and vibrant business districts and neighborhoods draw visitors. These visitors spend money on recreation, accommodations, food, and travel, which supports the local economy. Tourism in which visitors travel to a community to see its cultural heritage sites and historic places is called heritage tourism.
- **Job creation:** Historic preservation generates jobs, both in the businesses that serve visitors seeking heritage tourism opportunities and in local construction jobs. Rehabilitation projects require labor and the purchase of building materials, which provide a boost to the local economy.
- **Tax revenue generation:** Historic rehabilitation projects for income-generating buildings are eligible for the Federal Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit, which has been leveraged over many decades to stimulate private investment. A report from the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC) and Preservation Pennsylvania calculated that the work that went into Federal Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit projects between 1978 and 2010 generated $7 billion in project expenditures, $17 billion in total economic impact, $380 million in state tax revenues, and 148,000 jobs. This benefited multiple sectors of the economy, particularly construction.

ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS

Carl Elefante, former president of the American Institute of Architects, famously stated in 2007: "The greenest building is the one that is already built." This is certainly the case when it comes to **embodied energy,** defined as the energy expended to create an original building and its components. Historic preservation conserves embodied energy in that the energy that went into a building's construction and the fabrication of its materials has already been expended. Even if a new replacement building is constructed to be energy-efficient and uses sustainable materials, the loss of the embodied energy from the original building can take three decades or more to recoup. This is due to the energy required to construct the new building and to produce the new materials. New buildings are also often constructed on "greenfields," which are open spaces that have not been previously developed.

Other ways in which historic preservation provides environmental benefits include:

- **Reducing construction waste:** Construction waste from demolition of buildings and the fabrication of new building materials accounts for about one-third of waste sent to landfills.
- **Reducing the need for new building materials:** Unlike traditional building materials such as wood, brick, and stone, newer building materials are often made of cement or petroleum-based products, which contribute to a significant share of global CO2 emissions and generally do not last as long as traditional building materials. Such materials include fiber cement siding, vinyl siding, modern stucco, and particleboard. In addition, traditional building materials can often be repaired more easily than newer building materials, which often require full replacement.
- **Reducing energy use:** Original building materials and features such as windows and walls can often be repaired, insulated, or weather-stripped in an historically appropriate manner so that they are just as efficient as their new counterparts.

CULTURAL AND SOCIAL BENEFITS

Historic preservation benefits residents by connecting them with the cultural heritage of their community. This promotes civic engagement, a sense of pride, and an appreciation of the physical environment. The historic building stock of Pittsburgh is an essential part of the community's identity.

Unlike most modern buildings, historic buildings were built at a pedestrian scale, intended for people to walk in and out of multiple businesses without the need to drive.

1.6 GENERAL BEST PRACTICES

The following steps are recommended to be taken **prior** to starting a project involving the rehabilitation of an historic building or structure:

- **Engage an architect or preservation consultant** for your project to look at solutions and to provide expertise on the appropriate use of building materials and features.
- **Identify predominant materials and features which contribute to the historic character of your building.** These may include the design of primary entrances and porches, patterns within materials such as brick, stone, and wood, profiles of trim work and cornices, and decorative elements such as shutters and hardware, all of which contribute to the historic character of your property.
- **Stabilization of damaged or deteriorated building features** should always be the first step prior to undertaking work on the building. Cleaning of exterior surfaces and elements should be done using the gentlest means possible.
- **Life safety, accessibility, and code requirements must take precedence over historic preservation.** Identify any character-defining exterior features, materials, and finishes that may be affected by code- or accessibility-required work. Care should be taken not to obscure, damage, or destroy character-defining materials or features where possible.
- **Consult with the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC) and City of Pittsburgh Department of City Planning staff to help determine the most sensitive solutions** to comply with access, life safety, and code requirements related to your historic building. This could mean finding alternative means of compliance that will meet requirements while not negatively impacting the historic character of the building and district.
- **Consult with the City of Pittsburgh Archivist** (or other historic organizations/databases) **for any available information and historic imagery showing what your building may have looked like in the past.** This can serve as a baseline for completing a rehabilitation that is sensitive to your building's historic character. Other resources include:
  - Local libraries
  - Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps
  - Archives of local or state higher education institutions such as the Carnegie Mellon University Archives, University of Pittsburgh Archives, and Penn State University Archives
  - Google Street View imagery from past dates

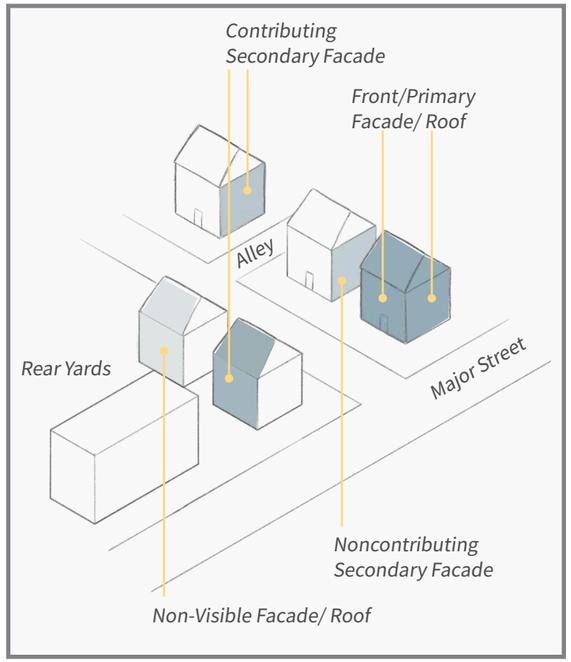
1.7 HIERARCHY OF FACADES

Buildings have multiple faces, some of which are visible from the public street and some of which are not. These Design Guidelines primarily focus on alterations, additions, and new construction that can be seen from the street or sidewalk, as those changes to the Historic District have the most impact on the Historic District's character.

In order of importance, the following definitions describe the various façades that are found on a building:

- A **front/primary façade** is the building face and most visible from and facing a public street, and includes visible roof surfaces. It contains the main entrance to the building and typically has the most character-defining architectural features. Almost all work done to a front façade will be reviewed closely by the HRC. Primary facades include sides of corner buildings that do not contain the main entrance but are visible from a major public street.
- **Contributing secondary façades** are those that are visible from the public street but are not on the front of the building, and includes visible roof surfaces. This can include the sides of detached buildings, provided that those side walls are visible from the public street and the street-facing facade of contributing accessory structures such as historic garages. As with front façades, contributing secondary façades often contain character-defining architectural features.
- **Noncontributing secondary façades** are those that are in the rear of a building, visible only from an alley, or on the side of the building, only partially visible from a public right-of-way.
- A **non-visible façade** is one that cannot be seen from the public right-of-way and is not reviewed by the HRC.

HIERARCHY OF FACADES



1.8 CHARACTER-DEFINING FEATURES

WHAT ARE CHARACTER-DEFINING FEATURES?

Character-defining features are the aspects that help your property convey its sense of history.

According to the National Park Service, **a character-defining feature is a prominent or distinctive aspect, quality, or characteristic of a historic property that contributes significantly to its physical character**. More simply put, they are those things that make a building special, make it worthy of inclusion within the historic district, and make it more than one in a crowd. Any time that one of those features is removed or hidden, it destroys the character of the building and makes it less special.

Character-defining features are difficult to list in detail because each architectural style has its own features. A Queen Anne Victorian and Colonial both have significant features yet the details are different. It is difficult to compare the ornately decorative trim work of the first stylistic example to the strong angular lines of the second example. The National Park Service suggests identifying the overall visual character of a building by starting with larger concepts and moving toward small details: shape of the overall building, number and placement of openings (doors, windows), roof shape, configuration, and related features (dormers, chimneys), decorative trim, setting, materials, other details.

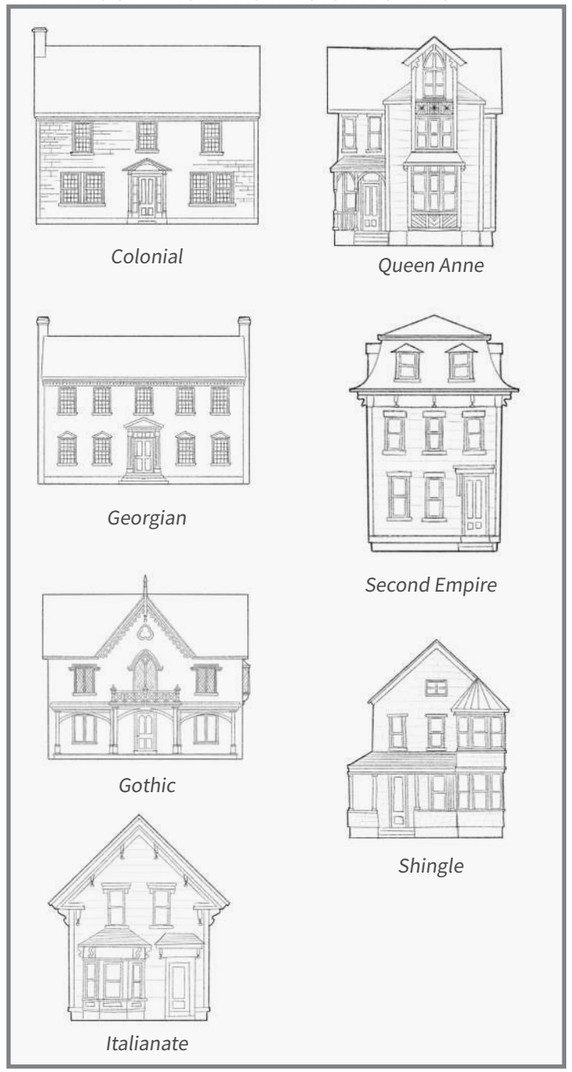
IDENTIFICATION CHECKLIST

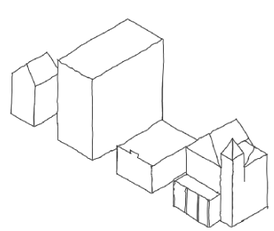
The following questions from the National Park Service may help property owners in the identification process of character-defining features:

1. **Shape:** What is there about the form or shape of the building that gives the building its identity? **Is the shape distinctive** in relation to the neighboring buildings? Is it simply a low, squat box, or is it a tall, narrow building with a corner tower? Is **the shape highly consistent with its neighbors?** Is the shape so complicated because of wings, or ells, or differences in height, that its complexity is important to its character? Conversely, is the shape so simple or plain that adding a feature like a porch would change that character? Does the shape convey its historic function as in smokestacks or silos?

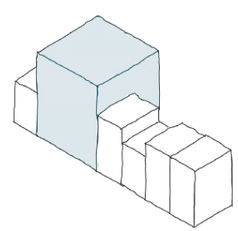
2. **Roof and Roof Features:** Does the roof **shape or its steep (or shallow) slope** contribute to the building 's character? Does the fact that the roof is **highly visible (or not visible at all)** contribute to the architectural identity of the building? Are certain **roof features** important to the profile of the building against the sky or its background, such as cupolas, multiple chimneys, dormers, cresting, or weathervanes? Are the **roofing materials or their colors or their patterns** (such as patterned slates) more noticeable than the shape or slope of the roof?

EXAMPLES OF TYPICAL ARCHITECTURAL STYLES





Consider the shape of the building and special features.



Is the shape or massing consistent with other buildings nearby?

3. **Openings: Is there a rhythm or pattern to the arrangement of windows or other openings** in the walls; like the rhythm of windows in a factory building, or a three-part window in the front bay of a house; or is there a noticeable relationship between the width of the window openings and the wall space between the window openings? **Are there distinctive openings**, like a large arched entranceway, or decorative window lintels that accentuate the importance of the window openings, or unusually shaped windows, or patterned window sash, like small panes of glass in the windows or doors, that are important to the character? Is the plainness of the window openings such that adding shutters or gingerbread trim would radically change its character? **Is there a hierarchy of facades that make the front windows more important than the side windows?** What about those walls where the absence of windows establishes its own character?

4. **Projections: Are there parts of the building that are character-defining because they project from the walls of the building** like porches, cornices, bay windows, or balconies? Are there turrets, or widely overhanging eaves, projecting pediments or chimneys?

5. **Trim and Secondary Features: Does the trim around the windows or doors contribute to the character of the building?** Is there other trim on the walls or around the projections that, because of its decoration or color or patterning contributes to the character of the building? Are there secondary features such as shutters, decorative gables, railings, or exterior wall panels?

6. **Materials: Do the materials or combination of materials contribute to the overall character of the building as seen from a distance** because of their color or patterning, such as broken faced stone, scalloped wall shingling, rounded rock foundation walls, boards and battens, or textured stucco?

7. **Materials at Close Range: Are there one or more materials that have an inherent texture that contributes to the close-range character**, such as stucco, exposed aggregate concrete, or brick textured with vertical grooves? Or materials with inherent colors such as orange-colored brick with dark spots of iron pyrites, or prominently veined stone, or green serpentine stone? Are there combinations of materials, such as several different kinds of stone, combinations of stone and brick, dressed stones for window lintels used in conjunction with rough stones for the wall? Has the choice of materials or the combinations of materials contributed to the character?

Notice the rhythm and regularity of these three story attached buildings: each is three bays wide with window openings and storefronts below.

Secondary features such as door and window trim, dormers, entry hoods, and projections contribute to the character of the building and district.

Materials provide inherent color and texture that contribute to the character of the streetscape up close and from far away.

8. **Craft Details:** Is there high-quality brickwork with narrow mortar joints? Is there hand-tooled or patterned stonework? Do the walls exhibit carefully struck vertical mortar joints and recessed horizontal joints? Is the wall shingle work laid up in patterns or does it retain evidence of the circular saw marks, or can the grain of the wood be seen through the semitransparent stain? Are there hand split or hand-dressed clapboards, or machine smooth beveled siding, or wood rusticated to look like stone, or Art Deco zigzag designs executed in stucco? **Almost any evidence of craft details, whether handmade or machine-made, will contribute to the character of a building because it is a manifestation of the materials, of the times in which the work was done, and of the tools and processes that were used.** It further reflects the effects of time, of maintenance (and/or neglect) that the building has received over the years. All of these aspects are a part of the surface qualities that are seen only at close range

9. **Setting: What are the aspects of the setting that are important to the visual character?** For example, is the alignment of buildings along a city street and their relationship to the sidewalk the essential aspect of its setting? Is the front yard important to the setting of the modest house? Is the specific site important to the setting such as being on a hilltop, along a river, or is the building placed on the site in such a way to enhance its setting? Is there a special relationship to the adjoining streets and other buildings? Is there a view? Are there fencing, planting, terracing, walkways. or any other landscape aspects that contribute to the setting?

Craft details contribute to the overall look of a building.

A building's setting includes its relationship to other elements, such as any front yards, sidewalks, streets, and geography.

1.9 GLOSSARY OF BUILDING FEATURES

Addition - new built rooms, spaces, and/or stories that are constructed as an attachment to an existing building.

Accessory Building/Structure - a structure that is subordinate to an serves a primary structure; is subordinate in area, extent, and purpose to the primary structure served.

Alley - a narrow right-of-way that typically runs behind or between buildings in towns, serving as rear access or service roads or walks.

Awning – an architectural projection that provides weather protection, identity, or decoration and is wholly supported by the building to which it is attached. An awning is comprised of a lightweight frame structure over which a covering is attached.

Bay - the space between columns or other structural elements. In buildings where there may not be intermediate structural elements, a bay refers to each window in a wall's span.

Bay Window – minor projection containing a window that extends outward from the wall.

Bulkhead – the area between the sidewalk and the display windows: can be of wood, tile, or metal, or can be glazed; also known as a window base or kickplate.

Canopy – a permanent structure or architectural projection of rigid construction over which a covering is attached that provides weather protection, identity, or decoration. A canopy is permitted to be structurally independent or supported by attachment to a building on one or more sides.

Cast iron – iron produced by casting molten ore into molds of a wide variety of shapes and sizes; used for structural members, freestanding ornament, and components of building facades.

Character-Defining Feature – the unique qualities of a building, property, or neighborhood conveyed by setting, streetscape, and rhythm, and elements including materials, craftsmanship, doors, windows, composition, roofline, and finishes.

Clapboard – a siding material consisting of narrow wood boards installed horizontally with the bottom edge overlapping the board below.

Column – a vertical support; in classical architecture, a usually cylindrical support, consisting of a base, shaft, and capital.

Compatible – alterations and new construction in historic districts without adverse effect on the historic character. Elements to consider are massing, size, scale, design, materials, and details.

Composition – in design, the arrangement of elements in relation to one another, generally according to a predetermined set of standards or conventions.

Cornice – a decorated, projecting linear element placed along the top of a building's facade or atop a section of the facade to divide it visually from other sections.

Demolition by Neglect - the willful or negligent failure to provide ordinary and necessary maintenance and/or repair a building or structure, which leads to severe disrepair, resulting in stability and structure removal.

Display window – the main areas of clear glass on a storefront behind which goods are arranged; usually of polished plate glass.

Dormer – a minor projection on a pitched roof, usually containing a window on its front face.

Eave – the lower edge of a roof slope that intersects and/or overhangs the exterior wall.

Facade – the front, or principal, exterior face of a building; may refer to other prominent exterior faces as well.

Feasible / Feasibility - the possibility for a solution or approach to be done in an attainable way, which may be influenced by the reasonable availability of the preferred material, the skill required to execute the preferred approach, and the quality, appearance, and character of alternative solutions.

Flashing – sheet metal used to prevent water infiltration at roof slope intersections or where roofs intersect vertical surfaces (valleys, hips, chimneys, eaves)

Frieze – a decorative, horizontal band set just below the cornice.

Gable – the upper area of the end wall of a building that is located between the roof slopes (from cornice/eave to ridge), typically triangular in shape.

Glazing – windows set in frames as part of a building.

Hip Roof – a roof where all sides slope between the ridge and eaves (includes no gable ends)

Historic - refers to elements, features, or structures that have been in place for a significant period of time and are original or compatible with the building style.

Hyphen – a minor volume that connects two larger volumes, sometimes recommended for connecting historic buildings with additions to provide physical and visual separation.

Infill – new construction located within an existing, historic context.

In-Kind – the replacement of an element with a new element of the same material, color, texture, shape, and form as the original.

Integrity – the ability of a property to convey its significance through its physical features or characteristics.

Lintel – a structural member above a storefront that supports the upper wall.

Lite – a piece of glass located within a window separated by mullions.

Marquee – a sheltering roof over an entry supported by the wall from which it projects rather than by piers or columns.

Masonry – materials such as stone, brick, and adobe used for facing or structural support.

Massing – the distribution of a building's volume through three-dimensional forms to create its overall shape, size, and height.

Mortar joint – the space between bricks, concrete blocks, or glass blocks, that are filled with mortar or grout.

Muntin – a narrow strip that separates the lites within a window sash.

New Construction - an independent structure that is built on a parcel and is not connected or attached to an existing structure.

Original - refers to elements or features that date to the period of initial construction of a structure.

Parapet – a low, solid, protective wall or railing along the edge of a roof or balcony, often used to obscure a low-pitched roof.

Pier – a vertical structural support of a building, usually rectangular.

Pilaster –a narrowly protruding column attached to a wall, giving the illusion of a real free standing support column.

Proportion – the relationships of the size, shape, and location of one building element to the other elements or the whole building.

Public Way - the surface, the air above the surface, and the area below the surface within any public right-of-way and any street, highway, lane, path, alley, sidewalk, boulevard, drive, bridge, tunnel, park, parkway, lane, square, viaduct, waterway, or other public right-of-way including public utility easements or rights-of-way in which the City has jurisdiction.

Recessed entry – an entrance door which is set back from the main facade of the building.

Repointing – the process of renewing the pointing, which is the external part of mortar joints, in masonry construction.

Ridge – the location where two roof slopes meet to form a peak, generally the highest point of a roof.

Right(s)-of-way – a strip of land acquired byh reservation, dedication, prescription, or condemnation and intended to be occupied by a road, crosswalk, railroad, utility service; and/or the surface and space above and below any real property in which the City has an interest in law or equity, including, but not limited to any public street, boulevard, road, highway, freeway, lane, alley, court, sidewalk, parkway, swale, river, tunnel, viaduct, bridge, park, or any other place, area, or real property, other than real property owned in fee by the City.

Setback - the dimension from a property line to a building edge or location of an accessory structure. Setbacks are regulated by zoning ordinances.

Architectural setback – an architectural device in which the upper stories of a tall building are stepped back from the lower stories.

Building setback – the distance that a house or structure must be from the front, side, and rear property lines.

Storefront – the front exterior wall of a commercial space, typically with large area of glass.

Surround/casing – an ornamental device used to enframe all or part of a window or other opening in a wall.

Terra cotta – enriched clay, cast into blocks of almost any form and usually glazed; used extensively in the late 19th and early 20th centuries for wall cladding and decorative elements.

Transom – a window element, usually horizontal, above an entrance door or a larger window.

Vernacular – a design that is native to a region rather than a specific architectural style. These designs typically have more simplistic details and utilize local materials and forms that respond to local climate.

FURTHER READING

For more City-specific zoning definitions, please refer to the City of Pittsburgh's Zoning Code, Chapter 926 - Definitions.

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CHAPTER 2

PROCEDURES

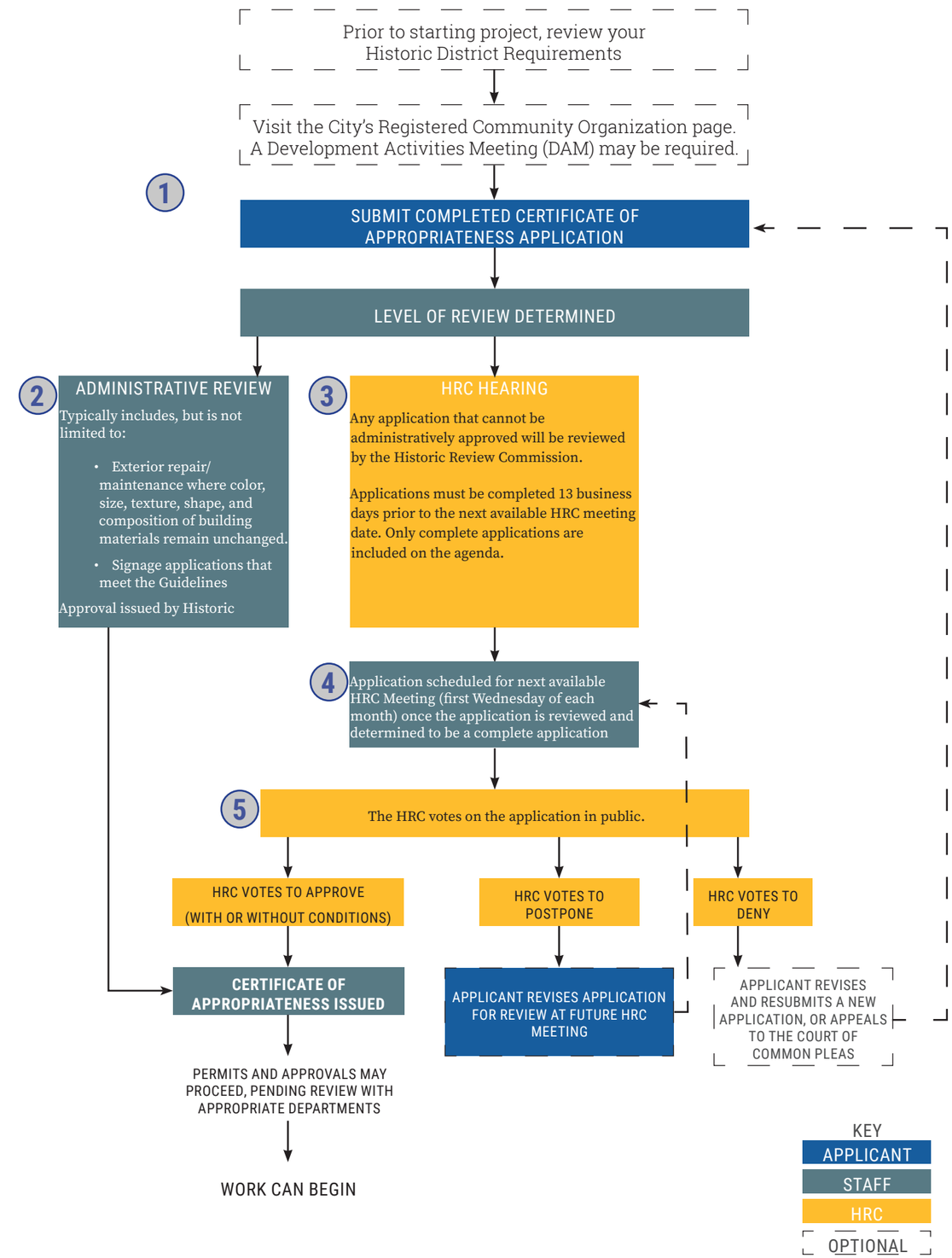
2.1 PLANNING A PROJECT

Property owners who are planning changes to the exterior of their buildings within the historic district review the application process and applicable guidelines published by the City.

Before submitting applications or reaching out to City Staff with any initial questions, it may be helpful to review and answer the following questions, which can assist property owners in planning their projects.

- Is the building located in the Historic District?
- How old is the building?
- What are the building's character-defining features (see Part 2)? What physical features on the exterior of the building convey its significance to the Historic District?
- Does the building retain its integrity? Has the building changed over time? Have there been additions, changes in scale, materials, and key defining features?
- Why is the exterior work being proposed? What is the desired outcome? What elements are required, and which of these are flexible?
- What are the short- or long-term costs of the work being proposed, and what are the expected lifespans of the proposed materials?
- If full or partial demolition is proposed, is demolition truly the last resort? What assessments or due diligence have been conducted that show that rehabilitation is not feasible, and what alternatives have been explored?

CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS PROCEDURES



2.2 HISTORIC REVIEW COMMISSION (HRC) PROCEDURES

ABOUT THE HISTORIC REVIEW COMMISSION

In 1971, the City adopted a formal Historic Preservation Ordinance, which gives authority to the city's Historic Review Commission (HRC) and outlines a process to identify and protect historic properties.

The city's Historic Preservation Ordinance "Declaration of Policy" states that its purpose is to:

"...promote the economic and general welfare of the people of the City of Pittsburgh; to ensure orderly and efficient growth and development of the City of Pittsburgh; to preserve and restore the qualities of the City of Pittsburgh relating to its history, culture, and traditions; to preserve and restore harmonious appearance of structures which attract tourists and residents to the City of Pittsburgh; and to afford the City including interested persons, historical societies, or organizations, the opportunity to acquire or arrange for the preservation of designated districts or structures."

After a resource is locally designated as historic, physical changes to the exterior are subject to a City review process. Before the proposed change can be undertaken, the applicant is required to file an application and obtain a Certificate of Appropriateness (CoA) from the City. For minor changes, the application can be reviewed and approved administratively by the City's Historic Preservation Planner. For major changes, the application is considered by the HRC.

The Historic Review Commission and city staff shall take these factors into consideration when reviewing proposed work:

- The significance of the property
- The context, with respect to other historic properties
- The location of any key, character-defining features
- The condition of those features

In addition, there are many cases in which the guidelines state a particular preferred treatment or solution, but the guideline further notes that some alternatives may be considered if the preferred approach is not feasible. In determining such feasibility, the City will also consider:

- The reasonable availability of the preferred material
- The skill required to execute the preferred approach
- The quality, appearance, and character of alternative solutions, such as new materials

Some design guidelines note that an alternative may be considered by the HRC on a "case by case basis." This does not mean that the city may choose to waive the guideline, but simply that its interpretation in a particular application may require closer consideration of the same factors described above.

HRC REVIEW PROCEDURE & CERTIFICATES OF APPROPRIATENESS

Historic Preservation, Zoning Staff, and the HRC review applications for Certificates of Appropriateness (COAs), which must be completed by property owners in the historic district before any proposed erection, exterior reconstruction, exterior alteration, demolition, or razing of a building, structure, or fence. Review applies to any project that has exterior elements that can be seen from a city right-of-way, which includes alleys, lanes, and adjacent streets. Obtaining a COA is a prerequisite for being issued a zoning permit and a building permit.

HRC approval is not the only approval required to obtain permits. All work is subject to City of Pittsburgh building codes, the Department of Mobility and Infrastructure (DOMI), and the zoning code.

1. APPLICATION

- Complete an application for a COA and submit it to the Historic Preservation Planner in the Department of City Planning.
- Applications shall include all information and supporting data needed to fully describe the exterior work for which the application is being made, including written descriptions of the proposed work, site plans, elevation drawings, floor plans (if necessary), perspective drawings (if available), photographs, samples of material, etc. Supporting materials may be submitted after the application form but must be submitted at least ten (10) days prior to a Historic Review Commission hearing in order for the application to be reviewed at the meeting.
- Applications are considered incomplete unless accompanied by the application fee, a check payable to Treasurer, City of Pittsburgh.

COA FIRST, THEN OTHER PERMITS

A Certificate of Appropriateness is required prior to the issuance of a building permit, demolition permit, sign permit, or any other permit, and is required prior to the commencement of any work.

For more information, contact the Historic Preservation Planners within the Department of City Planning: 412.255.2241 / 2246

http://pittsburghpa.gov/dcp/historic

2. ADMINISTRATIVE APPROVAL

- Upon receipt of a completed application, the Historic Preservation Planner will review the scope of the work included in the application. If the work falls within the guidelines for administrative approval, the Historic Preservation Planner will prepare a COA authorizing that work.
- If the Historic Preservation Planner decides to recommend anything other than approval as submitted, they will collaborate with the applicant to decide whether or not the application will be withdrawn, revised, or referred to the HRC.

3. GETTING ON THE HRC MONTHLY AGENDA

- If the scope of work included in the application falls outside of the guidelines for administrative approval, the application must be reviewed by the HRC at its regularly scheduled meeting.
- Notice of the date, time, and place of the next regularly scheduled meeting shall be given to each applicant and/or applicant's representative at least seven (7) days prior to the date of that meeting to allow the applicant to appear and present testimony in support of the request. Notices shall also be sent to the record owner of the property, if different from the applicant; the head of the Department of Permits, Licenses, and Inspections; and other persons and/or organizations as the HRC may determine.
- All applicants and those requesting to address the HRC on business other than design review shall have the right to be heard at the next regularly scheduled meeting of the HRC, provided that the application has been filed by the deadline for that meeting. The applicant, or a representative of the applicant who has been empowered to make changes in the application, must be present at the HRC meeting for the application to be reviewed unless the applicant sends written notice allowing the HRC to proceed.

ADMINISTRATIVE APPROVAL

- Any project that calls for in-kind repair or replacement of building elements
- Any project that involves routine maintenance that does not require a change in materials or appearance (repainting in the same color(s) or varnishing, etc)
- Any project that involves work on a building in a row of identical buildings, when the Historic Review Commission has already approved an identical application in that same row
- Applications for signage that meet the established Design Guidelines for the issuance of COAs

HISTORIC REVIEW COMMISSION APPROVAL

- All projects that call for new construction, demolition, major alterations, and/or changes in materials
- Proposals to restore the exterior of a building to a documented original condition

- **Local Review Committees (LRC)** are advisory groups and have no regulatory jurisdiction, however, applicants are encouraged to seek the support and endorsement of the LRC prior to attending the HRC hearing (though it is not mandatory). At any time, the HRC may request the recommendation of a LRC. Each LRC shall be made up of residents, or in commercial areas, property owners of each district. LRCs shall advise the HRC on work applications and guidelines for the issuance of COAs for the district.

IN-KIND REPAIRS

"In-Kind" refers to the repair or replacement of a historic building material or feature, using the same materials, design, dimensions, texture, and detailing as existing to replicate the original appearance.

4. HRC PRESENTATION AGENDA

- The Historic Preservation Planner shall summarize each application and shall describe the City's recommendations and those of the LRC. The historic Preservation Planner will describe why the application did not fit the criteria for administrative review and will describe whether the application meets the letter and intent of the Design Guidelines.
- The applicant, upon recognition by the presiding officer, shall be allowed to explain the application and shall answer the questions of the HRC members. The applicant may present photographs, material samples, drawings, or other items that help explain the application.
- The presiding officer shall then allow proponents of the proposal to speak, upon recognition. A period of three (3) minutes shall be allowed for each proponent. The presiding officer shall then allow opponents of the proposal or other interested parties to speak and question the petitioner, upon recognition. A period of three (3) minutes shall be allowed for each speaker. Proponents will then be allowed a period of three (3) minutes for all speakers who wish to offer rebuttal. Opponents shall not be allowed to rebut.
- Individuals who have requested to address the HRC on matters unrelated to specific work applications, and who are included on the agenda of the meeting, shall have a maximum of three (3) minutes in which to speak.
- The presiding officer may extend or shorten these time limitations, with the approval of the HRC members present, in exceptional and unusual cases.
- The HRC will discuss the application. The HRC shall consider the testimony presented to it, as well as the Design Guidelines when arriving at decisions regarding work applications.

ZONING VARIANCES

If your project requires the review and approval of the Zoning Board of Adjustment (ZBA) in order to establish the legal right to build, the applicant should discuss the proper order of application with the Zoning Administrator. In some cases, the ZBA and the HRC hearings can be scheduled concurrently, though the Zoning Administrator will decide which hearing

5. HRC APPROVAL

- At the end of the meeting, the HRC shall publicly vote to approve (with or without conditions), deny, or postpone consideration of each application. If the HRC fails to take action within sixty (60) days of the monthly meeting at which it first reviewed the application, then the application shall be deemed approved.
- All applications and the head of the Department of Permits, Licenses, and Inspections shall be notified in writing of the decisions of the HRC. If the HRC gives its final approval to an application, then the Historic Preservation Planner shall prepare a COA for that proposal. The Historic Preservation Planner and the Secretary of the Historic Review Commission must sign all COAs for them to be valid, unless the COA is issued under the guidelines established for administrative approvals. If the HRC denies an application, its written notice of the decision shall indicate the changes in the application that would allow it to meet the HRC's criteria for approval. The applicant has the right to appeal the HRC's criteria for approval to the Court of Common Pleas of Allegheny County.
- Minutes of the HRC meetings, records of all votes, and the file records of all applications shall be kept in the Preservation Office of the Department of City Planning. All such records may be reviewed by members of the public and any public body or agency upon application in writing to the Historic Preservation Planner in the Department of City Planning.

2.3 FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What do the Design Guidelines provide standards for?

The Design Guidelines cover multiple building features, with guidelines for roofs, windows, doors, masonry, utility and communication equipment, signs, and site features (such as fences).

Are the Design Guidelines voluntary or mandatory?

While the Design Guidelines are not an ordinance or law, the more that property owners in the Local Historic District follow the guidelines, the greater the chance that the HRC will issue a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA).

In addition, following the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation, upon which these Design Guidelines are based, is necessary to receive federal and state tax credits for improvements to historic buildings.

What does "rehabilitation" mean?

Rehabilitation is the process of making repairs, alterations, or additions to a structure while preserving those portions or features that convey the structure's historical, cultural, or architectural values. This document provides guidelines for rehabilitation of existing buildings and construction of new additions and buildings. In contrast to the concepts of preservation and restoration, rehabilitation allows for alterations and construction of new additions as well as for the replacement of extensively deteriorated, damaged, or missing features using in-kind or otherwise compatible substitute materials.

Do the Design Guidelines apply to non-historic buildings and new construction?

Yes, new construction and alterations to newer buildings that are visible from a public street are required to be reviewed by the HRC. Any relevant sections of the Design Guidelines that apply to such buildings will be referenced during HRC review. While non-historic buildings and new construction will not possess the architectural features that contribute to historic integrity or to the Local Historic District, they still have impacts on their block and on the Local Historic District as a whole. These are considerations that will go into the determination of approval for a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) from HRC. As long as a building is located within the boundaries of the Local Historic District, HRC review is required.

What is the difference between the Design Guidelines and the City's zoning ordinance?

Guidelines are different than regulations, ordinances, or zoning policies, as they do not dictate specific requirements or solutions. Instead, these Design Guidelines are intended to provide guidance on how to evaluate options and make informed decisions about a variety of design issues, including materials and construction methods.

Will I be forced to restore my property with the Design Guidelines?

The Design Guidelines do not force property owners to restore their buildings to an historical standard or appearance. Previous alterations that exist may be retained, but if property owners wish to perform exterior repairs, alterations, new construction, or demolition, they must submit a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) application for review and approval. Preservation of the existing historic or original fabric is the preferred course of action. If previous unsympathetic alterations have been made, property owners should consider the quality of design, materials, and workmanship when considering whether to retain these alterations. Property owners will not be required to restore or undo unsympathetic changes made previously, but all new exterior work will be required to be in compliance with the Design Guidelines in order to receive a COA. Only a code violation cited by City of Pittsburgh Department of Permits, Licenses, and Inspections can require work.

If I renovate my historic building, do I need to make it accessible?

Historic buildings are generally not exempt from compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Like all buildings (other than residential dwellings without an elevator and fewer than four dwelling units), historic buildings are required to make reasonable efforts to ensure accessibility to the greatest extent possible. However, if full compliance with the ADA Standards for Accessible Design is not feasible without comprising or destroying the building's historical significance, the building may be eligible to meet alternative minimum standards.

To determine eligibility for alternative minimum standards, building owners must contact the Pennsylvania State Historic Preservation Office (PA SHPO), who can provide guidance on feasible accessibility solutions. Contact information for the PA SHPO's Western Region Community Preservation Coordinator can be found here: https://www.pa.gov/agencies/phmc/historic-preservation/community-preservation/contact-and-forms.html.

Note that exemptions from the ADA apply only to alterations of historic buildings. New additions or construction must fully comply with the ADA as well as any other codes and regulations required by relevant jurisdictions and authorities.