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MEXICAN WAR STREETS HISTORIC DISTRICT

DESIGN GUIDELINES

Sept 2026

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1 CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MEXICAN WAR STREETS HISTORIC DISTRICT

1.1 Introduction....6
1.2 About the Mexican War Streets Historic District....8
1.3 Hierarchy of Facades....10
1.4 Key Characteristics of the Mexican War Streets Historic District....11
1.5 Major Architectural Styles....14

CHAPTER 2 GUIDELINES FOR EXISTING BUILDINGS

2.1 Exterior Walls & Materials....26
2.2 Roofs....30
2.3 Doors....32
2.4 Windows....33
2.5 Storefronts....37
2.6 Porches & Stoops....38
2.7 Accessory Structures....40

CHAPTER 3 GUIDELINES FOR SUPPORTING ELEMENTS

3.1 Signage....44
3.2 Murals and Artwork....45
3.3 Accessibility....46
3.4 Fences, Walkways & Other Landscape Elements....47
3.5 Technology & Equipment....49
3.6 Energy & Sustainability....50
3.7 Utilities & Building Systems....52

CHAPTER 4 GUIDELINES FOR ADDITIONS AND NEW CONSTRUCTION

4.1 General Guidelines....56
4.2 Location of New Construction....58
4.3 Mass & Scale of New Construction....59
4.4 Building Elements....60
4.5 Building Materials and Finishes....63
4.6 New Accessory Structures....64

CHAPTER 5 GUIDELINES FOR DEMOLITION

5.1 General Guidelines....68
5.2 Considerations....69
5.3 Procedures for Documentation....70

TECHNICAL APPENDIX....72

CHAPTER 1

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MEXICAN WAR STREETS HISTORIC DISTRICT

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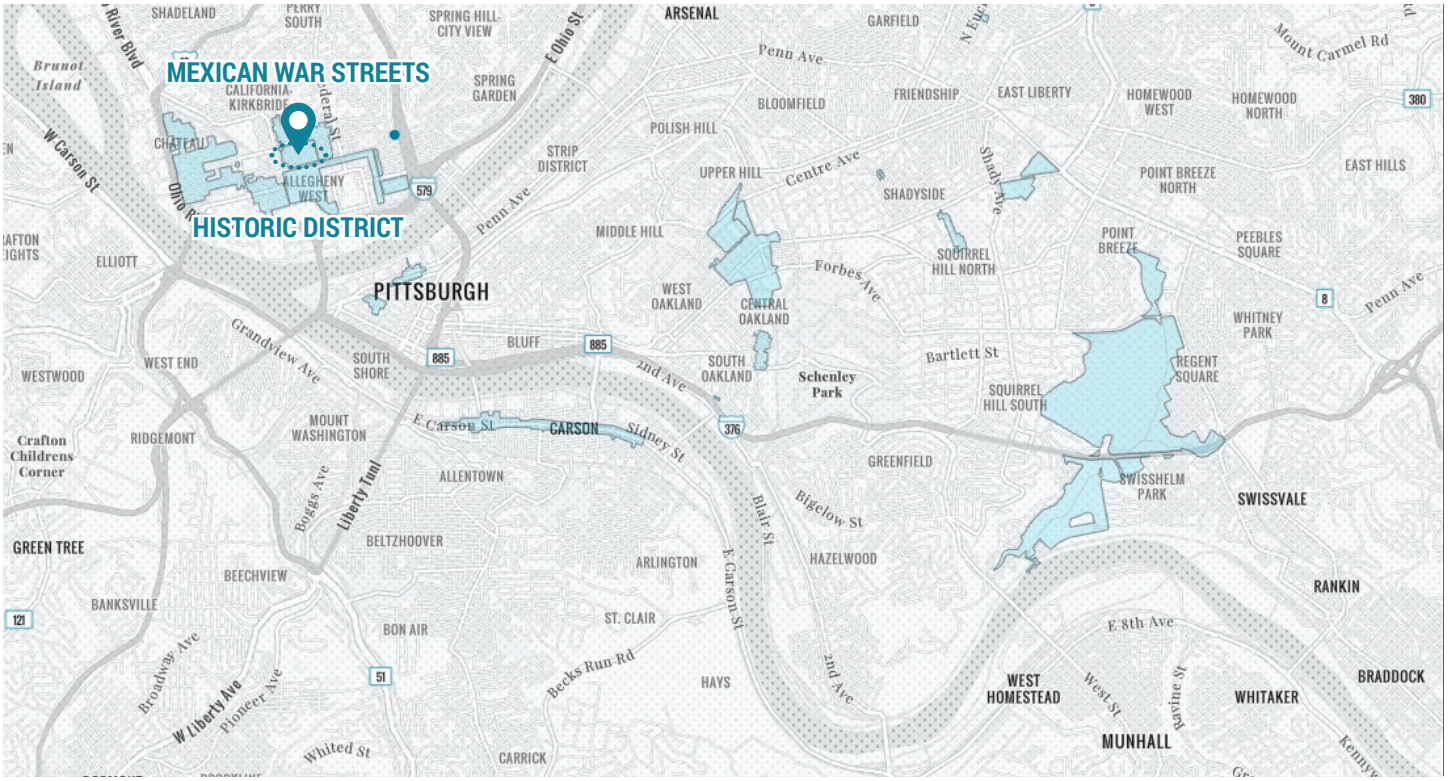
1.1 INTRODUCTION

The Mexican War Streets Historic District is one of over a dozen historic districts throughout the City of Pittsburgh designated under City of Pittsburgh Code of Ordinances, Title 11: Historic Preservation. Each historic district has a unique identity and characteristics.

Exterior work within historic districts is reviewed by Department of City Planning staff and, depending on the overall scope, a project may be reviewed by the Historic Review Commission.

To learn more about the City's historic districts and procedures for review of exterior work within historic districts, please review "City of Pittsburgh Historic Districts General Design Guidelines." This and more information are available via the City's Historic Preservation homepage: "City of Pittsburgh Historic Preservation Program"

CITY OF PITTSBURGH LOCAL HISTORIC DISTRICTS



TIMELINE FOR MEXICAN WAR STREETS HISTORIC DISTRICT

1870 - Build start

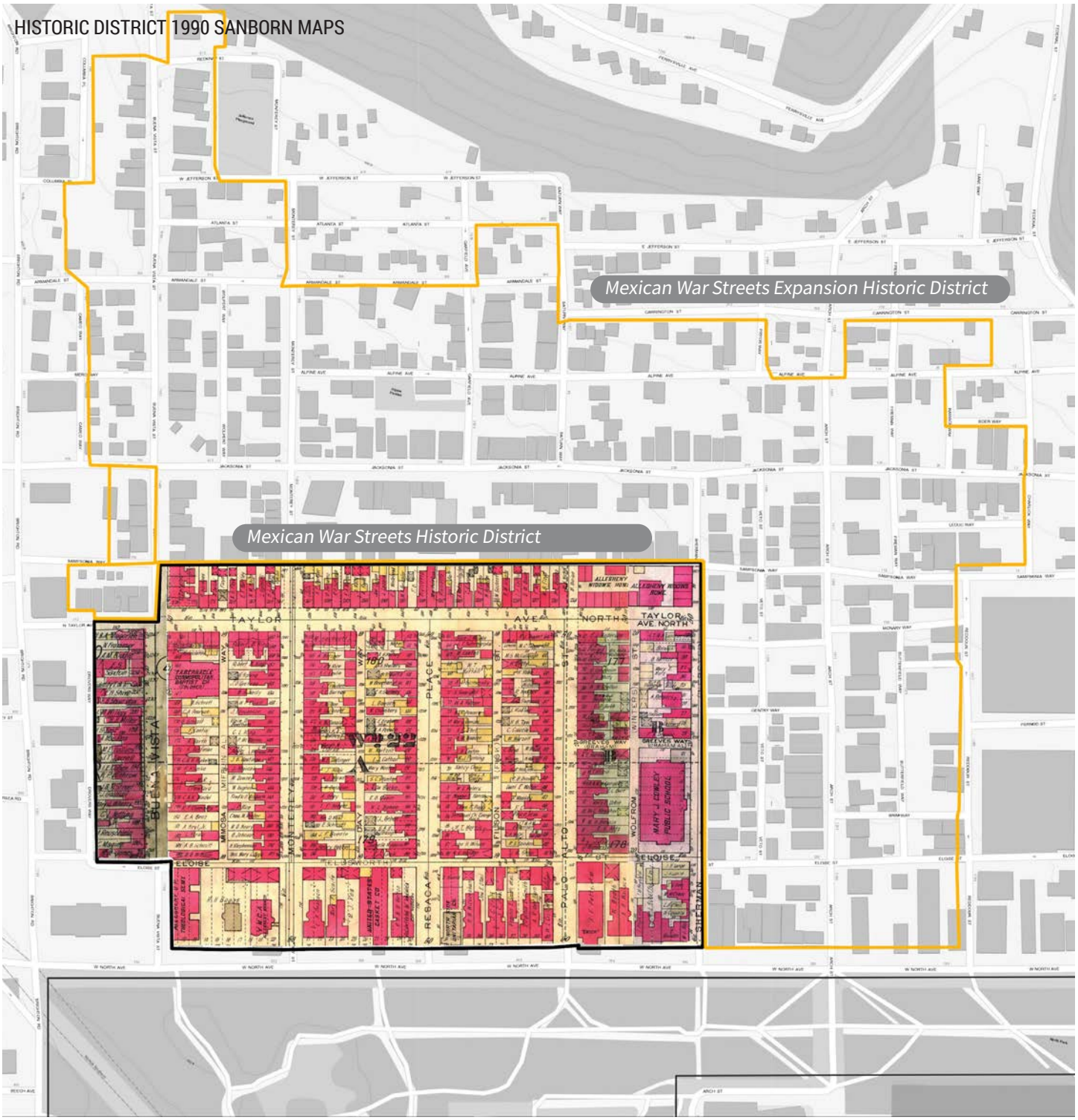
Several of the frame houses predate the 1880s in the Mexican War Streets Historic district as well as the Historic District Expansion.

1930 - Built out

The Mexican War Streets Neighborhood was largely built out by about 1930. This 1925 Hopkins map shows the neighborhood. Densely packed, meticulously crafted Greek Revival, Italianate, Second Empire, and late-Victorian brick and wood row houses.

1975 - NRHP Listing

The 27-acre district was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1975 with 119 buildings deemed to contribute to the historic character of the district.



1976 - Mexican War Streets Historic District

2008 - Mexican War Streets Historic District Expansion

2026 - Historic District Design Guidelines update

A group of passionate community preservationists fight the demolition of their neighborhood, officially forming the Mexican War Streets Society (MWSS). They begin buying and restoring homes. Consequently, The City of Pittsburgh officially recognizes the area's architectural value, designating the Mexican War Streets as a City Local Historic District—making it one of the earliest locally protected districts in the city.

The Mexican War Streets Expansion Historic District is officially listed, adding roughly 450 later Victorian structures to the master plan to preserve the architectural character of the Central Northside.

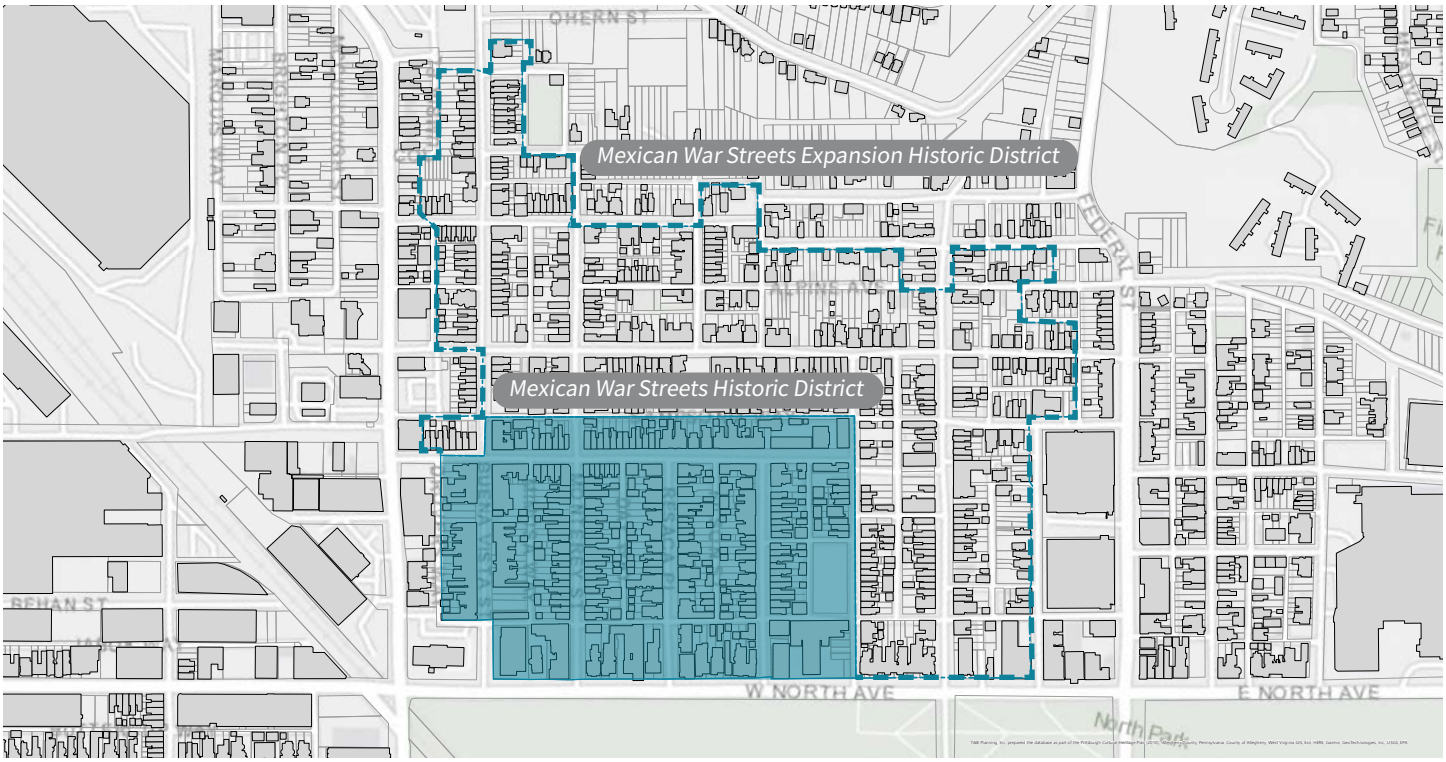
1.2 ABOUT THE MEXICAN WAR STREETS HISTORIC DISTRICT

The Mexican War Streets Historic District is a compact area of intact Victorian-era buildings and streetscapes located in the Central Northside neighborhood of the City of Pittsburgh, north of the Allegheny River. The neighborhood used to be part of the independent City of Allegheny before its annexation to Pittsburgh in 1907. General William Robinson, Jr., the first Mayor of Allegheny, laid out the district's plan in 1847 and named many of the streets for generals and battles of the Mexican-American War of 1846-1847.

Construction of housing began the same year, with a subsequent building boom in the 1860s, and continued through the early twentieth century. Architectural styles from throughout this period are represented. Within this diversity of design, the district displays strong consistency of scale, with most buildings ranging from two to three bays (window widths) wide and two to three stories tall. Along West North Avenue, facing Allegheny Commons Park, the district is punctuated by a few taller, four-story buildings and one-story churches.

Photo: Historic photo TBD

MAP OF MEXICAN WAR STREETS HISTORIC DISTRICT



Buildings in the Mexican War Streets Historic District are predominantly residential with scattered commercial storefronts, reflecting a typical nineteenth-century neighborhood pattern. The district includes cultural and architectural landmarks such as the Allegheny YMCA (Robert Maurice Trimble, 1926), the former Boggs mansion at 604 West North Avenue (Longfellow, Alden, & Harlow, 1888), and the former Orphan's Asylum—later the Allegheny Widows' Home—complex along North Taylor Avenue, Sherman Street, and Sampsonia Way at the northeastern corner of the district. First constructed in 1838, the Widows' Home's earliest elements predate the platting of the Mexican War Streets and were designed by John Chislett, Pittsburgh's first important architect. With additions from the 1870s, this was an early and important example of benevolent housing.

In 1972, the City of Pittsburgh designated the Mexican War Streets Historic District as its first local historic district. In 1975, the district was listed in the National Register of Historic Places. The National Register district was expanded in in 2008 and 2012, and City designated the Mexican War Streets Expansion Historic District under its local ordinance in 2020. The two local districts are contiguous and share much of their history.

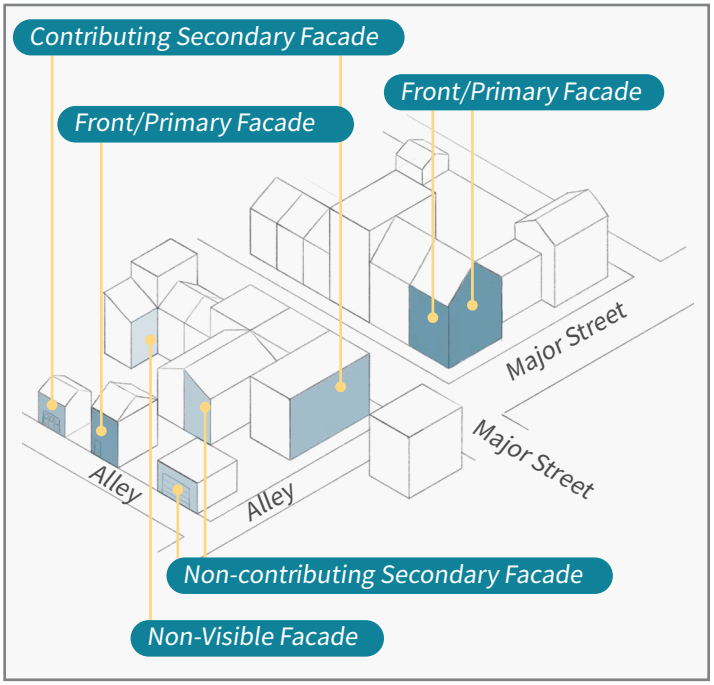
1.3 HIERARCHY OF FACADES

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 most visible from and facing a public street. It contains the main entrance to the building and typically has the most character-defining architectural features. Primary facades include sides of corner buildings that do not contain the main entrance but are visible from a major public street. The HRC reviews new construction, exterior alterations, and alternative materials on primary facades.
- **Contributing secondary façades** are those that are visible from the public street but are not on the front of the building. 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 carriage houses and historic-era garages. Contributing secondary façades often contain character-defining architectural features. The HRC reviews new construction, exterior alterations, and alternative materials on contributing secondary façades.
- **Non-contributing 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. The HRC reviews new construction on noncontributing secondary façades. Exterior alterations and alternative materials are reviewed administratively.
- A **non-visible façade** is one that cannot be seen from the public right-of-way and is not reviewed by the HRC. New construction, exterior alterations, and alternative materials are reviewed administratively.

HIERARCHY OF FACADES



HIERARCHY OF FACADES CLASSIFICATION

DCP facade classification according to hierarchy GIS map:

https://www.pittsburghpa.gov/Business-Development/City-Planning/Historic-Preservation-Program/Historic-Designations-and-Districts

1.4 KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MEXICAN WAR STREETS HISTORIC DISTRICT

The Mexican War Streets Historic District is located in a dense urban setting characteristic of its development during an era when most people walked to work, school, and religious services, and to procure goods and services within close proximity to their homes. The predominant building type in the district is the attached dwelling. Scattered storefronts often had shopkeepers' apartments above. Architectural styles from throughout the Victorian period contribute a variety of ornamental features and details to the visual character and texture of the district's streetscapes.

Buildings within the district exhibit consistent size, scale, and proportion. Most are two, two-and-a-half, or three-story dwellings. Throughout the district, there are clusters of contiguous attached buildings constructed in the same style with nearly identical detailing, such as 515-525 and 603-609 North Taylor Avenue and 1215-1229 Buena Vista Street. These rows of two to five buildings from the same architectural moment create small areas of cohesive rhythm set into the overall diversity of architectural expressions along the streetscapes.

Most buildings are built with their facades to the sidewalk and have a stepped entry to a styled or decorative first floor entry door. The type (single or double leaf) and design of doors varies with building style and period of construction. Detailing at window surrounds also varies by building style, but typically features expressive sills and lintels that may be flat, curved, or arched, and constructed of stone, brick, or wood.

Building Type: The Mexican War Streets includes mostly attached single-family and multi-family residential buildings with accessory structures, such as garages. Although dwellings dominate the district, some mixed-use buildings that include ground floor commercial storefronts are found, as well as buildings purpose-built for religious, cultural, and social institutions.

Building Placement: The majority of the buildings in the Mexican War Street Historic District are located along a single plane, built up to the lot line, with zero setback. There are a few exceptions throughout the district that are set back behind shallow front yards, including many of the the residences along West North Avenue that face Allegheny Commons Park.

A variety of façades forms the streetscape of the historic district.

The typical building type in the Mexican War Streets is residential.

Symetrical façade composition on an Italianate house.

Most properties extend to narrow alleys that run through the middle of almost every block in the district. In some cases, the rear of the property includes an open yard, often fenced along the alley. Many other residential properties include an accessory structure, like a former carriage house or garage, located near the rear of the lot facing the alley. Some garages have attic stories and/or accessory dwellings above a first floor dedicated to vehicle storage. There are also a few cases where lots are divided mid-block, such that one house faces the street and another at the rear has a primary facade fronting the alley.

Building Form: Building massing and volume are generally dictated by the Mexican War Streets' regular, rectangular lot size and shape and consistent with building use and architectural style. Given the rapid development of this area, most residences are homogeneous in scale and proportion. All are low-rise, two to three stories, and are either attached rowhouses or closely-built detached houses. Most are two to three bays wide and have low-pitched gabled roofs. A smaller number built in the decades during and just after the Civil War have mansard roofs. Dormers are a common feature on both roof types. The roofline typically includes shallow overhanging eaves with wooden brackets or a corbeled brick cornice.

Because most primary facades stand at the lot line, front porches are not common in the district, but are present on some houses facing and near Allegheny Commons Park. Porches, where they exist, are key character-defining architectural features.

Façade Composition: The composition of residential buildings includes a main entry door located on the ground floor and either centered or off-centered with the rest of the façade elements. Window openings are typically aligned vertically on the first and upper levels. Dormer projections at the third floor level typically include smaller windows that are either aligned with or centered between the primary facade windows below.

The typical window has a double-hung configuration, usually tall and narrow with either a flat or arched top. The number and configuration of panes of original windows is a major character-defining feature and vary by style. Depending on the architectural style, the windows and doors either have rectangular lintels flush with the surrounding façade, or projecting hoods that may be decoratively carved or detailed.

Mixed-use buildings are generally similar to their residential counterparts on the upper levels, but include a storefront with large display windows and a flush or recessed doorway on the first floor. These commercial ground floors are less likely than the district's dwellings to include a raised entrance with a stoop.

Example of Historic District building form.

Example of Historic District façades composition.

Windows with flush lintels

Windows with projecting hoods

Building Materials: The district's primary building materials are those that were readily available when its buildings were constructed: brick from local brickyards, stone from nearby quarries, and wood.

Stone, usually sandstone, is the typical foundation material for buildings in the Mexican War Streets Historic District. Stone was also preferred façade material for the Romanesque Revival Style and can be seen as the primary façade material on a number of buildings within the district.

Brick is the primary material of the facades of buildings in the Mexican War Streets Historic District, frequently trimmed with wood at windows, doors, surrounds, and cornices. Standard brick masonry was generally laid in a common running bond pattern, with some instances of decorative brick units, patterns, and bonds.

The predominant historic brick color was red, but sometimes tan or buff brick was used, especially for styles that emphasized lighter colors, such as Colonial Revival. Some of the brick buildings in the neighborhood have been painted, but this is not a historical treatment and often causes damage to the underlying masonry.

The district also includes some wood frame residences with clapboard siding, trim, and dormers. The ability of wood to be sawn, routed, and tooled into a great variety of shapes and profiles made it the most popular choice for the decorative brackets, spindles, and moldings that are a character-defining feature of Victorian-era architectural styles. Historically, wood was always painted to protect it from the elements.

Slate was historically the district's predominant roof material due its durability. A standard rectangular slate was the most common, but there are many instances, especially on mansard roofs, where builders created decorative patterns using different shaped slates, some of which can still be seen. Many slate roofs have since been replaced with asphalt shingle which has not replicated the texture, form, and/or pattern of the original slate.

Metal was a much less common building material, mostly limited to low slope and porch roof applications, flashings, gutters, and railings.

Example of Historic District building materials.

Typical alley view in the Mexican War Streets including primary and secondary structures.

1.5 MAJOR ARCHITECTURAL STYLES

There are eight major architectural styles in the Mexican War Streets Historic District.

GREEK REVIVAL (1825-1860)

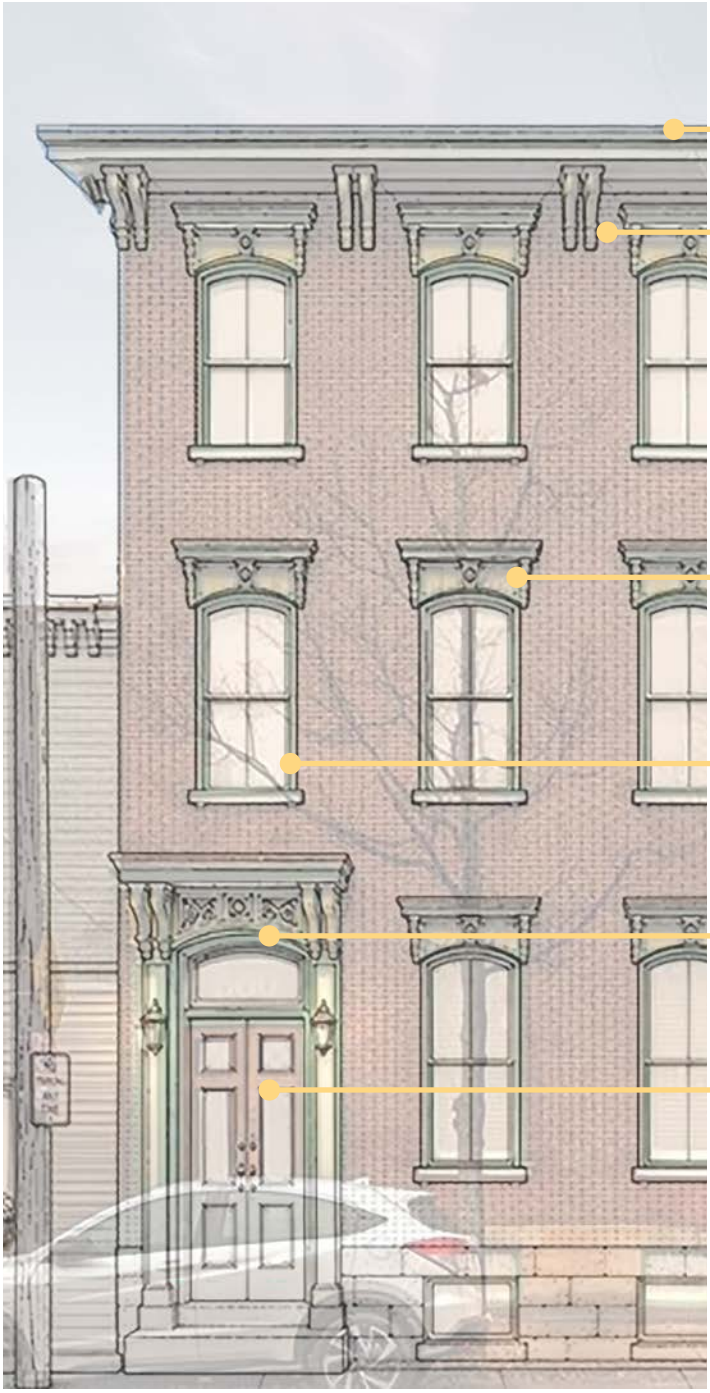
The Greek Revival Style emerged in the early decades of the American republic out of sympathy and support for the Greek War of Independence (1821-1830). Americans developed an interest in Greek culture and history that extended to architectural forms inspired by ancient Greek temples. Variations of Greek Revival include a more simplified, vernacular version, seen in some of the district's earliest buildings, such as the 1838 Chislett-designed portion of the former Allegheny Widows' Home.

KEY DEFINING FEATURES OF THE GREEK REVIVAL STYLE

- *gable roof, gable end to street*
- *frieze band below roof cornice*
- *molded pediment in gable end or return*
- *full-height columns or pilasters*
- *double-hung, multi-paned windows*
- *side and/or top lites at main entrance*

ITALIANATE (1850-1885)

The Italianate Style offered a romantic, picturesque interpretation of the medieval villas found in the Italian countryside. Its characteristic boxy massing and lack of ground-floor projecting forms, such as porticos, made the style easily adaptable to the urban row building. The availability of new building materials after the Civil War allowed for varied and robust ornamentation.



KEY DEFINING FEATURES OF THE ITALIANATE STYLE

- *low pitched roofline*
- *projecting bracketed cornice*
- *decorative window hoods or drip molds*
- *tall and narrow windows*
- *segmental and/or round arched window heads*
- *tall, narrow doorway, often with double doors*

SECOND EMPIRE (1860-1900)

The Second Empire Style is named after the reign of Napoleon III, "France's Second Empire," which saw Paris rebuilt from a medieval to a modern city. Its defining roof form, the mansard, was named for French architect Francois Mansart and, with dormers, creates a fully usable attic space. The Second Empire was a popular building style in the United States in the 1860s-1870s. On a row building, it can often look like a mansard roof atop a house with typically Italianate detailing, and mansard roofs were sometimes added to older houses in this way.

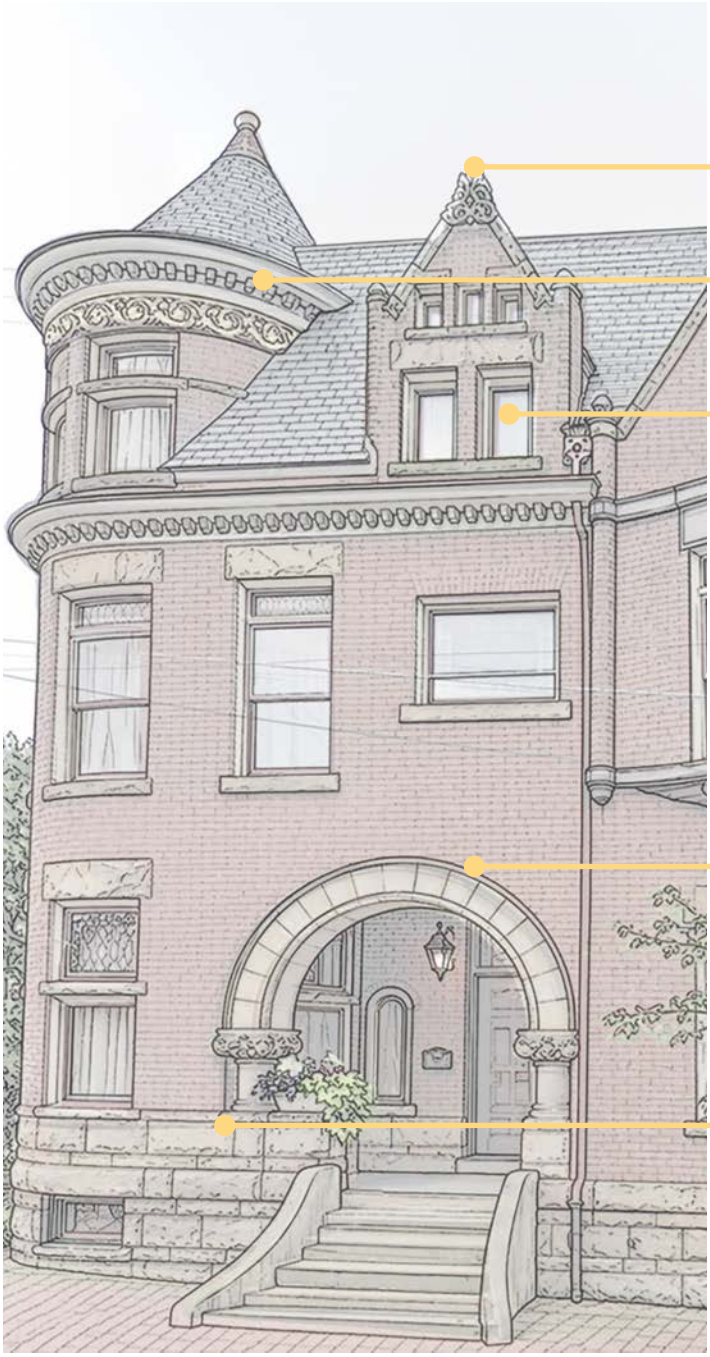
KEY DEFINING FEATURES OF THE SECOND EMPIRE STYLE

- *cast iron decorative cresting*
- *cornice*
- *mansard roof*
- *arched or segmented-arched window openings*
- *vertically proportioned windows*
- *tall, narrow doorway, often with double doors*

ROMANESQUE REVIVAL (1870-1900)

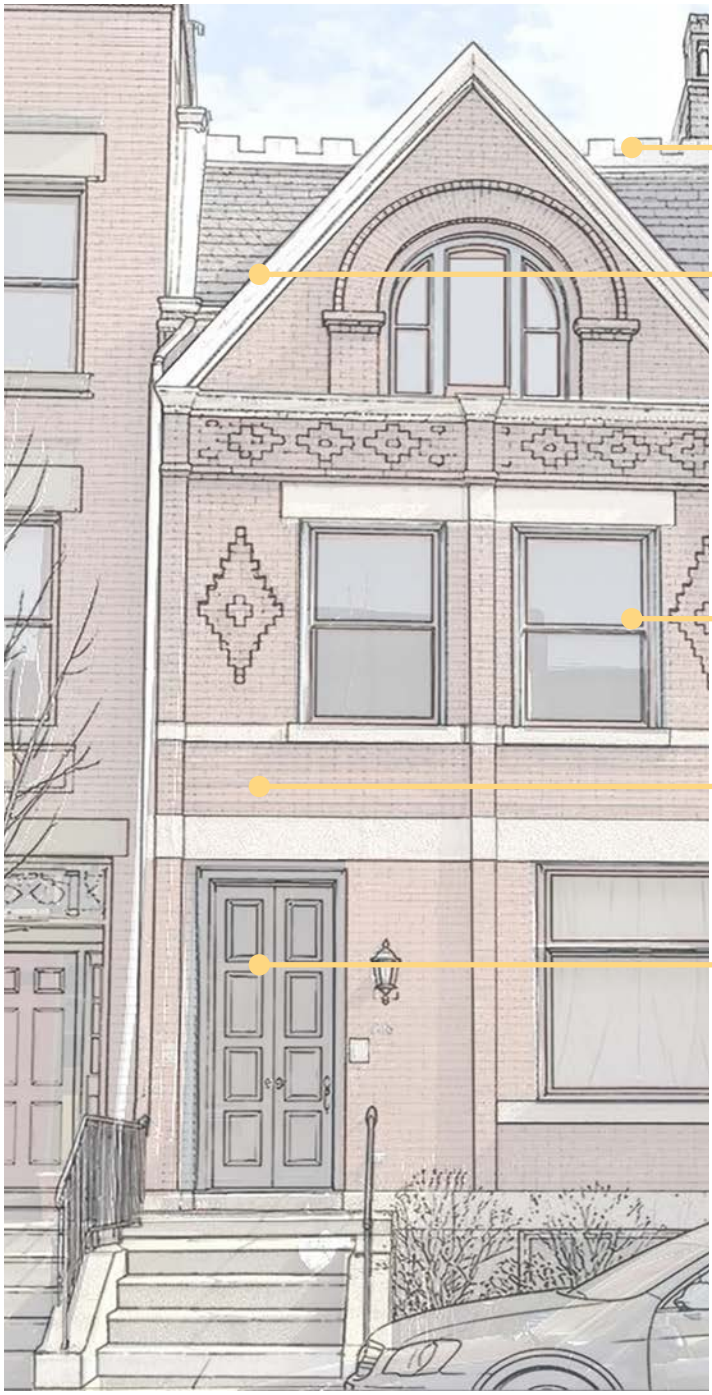
Romanesque Revival buildings feature heavy masonry construction; richly-textured, asymmetrical facades; and rounded forms derived from the medieval Romanesque architecture of France and Spain. In the United States, the style was popularized by Henry Hobson Richardson, who made it his signature in Boston in the 1870s and designed the Allegheny County Courthouse and Jail in downtown Pittsburgh in the 1880s. The Romanesque Revival is sometimes called "Richardsonian" after him. Often associated with banks and institutional buildings, the Romanesque Revival was also fashionable for residential construction in the 1880s and 1890s.

KEY DEFINING FEATURES OF THE ROMANESQUE REVIVAL STYLE



QUEEN ANNE (1880-1910)

The Queen Anne Style is an eclectic recombination of forms and motifs drawn from a range of sources, including ancient Classical, medieval English, and Flemish architecture, first created and popularized by architect Richard Norman Shaw in England. Almost exclusively used in residential design, it emphasized domestic comfort and exuberant ornamentation with great variety, and even contrast, of forms, textures, and materials.



KEY DEFINING FEATURES OF THE QUEEN ANNE STYLE

- *roof cresting*
- *multi-gabled roof*
- *variety of window types, shapes and sizes*
- *variety of wall materials and textures*
- *door contains beveled glass and/or wood panels*

COLONIAL REVIVAL (1880-1960)

Inspired the United States centennial celebration of 1876, the Colonial Revival Style borrowed forms, materials, and motifs from early American architecture, which in turn had borrowed from ancient Greek and Roman prototypes. Colonial Revival buildings display a return to symmetry, formality, and classically-inspired detailing after the eclectic free expression of the late Victorian period. The restoration of Colonial Williamsburg beginning in the 1930s helped keep this style popular through the mid-twentieth century, and variations are still in use today.

KEY DEFINING FEATURES OF THE COLONIAL REVIVAL STYLE

classical cornice, eave dentils

brick, pre-cast concrete or wood lintels.

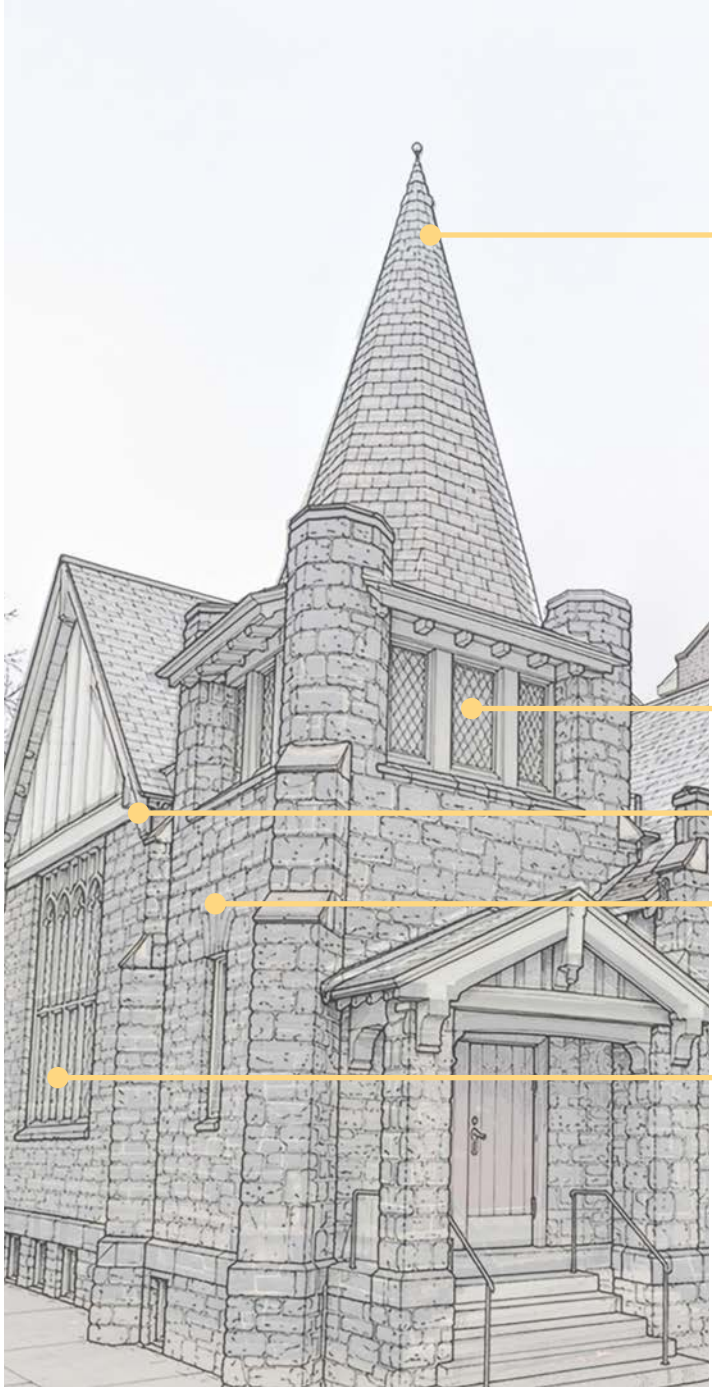
window glazing may be multi-pane, single-pane or both

dentils and tuscan columns

TUDOR/JACOBEAN REVIVAL (1890-1940)

The Tudor Revival and its subtype, the Jacobean Revival, were popular residential styles derived from English Renaissance buildings of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The Tudor Revival's signature steep gables and faux half-timbering are almost exclusively associated with detached homes, while the Jacobean Revival, characterized by brick walls, stone trim, and round arches, is also frequently seen in institutional, educational, and even commercial buildings, for example, the Allegheny YMCA.

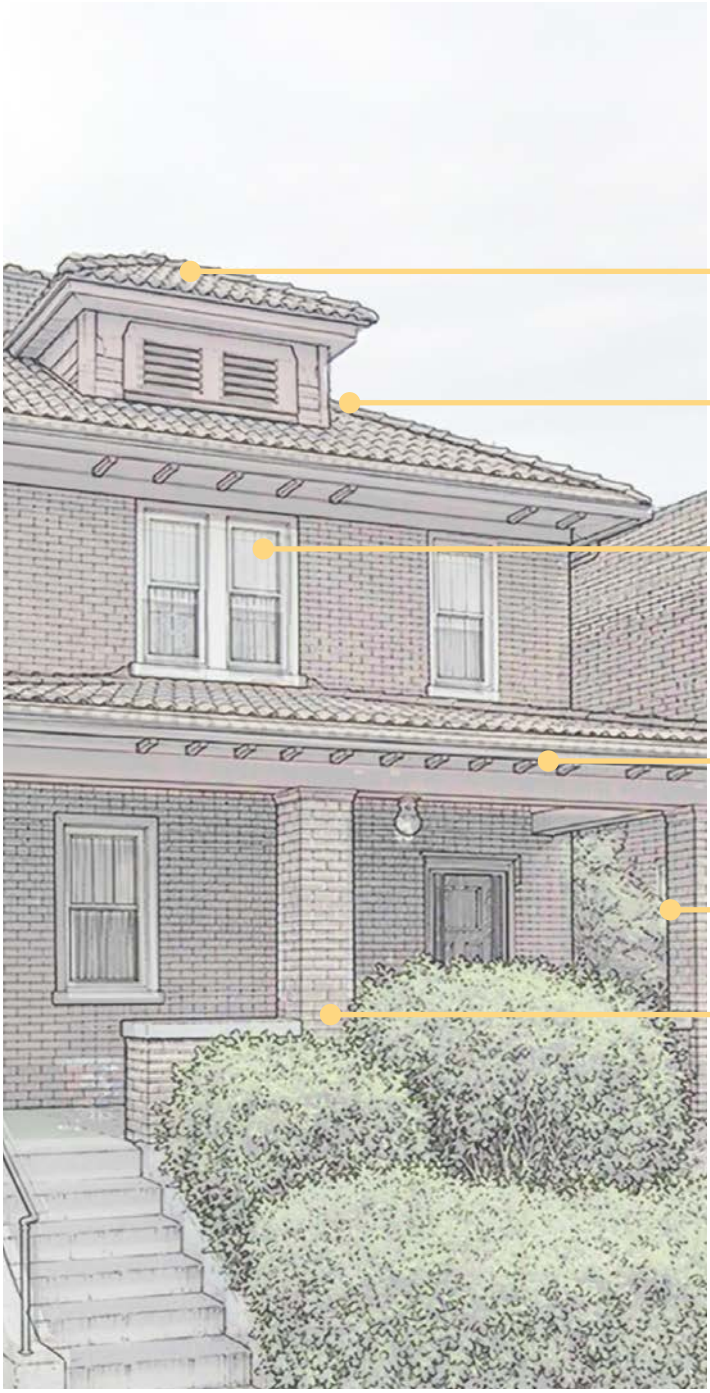
KEY DEFINING FEATURES OF THE TUDOR/JACOBEAN REVIVAL STYLE



CRAFTSMAN (1905-1935)

In the early twentieth century, artisans such as furniture maker Gustav Stickley promoted hand-craftsmanship in response to the industrial mechanization of many processes. At the same time, industrialization created modern conveniences that helped with domestic work and created a market for small, simple homes. High-style houses in the Craftsman Style were built of local materials by local craftspeople, while the cozy Arts and Crafts aesthetic melded with the mass-production of building plans and parts to produce everyday buildings influenced by the Craftsman movement. Details often overlapped with contemporaneous Colonial Revival and Tudor Revival styles.

KEY DEFINING FEATURES OF THE CRAFTSMAN STYLE



- *low-pitched hipped or gabled roof*
- *slate or terra cotta tile roofing*
- *double-hung windows often with only vertical mullions*
- *exposed wooden details (braces, rafter tail beams)*
- *prominent front porch*
- *tapered or square columns with stone or brick bases*

OTHER VERNACULAR, MIXED, AND UNSTYLED BUILDINGS

"Vernacular" is not a style of architecture, but refers to local adaptations of popular architectural fashions, often by builders, using available materials and/or millwork. Vernacular buildings may exhibit simplified characteristics of a recognizable style, a mixture of styles, or no apparent style at all. In fact, many buildings do not have a "pure" style, but either were originally built with a mix of stylistic influences, or acquired elements of different styles through renovations over the course of the historic period. These stylistic variations are historic in their own right and should be preserved as a record of a building's history.

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CHAPTER 2

GUIDELINES FOR EXISTING BUILDINGS

2.1 EXTERIOR WALLS & MATERIALS

Masonry, both brick and stone, is the key building material in the Mexican War Streets Historic District, complemented by functional and decorative wood elements such as doors, windows, cornices, and trim. These natural, durable exterior materials not only contribute to the historic architectural character of the district, they play a crucial role in each building's structural envelope. Maintaining and repairing these historic materials is preferred to replacement or cladding with new materials.

2.1.1 **Historic masonry** should be stabilized and repaired rather than replaced whenever possible.

2.1.2 Masonry is a finish material and **should not be removed or covered** with artificial or synthetic materials**.**

2.1.3 Stone or brick also **should not be painted** or treated with water-repellent coatings. These coatings can trap moisture and cause deterioration of masonry walls.

2.1.4 **Repainting** may take place if the masonry was painted historically. Appropriate surface preparation includes gentle cleaning, removal of loose old paint, and repointing and repair of mortar joints.

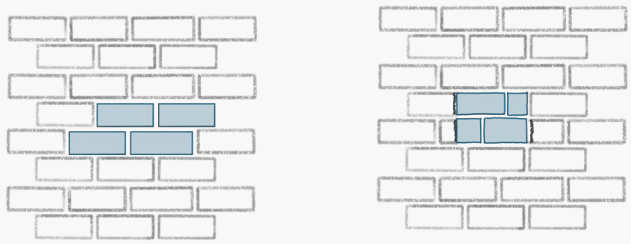
2.1.5 **Historically-appropriate colors** are preferred for masonry repainting. Reach out to City Planning staff for consultation when selecting a color scheme for a building.

2.1.6 Treatment of historic masonry with a **water-repellent** coating may be considered in special cases where the masonry was damaged by past inappropriate abrasives or chemicals, which have removed the outer surface of the masonry and allowed moisture to infiltrate the building envelope.

2.1.7 **Cleaning historic masonry** should be done by the gentlest means appropriate to the type of soil, stain, or matter to be removed. Abrasive cleaners are not appropriate because they are damaging to historic masonry.

2.1.8 **Masonry repairs and repointing** should be done by a qualified person who is familiar with historic masonry and mortar mixes.

2.1.9 When **repointing masonry** walls, match existing mortar in color, texture, strength, joint width, and joint profile.



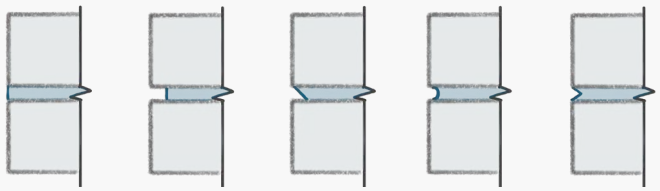
APPROPRIATE

"Tooth-in" replaced masonry units following the existing coursing (pattern).

NOT APPROPRIATE

Saw cut existing masonry and fitting replacement units to fit, disrupting the existing coursing.

MASONRY JOINTS



Flush Raked Struck Concave V-Shaped

BRICK MASONRY REPLACEMENT

Historic brick tends to be "softer" than modern brick. It has a lower strength, or psi, due to technological limitations when the brick was fabricated. When replacement of brick is necessary, take into consideration the color, texture, and strength of the existing brick. This will ensure aesthetic and material integrity of the structure overall.

2.1.10 Portland cement **mortar** is too high in strength for historic masonry and likely to cause damage during freeze-thaw cycles. A typical compatible mortar is Type N or S, using a combination of Portland cement, lime, and sand.

2.1.11 **Patching of brick** walls should be done by "toothing-in" bricks to maintain the original coursing pattern.

2.1.12 **Cracked, spalled, or deeply eroded stone** should be repaired using a Dutchman technique, in which only the damaged section of stone is carefully cut out and replaced with a new or salvaged stone block to match adjacent material as closely as possible.

2.1.13 **Historic metals** should be painted if they were originally painted or if a coating is necessary for protection from corrosion. Otherwise, metals should be left unpainted. Patina, such as that found on historic copper or bronze, should not be removed.

2.1.14 **Use non-corrosive cleaning methods to clean soft metals** such as lead, tinplate, and copper, and use the least abrasive cleaning methods to clean hard metals such as cast iron, wrought iron, and steel.

Example of deterioration to masonry caused by inappropriate strength mortar repair.

Example of inappropriate use of paint on masonry substrates.

MASONRY CLEANING

Masonry may be cleaned to remove environmental staining or biogrowth, such as moss, algae, or lichen. Biogrowth can introduce soluble salts into the masonry units and hide surface issues. When cleaning, use a biodegradable, pH neutral detergent, low-pressure wand (100 psi or less, white or black tip) and soft nylon brush. Avoid using chemicals or sandblasting for masonry cleaning. City Planning staff can provide more guidance on appropriate product types to use.

Wood is one of the most common building materials due to its strength, ready availability, and ability to be cut and tooled for a great variety of structural and decorative purposes. The natural texture of wooden building elements contributes to the historic character of the [MWS/Manchester] Historic District. Exterior wood must be kept painted to remain weatherproof and in good condition.

2.1.15 Historic wood siding and other building elements were milled from old-growth wood that is superior in durability to modern lumber products. Maintain historic wood on building exteriors in the same profile and configuration that exists.

2.1.16 Repair deteriorated or damaged wood elements using methods that strengthen original materials through consolidation using epoxies and putties to restore solidity, fill cracks and holes, and rebuild damaged or missing sections of molding.

2.1.17 Historic wood repair may include limited replacement of extremely damaged or deteriorated members. Use replacement wood to match the species, size, profile, and appearance of the original siding or trim**.**

2.1.18 If there are extensively deteriorated or missing areas of wood siding or trim that make localized repairs or replacement infeasible, full replacement may be appropriate. **New materials should replicate the original** as closely as possible in material, composition, size, profile, and appearance.

2.1.19 Substitute materials, such as engineered wood, fiber cement, or synthetic cladding may be considered if they can adequately match the visual appearance, physical properties, and durability of the historic materials. Synthetic "wood grain" finishes typically look less like historic painted wood than smooth factory finishes and are discouraged.

2.1.20 Installation of new cladding over original or historic building features is inappropriate.

Original wood siding and trims should be maintained.

WOOD ELEMENT CLEANING

Maintenance of wood siding and elements promotes a long life for the materials. Cleaning may be performed with a pH netural, biodegradable detergent and soft brush. Avoid using chemicals for cleaning.

MAINTENANCE TIP

Protect masonry, metal, and structural elements such as wood members from corrosion and rot by keeping gutters and downspouts clear, roofing in good repair, and wood free from insect infestation. Provide proper drainage to ensure that water does not erode foundation walls, pool on surfaces, or drain toward the building.

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2.2 ROOFS

The roof (geometry and material) of a building is an important architectural feature that is both character-defining and functional. Dormers, chimneys, metal flashing, roof-edge drainage systems, and trim are associated features that also contribute to the building's character. Make every effort to retain these elements in good condition.

2.2.1 **Repair and restore** original roofing whenever possible. Before replacing historic roof materials such as slate or terra cotta, evaluate whether repair or localized areas of in-kind replacement of shingles or tiles is feasible.

2.2.2 When **planning roof repairs** and/or replacement, consider the prominence of the roof and the character of the historic roofing, and prioritize preservation of highly-visible and unique materials. For example, a steeply-pitched or mansard roof is more prominent than a low-pitched gable, and decorative slates or terra cotta tiles are more character-defining than regular rectangular shingles.

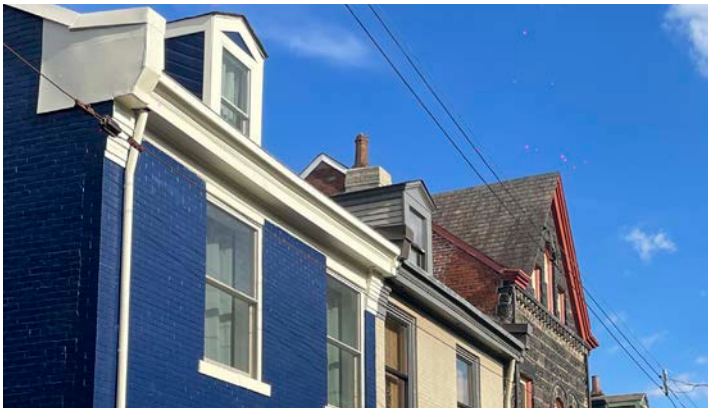
2.2.3 If full **replacement of a historic roof** is necessary due to severe deterioration or damage, use in-kind replacement materials that match the original material, appearance, color, pattern, shape, and dimensions.

2.2.4 If in-kind replacement of the historic roof is not feasible, select a substitute roofing material that **resembles the original** as closely as possible in appearance, color, pattern, shape, and dimensions. Feasibility of replacement and selection of substitute materials should be discussed in consultation with a roofing professional familiar with historic roofing. Substitute materials will be reviewed by City Planning staff and the HRC for appropriateness.

2.2.5 **Substitute roofing materials**, which are materially different from original roofing materials, may be appropriate if they resemble the appearance of the original material and do not detract from the architectural character of the building. Architectural and three-tab asphalt shingles as a replacement for slate and terra cotta tile are not appropriate. Corrugated metal

Historic slate roofing

historic cornice at a flat roof.



historic built-in gutters and metal downspouts

roofs are generally not appropriate. Corrugated metal roofs are generally not appropriate for buildings in the Mexican War Streets Historic District.

2.2.6 When **replacing a previous replacement** for the original roofing, it may be possible to select new roofing that more closely resembles the original by referring to historic photographs for documentation of the original roof material and style. If such documentation is not available for an historic building, use materials that resemble the original roofing materials on nearby historic buildings of a similar age and style. These materials will likely be slate or terra cotta tile. Asphalt shingles that match the color of nearby roofs on historic buildings may be considered if historic materials are not feasible.

2.2.7 **Original sheet metal roofing** should not be covered with membrane roofing or asphalt shingles.

2.2.8 **Avoid altering dormer shape or roof pitch**. Avoid removing historic dormers. For guidelines on adding a new dormer or expanding an existing dormer, see Chapter 4: Guidelines for Additions and New Construction, especially 4.3, Mass & Scale of New Construction, and 4.4, Building Elements.

2.2.9 **Avoid shortening or removing chimneys**. If chimneys are no longer in use, they should be capped and retained.

2.2.10 **Maintain built-in (box) gutters** and/or repair them in-kind. Hung or "K-style" gutters are not appropriate on historic buildings in the Mexican War Streets Historic District.

2.2.11 **Typical gutter materials** include aluminum, copper, and other metals. Plastic and vinyl are not appropriate materials for gutters on historic buildings.

2.2.12 **Paint drainage elements** to blend in with the building exterior, unless they are a material such as copper, which is meant to be left unpainted.

TYPES OF GUTTERS

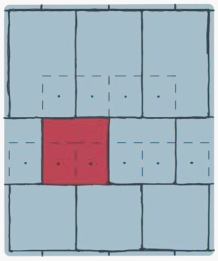
Half-Round Gutter | *Built-in Gutter (Box Gutter)* | *Inappropriate "K" Style Gutter*

SLATE SHINGLES

Rectangular *Beveled* *Scalloped*

"Exposure" refers to the visible area of a shingle, shown in red.

Exposure should be maintained in any roof maintenance or replacement work.



ALTERNATE MATERIALS

Alternate materials for slate may include synthetic slate shingles or asphalt shingles designed to look like slate. These materials should mimic the same shape, profile (or thickness), and color as the original slate.

2.3 DOORS

Doors are focal points of a facade, and doorways are stylistic compositions including the frame/surround, proportion and number of leaves (single or double), number and arrangement of panels, and presence and location of lites (windows), sidelites, and transom. The composition, proportion, shape, and detail of an historic doorway are significant architectural features that contribute to the historic character of the building.

2.3.1 **Retain historic doors** and doorway features. An experienced carpenter can repair historic wood doors and doorway features and bring historic doors back into plumb with their frames.

2.3.2 **Historic doors and doorways** should not be replaced with modern styles or materials. If a historic door is too damaged or deteriorated to repair, replace it in kind to match the original in location, material, size, design, profile, and operation.

2.3.3 **Wood replacement doors** are highly preferable to synthetic materials or metal. Stock doors rarely replicate historic designs or fit the height and width of historic doorway openings.

2.3.4 The **size and shape** of the replacement doors must be such that the new door fits into the historic opening without the need for infill or removal of historic material.

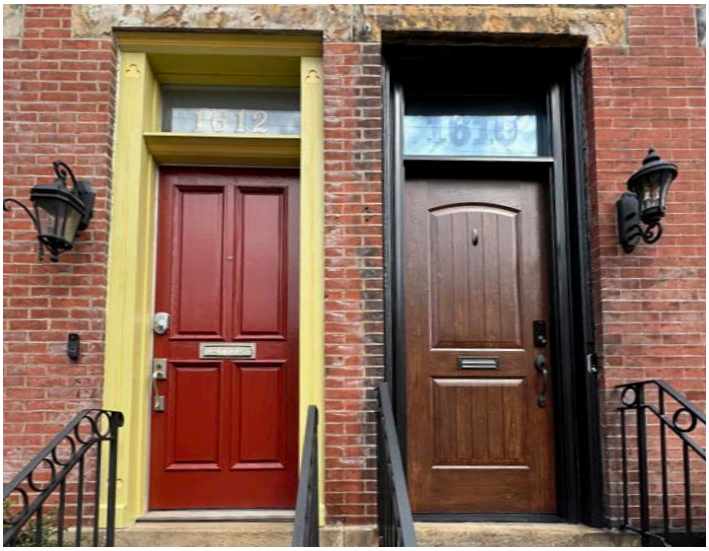
2.3.5 **Panels are a character-defining feature** of historic wooden doors. Panels on a replacement door should be authentic, i.e. set into the door's rails and stiles, not outlined with trim tacked on to a flush surface.

2.3.6 **Consider replacement of previously-installed** non-historic doors on primary facades with new or salvaged doors that are more historically appropriate. Historic photographs of the building may document its original door(s) for reference. If such documentation is not available, look to original doors on nearby historic buildings of a similar age and style.

2.3.7 **Maintain original sidelites and transoms** to preserve the solid-to-void ratio of the entrance system.

2.3.8 **Avoid creating new door openings** on the primary façade.

2.3.9 **Storm and screen doors** should complement the historic door. They should not excessively cover or detract from the historic entry door.



Appropriate replacement door (on right) is in keeping with the character of historic doors.

Historic doorway

COATINGS

Coatings are protective and aesthetic measures to protect the architectural materials. If possible, use oil/alkyd based paint on exterior wood doors. For stains, use a linseed or spar varnish instead of a polyurethane coating. These clear coats are protective yet breathable and do not require a total overhaul like polyurethanes.

Common coatings for metals include zinc-based paint. Linseed oil paint is also excellent as a protective coating. Powder coating is a very durable modern coating system applied at the factory, not on-site.

2.4 WINDOWS

Windows are among the most important character-defining features of historic buildings. Their original size, shape, arrangement, style, material, and surrounding treatment are all highly expressive of a building's architectural style. Inappropriate replacement windows can severely detract from historic character. Make every effort to retain and repair historic windows to the greatest extent possible.

2.4.1 **Historic wood windows** are made from old-growth wood that is tighter in grain and superior in durability to modern lumber products. Their inherent quality can never be replaced. Repair and restore original windows and associated components as the first course of action.

2.4.2 **Rehabilitate deteriorated or damaged wood window** components using methods that strengthen original materials through consolidation using epoxies and putties to restore solidity, fill cracks and holes, and rebuild damaged or missing sections of surrounds, sash frames, and/or muntins.

2.4.3 If the primary goal is to replace single-pane with double-pane insulated glazing, first explore whether it is possible to **retrofit the existing wood** sash to accept double glazing.

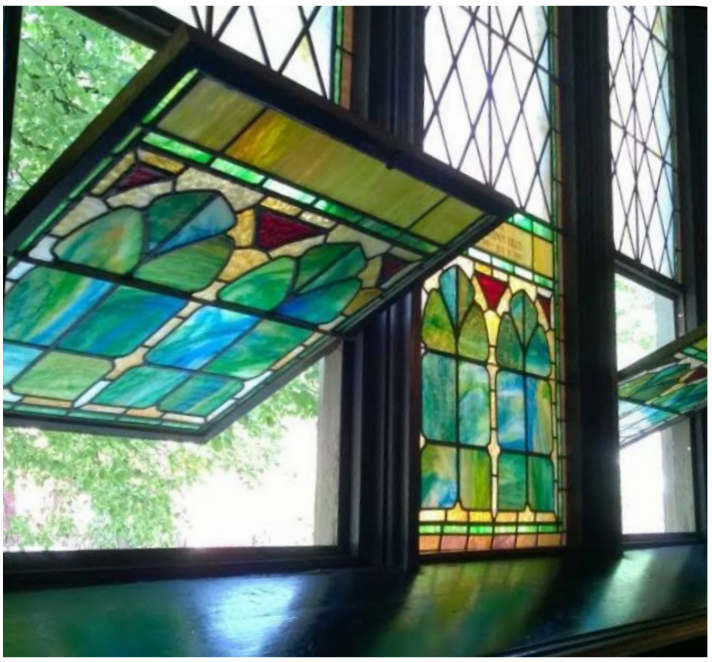
2.4.4 Investigate feasibility of **rehabilitation and thermal improvement** of original windows with an experienced carpenter or window restoration professional before proposing replacement of original window units. Replace historic windows only if rehabilitation is not possible due to extensive deterioration and loss of function that cannot be repaired.

2.4.5 When **replacing historic windows**, install new window sash only and repair or leave intact historic frames, brickmolds, and sub-sills whenever possible.

2.4.6 **Replacement windows** should be carefully selected to match the original historic window as closely as possible in material, shape, design, style, dimensions, and proportions.

2.4.7 **In-kind material replacements** are strongly preferred.

Retain original windows when possible.



Retain original character windows when possible.

2.4.8 **Substitute materials** such as aluminum-clad windows may be appropriate replacements for severely damaged or deteriorated wood windows because they can replicate the profiles and proportions of the original sash and, if necessary, surround. Composite wood or fiberglass windows may also be appropriate if they match the visual qualities of the historic windows. Vinyl windows are not appropriate due to their inability to match historic dimensions and profiles and their poor durability and performance.

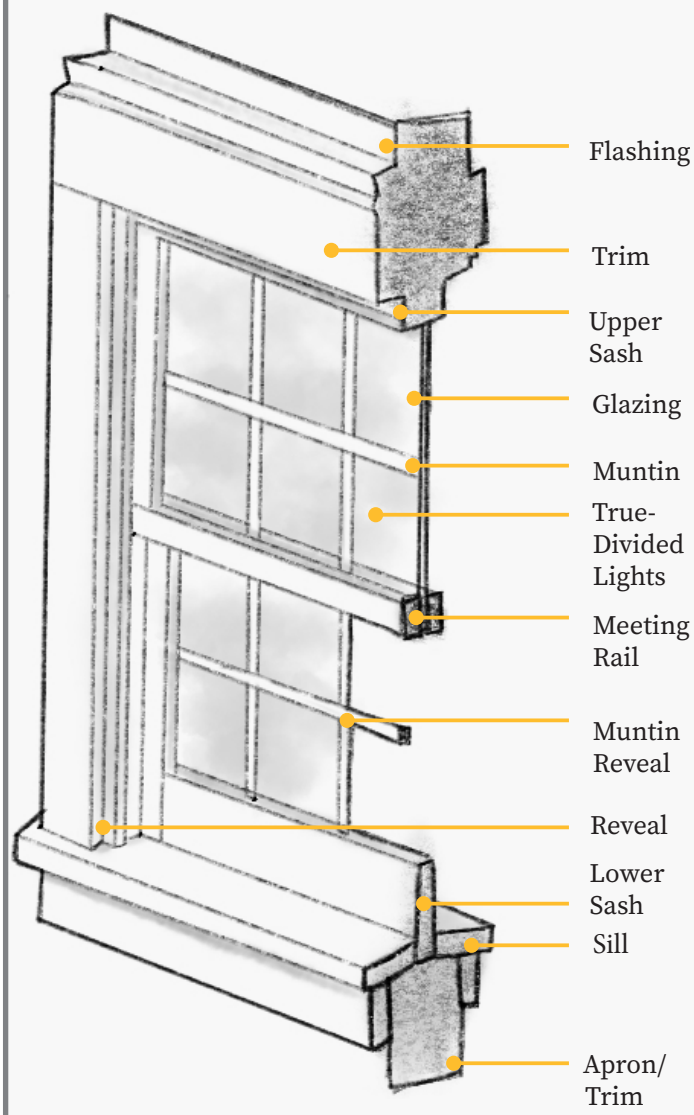
2.4.9 The size of the **replacement windows** must be such that the new window fits into the historic openings without the need for infill or removal of historic material. Replacement window shape must also match that of the historic opening.

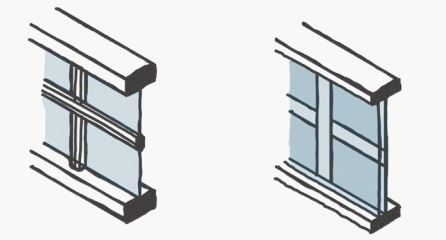
2.4.10 **The operation** (e.g. double-hung or casement) **and configuration** (e.g. one-over-one, two-over-two, etc.) of replacement windows should also match the originals. Where different windows existed historically on the same facade, these differences must also be observed in their replacements. Historic divided-lite sash must be replaced with true divided lites or dimensional muntins rather than a grid of simulated divided lites between glass.

2.4.11 Even a window replacement project should **preserve and retain select character-defining windows**, such as those with stained, leaded, or curved glass, or individual windows with uniquely decorative shapes or muntin designs.

2.4.12 **Consider replacement of previously-replaced**, non-historic windows with those that are more historically appropriate. Historic photographs of the building may document its original windows for reference. If such documentation is not available, look to original windows on nearby historic buildings of the same architectural style and period of construction.

ANATOMY OF A TYPICAL WINDOW





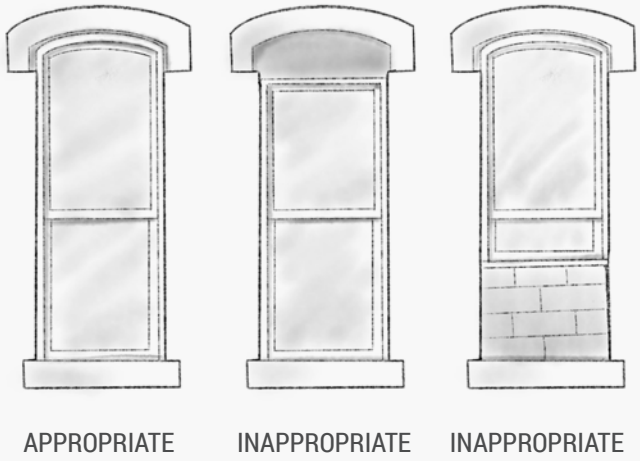
Maintaining window sightlines includes matching the thickness of window sashes, frames, and muntins. Simulated divided lites can maintain the original sightline. Grilles-between-the-Glass are not appropriate.

2.4.13 **Storm windows and retractable fabric awnings** are historically appropriate improvements for energy efficiency if they do not damage repairable original windows and frames. Exterior storms should be undivided or have primary divisions that correspond to those of the original window, and when in place, should not restrict or reduce original sight lines. Fabric awnings should be removable when not in season.

2.4.14 The introduction of **new window openings or alteration or infill of existing openings** are not appropriate on primary facades. If creating new openings or infilling existing openings is necessary to accommodate new interior uses, locate openings on secondary or non-contributing facades.

Example of appropriate window infill on a non-primary facade.

Example of replacement windows that are not appropriate.



Example of an appropriate window replacement approach for existing buildings. The size and proportion of historic window openings should be preserved.

Shutters and Security Grilles

2.4.15 **Repair and restore original** wood shutters whenever possible. Restore original hardware.

2.4.16 **Consider removal** of purely decorative, non-functional shutters installed after the historic period, as was sometimes done in the mid-twentieth century to create a more "Colonial" appearance.

2.4.17 **Consider replacement of previously-altered**, non-historic shutters with those that are more historically accurate.

2.4.18 When **replacing historic shutters**, ensure they are fabricated to be operational and mounted with historically appropriate hardware.

2.4.19 **Install new shutters only if shutters existed previously** on the building, and match the window shape. The width of the shutters should correspond with the window width so that the shutters would cover the full window when closed.

2.4.20 **Window security grilles** should be simple in design and should not overly obscure sight lines to the historic windows.

Example of appropriate window grill design and configuration.

2.5 STOREFRONTS

Ground floor commercial storefronts historically provided amenities within the primarily residential Mexican War Streets Historic District, as they still do today. Because they are mostly glass, storefronts typically have fewer stylistic features than the building's upper stories, while their compositions of large display windows, transoms, signboards, framing, entrances, and architectural details are essential to the character of the historic building as a whole.

2.5.1 **Stabilize, repair, and rehabilitate** historic storefronts as the first course of action.

2.5.2 If extensively-deteriorated, severely-damaged, or poorly-functioning storefront elements must be replaced, **new storefront elements** should match the originals as closely as possible in material, design, proportion, profile, and finish. Mill-finish aluminum is not an appropriate framing material for storefronts on buildings from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

2.5.3 Where storefronts were previously altered or replaced after the historic period, **inappropriate features may be removed** and a new storefront may be designed and installed that is in keeping with the original configuration, proportions, and detail of the original (if documented in historic photographs) or of nearby historic storefronts of similar scale and architectural era.

2.5.4 **Original recessed entries** should be retained in their original location rather than moved.

2.5.5 Where **steps to historic storefront** entrances create an accessibility barrier, refer to Section 3.3 below and consult with City Planning staff on an appropriate design solution.

2.5.6 **New storefronts** should not be installed on primary facades where they did not exist historically.

Historic storefront with wood panels, detailing, and signboard.

Historic storefront that utilizes the historic signboard for business identification.

MAINTENANCE TIP

Preserve existing historic storefronts by repairing damaged elements and keeping wood elements painted.

2.6 PORCHES & STOOPS

Porches are designed to shelter home occupants and visitors at the entrance and to extend the living space of the home outward toward the public realm. Stoops provide a transition between the sidewalk and a home's front door and relate, architecturally, to both. Porches and stoops are important character-defining features of the houses that have them, and they contribute greatly to the overall character of the historic district. Removing porches and stoops or replacing their elements with inappropriate materials alters one of the most character-defining assets of a home and diminishes the streetscape.

2.6.1 **Porches** on primary and contributing secondary façades shall not be removed or enclosed. Roof size and shape of porches should not be changed.

2.6.2 **Repair and restore** original historic porches as the first course of action. Retain original materials and designs of elements such as posts, piers, columns, rails, spindles/balusters, skirting, ornament such as brackets or fretwork, floors, steps, and roofs, including historic porch cornices and gutter systems.

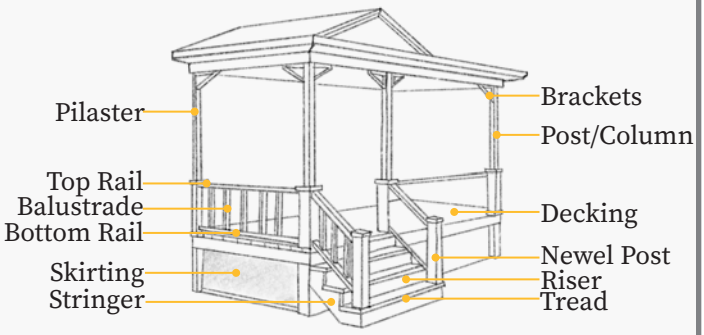
2.6.3 If repair is not feasible due to extensive deterioration, severe damage, or missing elements, **replace porches and/or their individual elements in kind**, matching as closely as possible the materials, design, composition, proportion, visual appearance, and transparency of the original porch.

2.6.4 **Substitute materials** that can be milled or routed to historic shapes and profiles and that can be painted may be considered as appropriate replacements for severely damaged, deteriorated, or missing historic wooden porch elements. These may include cellular PVC or wood fiber/polymer composites. Use of dimensional lumber is not appropriate for the replacement of visible porch features. Vinyl railings and trim are not appropriate replacements for historic wood elements.

2.6.5 Appropriate substitute materials for tongue-in-groove wood **porch floorboards** may include composite wood decking, if a close match to original dimensions.

Examples of original front stoops.

ANATOMY OF A PORCH



MAINTENANCE TIP

Keep wood porches painted to help protect the wood from moisture damage and degradation.

2.6.6 If in-kind replacement of the porch is not feasible, a design that closely **resembles the original** in materials, composition, proportion, visual appearance, and transparency may be considered.

2.6.7 Consider replacement of **previously-altered non-historic porch elements** with elements that are more historically appropriate. Historic photographs of the building may document its original porch for reference. If such documentation is not available, look to original porches on nearby historic buildings of the same architectural style and period of construction.

2.6.8 **Avoid removing, altering, or covering** historic ornamental details on porches.

2.6.9 Stone is the typical material for historic **stoops and their steps**. While stone is highly durable, replacement may be considered in cases of extensive erosion or other damage. Replace stone stoops and steps in kind when possible. Concrete may be an appropriate substitute material if poured, colored, and tooled to match the historic stone as closely as possible.

2.6.10 Historic **ornamental stoop railings** shall be retained, repaired, and/or replaced in kind.

2.6.11 **New stoop railings** to replace non-historic railings, or where there is no existing railing, should be metal with a simple picket-and-rail design. Decorative railing designs may be considered on a case by case basis. Railings of vinyl or dimensional lumber are not appropriate for historic stoops.

Porches along the front facade of attached homes.

2.7 ACCESSORY STRUCTURES

Accessory structures are generally located in the rear of the property and include carriage houses, garages, and sheds. In many cases, these structures may be secondary or non-visible. The exteriors of accessory structures visible from the public right-of-way are reviewed by HRC staff. Historic accessory structures should be maintained with the same care as the primary building and should adhere to all guidelines above.

2.7.1 **Repair and restore** historic accessory structures as the first course of action.

2.7.2 When **rehabilitating historic accessory structures**, retain the dimensions of the structure to the fullest extent possible. Accessory structures shall remain subordinate in proportion to the primary building and property footprint.

2.7.3 If rehabilitation of an historic accessory structure is not feasible due to extensive damage or severe deterioration, refer to Chapter 5, Guidelines for Demolition, regarding considerations for demolition, documentation, and appropriate replacement.

Accessory structures are considered contributing when they carry their own architectural significance. Often, historic accessory structures have similar detailing as the main structure.

Noncontributing accessory structures are those built outside of the period of significance for the historic district, and do not contribute to the historic fabric of the district.

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604
Boggs Mansion
BED & BREAKFAST

CHAPTER 3

GUIDELINES FOR SUPPORTING ELEMENTS

3.1 SIGNAGE

Signage in historic districts provides essential wayfinding and identification of commercial activity. Signs should be appropriately located, complement the building's design, and should not obscure or detract from its architectural character-defining features. All signage must comply with the Pittsburgh Zoning Code. Address placards do not require permits and are not subject to review by the HRC..

3.1.1 **Retain evidence of historic signage**, e.g. painted "ghost signs" on building walls, whenever possible.

3.1.2 Locate **new signs** in historically appropriate locations, such as in the sign band above a storefront.

3.1.3 **Avoid** obscuring character-defining architectural features with a new sign installation.

3.1.4 **Do not remove, damage, or destroy** historic building materials or features to install a sign. Mount anchors in mortar joints, not in masonry units, where applicable.

3.1.5 Historically-appropriate **signage** may be painted or consist of individually-mounted letters and/or graphics. Internally-illuminated box signs are not appropriate in the Mexican War Streets Historic District.

3.1.6 **Window signage** should maintain the transparency of the window by using graphics without a solid background.

Historic storefront with appropriate signage.

Appropriate address label in doorway transom.

CITY OF PITTSBURGH ZONING CODE

Refer to the City of Pittsburgh Zoning Code for building signage requirements beyond address numbers.

3.2 MURALS AND ARTWORK

Murals, sculptures, and other outdoor artworks can celebrate local history and community values and complement the architectural character of a historic district. They should be located sensitively and installed in a way that does not damage historic materials and is reversible should the artwork be removed in the future.

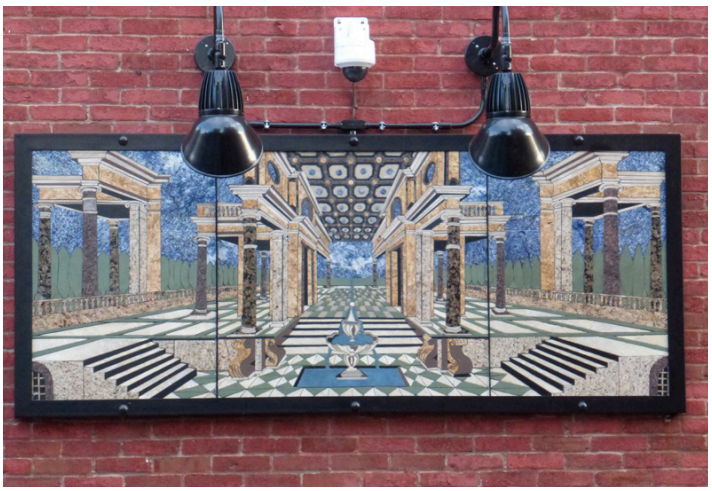
3.2.1 The HRC reviews only the **location and method of installation** of public art for its affect on historic fabric and character. The HRC does not review the content of public art.

3.2.2 **Murals and artwork** should not be painted onto unpainted brick or masonry.

3.2.3 Murals and artwork on buildings should be painted or applied with materials that are vapor permeable and compatible with brick, concrete masonry units, wood, or other underlaying substrates.

3.2.4 **Do not remove, damage, or destroy historic building materials** or features to install a sign. Mount anchors in mortar joints, not in masonry units, where applicable.

3.2.5 Murals and artwork should **not cover** windows, doors, or key defining architectural features of the facade.



First Historic District by Glenn Olcerst

Children's Alphabet Garden by Mary Mazziotti

ARTWORK VS SIGNAGE

Murals and artwork that contain words and lettering that **promote a product or business** may be considered as "signage" or "signs" and therefore contribute to the signage allowance of the property. Refer to the City of Pittsburgh Zoning Code.

MAINTENANCE TIP

Painted murals or applied artwork should be maintained on an ongoing basis or with intermittent refurbishment, or have a timeline for removal and restoration of the original facade.

3.3 ACCESSIBILITY

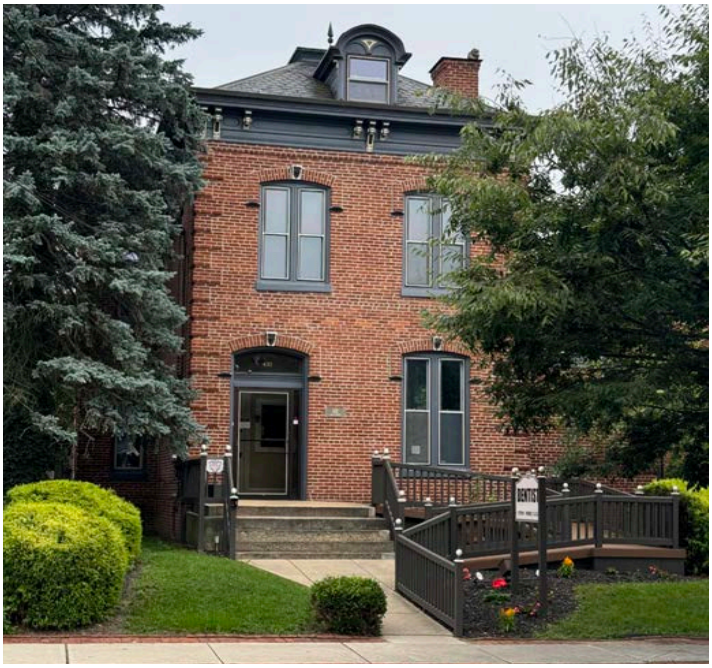
Most historic buildings were not designed to be readily accessible to all and will require sensitive renovations to make them so. Appropriate solutions will effectively address accessibility requirements while minimizing impacts to historic character-defining features. Historic buildings are not exempt from the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), but there is additional flexibility for designated historic properties.

3.3.1 **Assess existing accessibility** barriers and opportunities in the context of the property's character-defining features. The property's site and entrance(s) will be the most likely focus of accessibility planning, but consider also how solutions, such as ramps, may affect other character-defining features and spatial relationships.

3.3.2 **Design and construct modifications** to avoid damaging, removing, or obscuring historic materials and architectural elements; ensure modifications can be reversed without damaging historic fabric in the future.

3.3.3 **Provide access** through a primary entrance whenever feasible.

3.3.4 If necessary to establish a **new accessible entrance**, first consider whether an existing opening on a secondary facade close to the main entrance can be sensitively modified for this purpose.



Example of an appropriate accessible entry modification.

ADA APPLICABILITY

ADA is applicable to all places of public accommodation and does not apply to residential buildings. However, these guidelines still apply to residential building owners who desire to make accessibility upgrades to their property.

ADA COMPLIANCE FEASIBILITY

If full compliance with ADA standards is not feasible, the building may be eligible to meet alternative minimum standards. Contact the Pittsburgh Department of City Planning and/or Pennsylvania State Historic Preservation Office (PA SHPO), who can provide guidance on feasible accessibility solutions. Contact the PA SHPO's Western Region Community Preservation Coordinator.

3.4 FENCES, WALKWAYS & OTHER LANDSCAPE ELEMENTS

Site features such as **fences, retaining walls, and walkways exist in spatial relationship to historic buildings.** They help establish the visual character of the historic district and the rhythm and texture of its streetscapes, especially when they are located in relation to primary facades. A variety of ornamental iron fences are seen throughout the Mexican War Streets Historic District.

Fences

3.4.1 **Avoid removing** historic fencing, including to make openings for new walkways, driveways, or parking areas.

3.4.2 **Repair and restore** existing historic fences as a first course of action. This includes the rails, balusters, bases, and ornamental details.

3.4.3 If **repair is not feasible** due to extensive deterioration, damage, or missing elements, replace fences and/or their components in-kind, matching as closely as possible the materials, height, proportions, design, transparency, and overall visual appearance.

3.4.4 If **in-kind replacement** of the fence is not feasible, a design that closely resembles the original in materials, height, proportions, design, transparency, and overall visual appearance may be considered.

3.4.5 **New fences** must comply with the Pittsburgh Zoning Code and should complement the architectural style of the building and not obscure the view of the primary façade or negatively impact the pedestrian experience on the sidewalk.

3.4.6 **Appropriate fencing materials** include wrought or cast iron, wood, and vegetation (hedgerows or shrubs). Synthetic materials such vinyl and plastics are not appropriate materials for visible fencing in the historic district.

3.4.7 **Appropriate fence designs** may include picket, capped picket, and spindle. Avoid chain-link, split-rail, ranch-rail fences, or those composed of modern stock profiles.

3.4.8 **Metal pickets or vegetation** are the most historically-appropriate materials for front yard fencing between primary facades and the street or sidewalk in the Mexican War Streets Historic District. Wood fencing will be approved for side and rear yards. Stockade-style privacy fencing and horizontal-board fencing are permitted in the rear of properties only.

Iron fence with decorative post finials.

Example of brick and iron fence

NEW FENCES

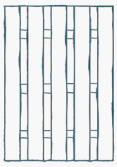
New fences should be designed to comply with City of Pittsburgh Zoning Regulations.

FENCE STYLES

APPROPRIATE fence styles use materials that would have existed historically and in patterns typical at the time of initial construction.

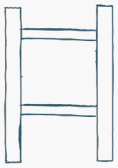
Wrought Iron

Picket

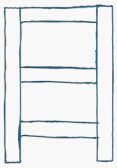


Shadow Box

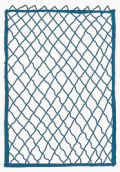
INAPPROPRIATE fence styles use materials that would not have existed historically, or in a style that is out of place from the period or area.



Ranch Rail



Split Rail



Chain Link

Walls, Walkways & Other Landscape Features

3.4.9 **Repair and restore** historic masonry retaining walls. Preserve the existing height and appearance of the wall and its relationship to associated historic site features, such as steps, cheek walls, and fencing. Repoint with a compatible mortar (see Chapter 2.1) to match existing in color, texture, strength, joint width, and joint profile.

3.4.10 **Cracked, spalled, or deeply eroded stone** should be repaired using a Dutchman technique, in which only the damaged section of stone is carefully cut out and replaced with a new or salvaged stone block to match adjacent material as closely as possible.

3.4.11 If repair of a **historic masonry retaining wall** is not feasible due to extensive damage or deterioration, replace the wall in kind, matching as closely as possible the masonry unit materials, color, and surface texture, the historic height of the wall, and its relationship to related historic site features, such as steps, cheek walls, and fencing.

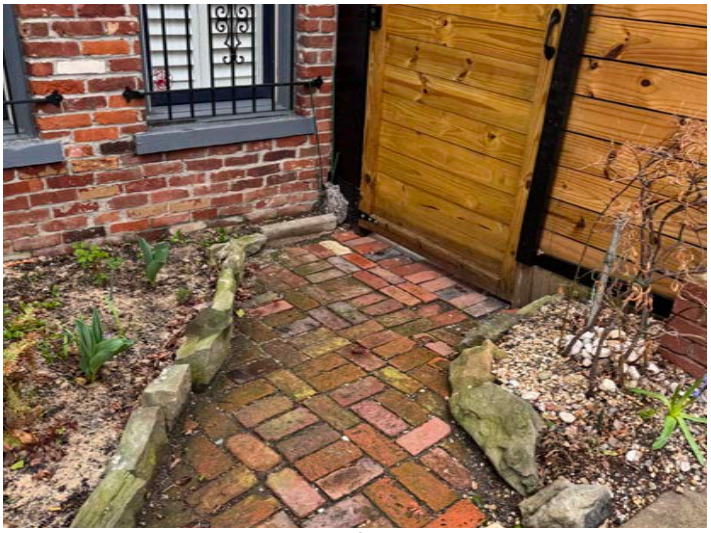
3.4.12 When constructing **new retaining walls**, use materials that are compatible with the surrounding materials of the district in appearance, texture, and scale.

3.4.13 Preserve the distinctive historic features of the **landscape and streetscape**, including walkways and paving which contribute to the character of a property. Ensure bricks and pavers are properly set.

3.4.14 Replace **deteriorated walkways** and other site features with in-kind materials, replicating the historic color and pattern.

3.4.15 If **in-kind replacement is not feasible**, utilize a visually-compatible substitute material. Reference DOMI requirements for public sidewalk walkways.

Existing brick sidewalks should be maintained.



Brick is an appropriate material for walkways.

Brick sidewalk.

BRICK SIDEWALKS INSTALLATION AND REPAIR

New Brick sidewalks should be installed when appropriate. All sidewalk replacement or repair should go through DOMI.

3.5 TECHNOLOGY & EQUIPMENT

Requirements for modern technology, such as security cameras and telecommunications wiring, should be sensitively located so as not to impact the integrity of historic buildings and to have the least possible visual impact on the historic district.

3.5.1 **Locate equipment** on non-visible or non-contributing facades or on roof slopes or set them back on flat roofs behind the parapet to minimize sight lines from the public way.

3.5.2 **Mount equipment** on non-historic materials or in the least intrusive manner feasible; anchor to mortar joints instead of masonry units on walls.

3.5.3 If necessary to install **equipment** on a primary façade (such as a security camera), select the smallest possible unit, place in a concealed location, and select finish or paint to blend in to adjacent surfaces.

3.5.4 **Install wiring and conduit** on secondary or non-contributing facades.

3.5.5 Technology and its equipment change frequently. **Remove obsolete** equipment from building exteriors when it is no longer in use.

Modern facade lighting is concealed under the eve and the fixture color blends in; this is an appropriate installation.

3.6 ENERGY & SUSTAINABILITY

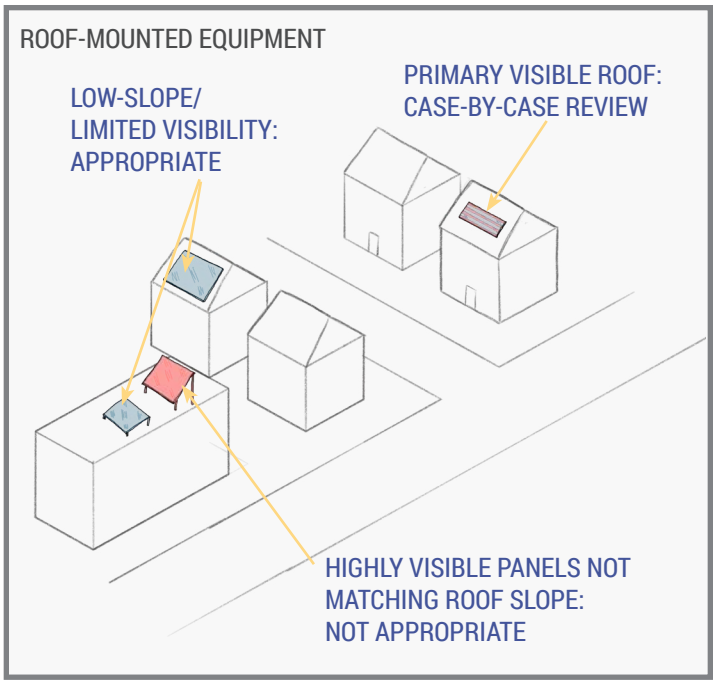
Historic Preservation is an inherently sustainable practice because it conserves the energy expended during the building's original construction. Well-maintained historic materials are often the most durable and sustainable. While significant advancements have been made in the development of energy-efficient building products, installing and implementing them in a historic context requires careful consideration of their impact to character-defining features of individual buildings and the historic district.

3.6.1 Prioritize energy upgrades that require the least alteration of historic architectural fabric.

3.6.2 Efforts to improve energy efficiency should begin with the **existing building envelope**. Work such as insulation, particularly of roofs/attics, basements, ducts, and pipes; filling cracks and open joints and sealing drafts around openings; utilizing historically-appropriate storm windows, awnings, and/or interior window treatments such has shutters or insulated curtains or shades; and updating mechanical systems and/or using them more efficiently can significantly improve a building's thermal performance, leading to less energy use.

3.6.3 A professional **energy audit** is recommended to obtain a detailed understanding of building performance and recommendations for upgrades that will be effective for the historic building. Studies have shown, for example, that window replacement does not result in energy savings that pay for themselves within a reasonable amount of time.

3.6.4 **Alternative energy systems**, such as solar devices, should be located on the ground, an accessory structure, and/or non-historic additions as a first resort. Primary buildings with flat roofs and/or high parapets that obscure sight lines from the public way may be candidates for the rooftop installation of solar devices.



Solar panel installation on a visible primary roof slope is reviewed on a case-by-case basis.

3.6.5 **Installing solar devices** on the primary historic building with a visible roof slope should only be considered after other locations have been evaluated and determined infeasible.

3.6.6 Solar devices should be as **low-profile and parallel to the roof** as possible so as to not obscure the geometry of the roofline and character-defining features of the building.

3.6.7 Typically, solar devices are appropriate on **non-visible or non-contributing** roof slopes that are minimally visible from the public right-of-way. The HRC will review all proposals for solar devices on front-facing roof slopes.

3.6.8 **Alternative energy systems** should be installed in a manner that does not damage historic roofing material and in a reversible manner.

3.6.9 **Windmills and turbines** should not be placed on historic buildings or sites, unless they are not visible from a public right-of-way.

3.6.10 **Green roofs** can be an option for historic buildings in some cases. However, they should be minimally visible from a public right-of-way, and engineering studies will need to be completed to determine if the historic building can accommodate the weight and water requirements of a green roof.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS SOLAR PANELS ON PRIMARY ROOF SLOPES

- Historic Material Status: Ensure the existing roofing material is non-original before considering installation.
- Flush Alignment: Mount panels so their slope is perfectly parallel to the existing roofline (avoid angled mounts).
- Reversible Attachment: Use non-destructive mounting methods that can be fully removed without damaging the underlying roof.
- Cohesive Geometry: Arrange the panel layout so it is organized, contiguous, and respects the roof's original proportions.
- Visual Discretion: Minimize the overall visibility and visual impact from the public right-of-way.

3.7 UTILITIES & BUILDING SYSTEMS

Modern building systems, including mechanical systems, air conditioning, and electrical systems, are necessary to maintain comfort within historic buildings, but they should be installed and located sensitively in order not to obscure historic architectural features or intrude upon the character of the historic district.

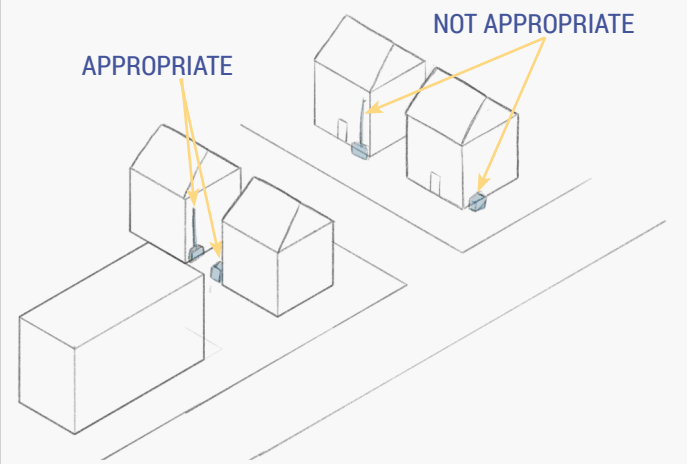
3.7.1 Install **new mechanical systems** that result in the least alteration possible to the historic building, its character-defining features, and its appearance from the public right-of-way.

3.7.2 Any **mechanical equipment**, such as HVAC units, installed on rooftops should be situated so that they are not visible from the public right-of-way. Ground-level mechanical equipment should be set back from primary facades and screened with fencing or non-deciduous vegetation so that it is minimally visible.

3.7.3 Locate **vents and penetrations** on non-contributing or non-visible roof slopes or facades, or conceal behind chimneys.

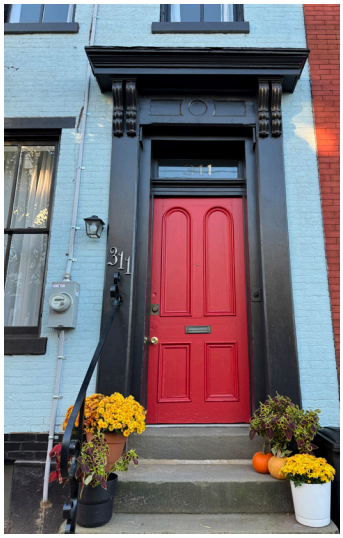
3.7.4 Make every effort to **coordinate with utility companies** to install meters on secondary, non-contributing, or non-visible facades rather than the primary façade.

3.7.5 **Minimize the visual impact** of existing meters through the use of fencing or landscaping if permitted by the utility company.



Place utilities or building systems equipment to avoid obscuring significant features or adversely affect the perception of the overall character of the property from the street level.

Appropriate example of a meter and vents placed on secondary facade.



Inappropriate example of a meter located on a primary facade.

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CHAPTER 4

GUIDELINES FOR ADDITIONS AND NEW CONSTRUCTION

4.1 GENERAL GUIDELINES

New construction within the historic district should fit the character of the neighborhood in terms of scale, setback, materials, massing, size, and proportion. New buildings and new additions to historic buildings should be deferential to their historic context, but not designed to be mistaken for historic. New construction shall comply with all applicable ordinances in the Pittsburgh Zoning Code.

4.1.1 The design of **new buildings** in the historic district should take cues from nearby buildings with respect to building type (e.g. detached, duplex, or row house); orientation; setback; form; dimensions, proportions, and rhythm of wall openings; materials; textures; and colors.

4.1.2 **New additions to existing buildings** should be undertaken only if it is determined that the site can accommodate an addition away from the historic building's primary facade.

4.1.3 **New additions** should be undertaken in such a manner that if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the original historic building and its materials and features would not be compromised.

4.1.4 Additions shall be differentiated in **scale and setback** from the original historic building. They must be subordinate to the primary building in size, location, and design.

4.1.5 Choose traditional **building materials** or new materials that complement the scale, textures, and colors of contributing buildings in the historic district to promote compatibility of design. Use of similar roof shapes and proportions and locations of window and door openings will also help new construction to relate well to its historic neighbors.

4.1.6 Both **newly-constructed buildings and new additions** to historic buildings should avoid historicizing, or creating the false impression that new construction is original historic fabric. The design of newly-constructed buildings and additions should be compatible with their historic context, but visually differentiated through recognizably newer design, materials, and/or building techniques.

Example of non-contributing new construction

Example of additions appropriate in massing, scale and location.

CITY OF PITTSBURGH ZONING CODE

For additional information refer to the City of Pittsburgh Zoning Code for additions and new construction.

4.1.7 The **design of new buildings** proposed to replace historic buildings which have been demolished may make visual references to the demolished building and/or incorporate salvaged materials from the demolished building, but should not attempt to replicate a demolished historic building.

4.1.8 The installation of **reconstructed façades** is discouraged in new construction. Sourcing salvaged materials is encouraged, but care should be taken to ensure the style and time period of the salvaged material is appropriate, and that they are installed in an appropriate manner.

4.1.9 **Site features** related to new construction, including driveways, parking lots, and landscape features, should respect the historic character of the property and the historic district. Retain and reuse existing site features that were present historically and incorporate them into the site plan of new construction, when feasible.

Example of additions inappropriate in massing, scale and location.

4.2 LOCATION OF NEW CONSTRUCTION

4.2.1 The construction of **new buildings** to occupy vacant or underutilized lots, or to replace demolished historic buildings in the historic district, is encouraged.

4.2.2 These **infill buildings** should observe contextual building sizes, setbacks, proportions, and building types (e.g. detached, duplex, or row house) as surrounding historic buildings.

4.2.3 **Avoid constructing additions** that impact or alter the primary façade of a historic building.

4.2.4 Design additions to be **subordinate to the original building**, preferably located on a non-contributing façade, or on a secondary façade if a non-contributing façade is not feasible.

4.2.5 **Set side additions back** from the primary façade of the building.

4.2.6 **Rooftop additions**, such as rooftop decks, should be located on non-contributing or non-visible facades and set back from the vertical plane of the façade to minimize sight lines form the public way.

4.2.7 When planning the **location and footprint** of a new building or addition, take care to preserve any historic landscape features of the site as well as any historic viewsheds that may be integral to the character of the historic district.

Appropriate roof deck on noncontributing accessory structure

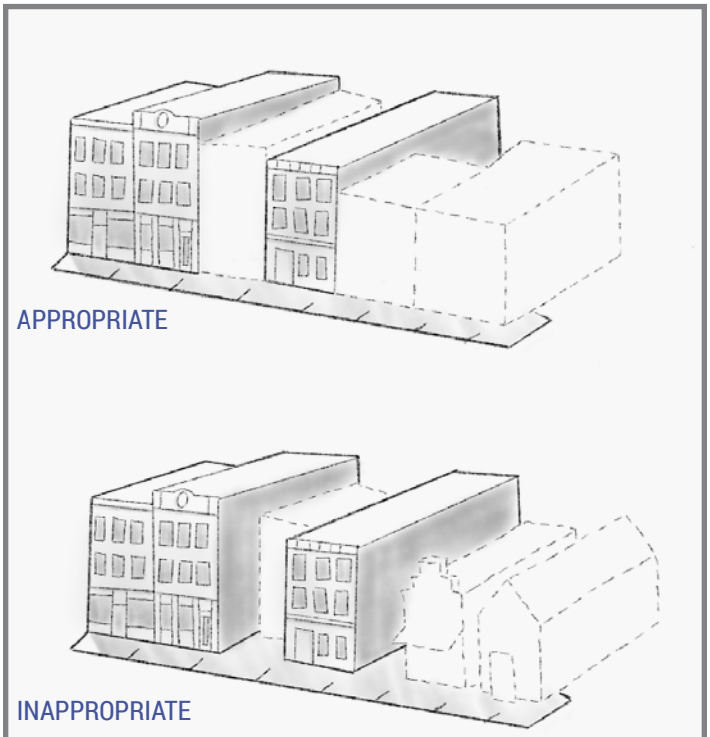


Diagram indicating appropriate infill construction in regards to setbacks and proportions/roof shapes.

4.3 MASS & SCALE OF NEW CONSTRUCTION

4.3.1 **New buildings** should be of the same scale as nearby historic buildings in terms of height, width, and massing. The new building should not stand out in a way that is incongruent with the established character of the historic district.

4.3.2 **New corner buildings** should be designed so that there are two primary façades that are treated equally in terms of design, materials, and details.

4.3.3 Design additions to be **subordinate to the original** historic building. New additions should be smaller in proportion overall to the size of the primary building.

4.3.4 Additions should be **shorter in height** than the original historic building. If an addition must be the same height as the original building, it should be set back considerably from the front façade of the building or lightly connected to the original building by a passageway or hyphen.

4.3.5 **Additions should never be taller** than the primary historic building, and new or expanded dormers should not break the historic roofline.

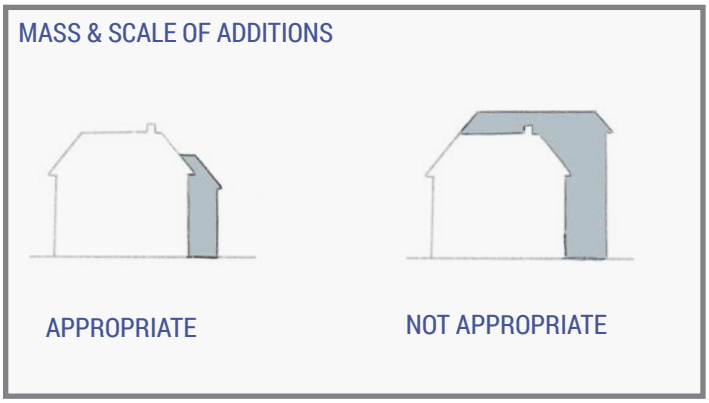


Diagram indicating appropriate scale and massing for new construction.

The newer construction on the left is not an appropriate addition to the historic neighborhood, in style, massing, setback, or proportion.

4.4 BUILDING ELEMENTS

4.4.1 When **designing new buildings or additions**, it is discouraged to create exact replicas of historic buildings, facades, or ornamental details. Instead, the focus should be on contextual building form, placement, organization, materials, colors, and textures. Simplified interpretations of historic architectural features are recommended.

4.4.2 When **planning and constructing** an addition to a historic building, minimize changes to the original exterior walls and materials, and ensure that historic architectural features are not destroyed, irreversibly damaged, or hidden.

4.4.3 The **facade composition** of new construction should be similar to that of historic buildings in the district, including prominent horizontal and vertical emphasis through belt courses, lintels, cornices, pilasters, and other traditional and contemporary devices.

4.4.4 **The ratio of solid/void** (wall to window) creates a rhythm of openings that helps characterize a façade. New construction should respect the nearby historic pattern and proportion of openings (windows and doors) to maintain consistency in the streetscape.

4.4.5 **Window and door openings** of new buildings and additions should be consistent with the size, shape, and type of those on adjacent or nearby historic buildings, but windows and doors may be of a modern material and/or simplified design. New openings should not be inappropriately large, nor should they be smaller than those of the primary or surrounding historic buildings. Their proportion and type (e.g., vertical double-hung windows) should also reflect those of historic neighbors.

4.4.6 **Main entrances** to new buildings should be on the primary façade facing the street. For commercial buildings located at corners, a main entrance at the corner is also an option.

Appropriate new architectural element.

4.4.7 **Canopies or awnings** of simple design may be approved to shelter main entrances. When introduced to historic buildings, canopies and awnings should be mounted so as not to damage or obscure historic architectural fabric or features. Canopies or awnings that extend over the sidewalk and/or incorporate signage may be subject to additional permitting from Zoning and/or the Department of Mobility and Infrastructure.

4.4.8 New construction should employ similar **roof shapes, slopes, and materials** to those of the adjacent historic buildings.

4.4.9 Proposed **new dormers and expansions** of existing dormers on primary facades should be subordinate to the dimensions of the existing roof. They should not be taller than the existing roof, span across the entire building, or extend from the eave of the roof to the roof's ridge.

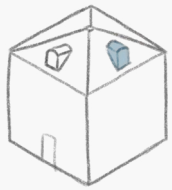
4.4.10 **New dormers** should be simple and contextual in design. Dormer roof shape, slope, and material should be consistent with the primary roof and architectural style of the historic building. Sill lines should be contextual with existing buildings in the historic district.

4.4.11 **Expansions of existing dormers** should adapt the same general design of the historic dormer and incorporate and reuse historic material and ornamental elements from the original dormer wherever possible.

4.4.12 For both **new and expanded dormers**, vertical dormer proportions are more appropriate than horizontal for most historic architectural styles in the Mexican War Streets Historic District. In general, one dormer should contain one window, not multiple.

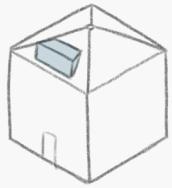
4.4.13 **New or replacement stoops** should be of masonry material and consistent in size, proportion, and orientation with nearby stoops on similar buildings.

MASS & SCALE OF DORMER ADDITIONS



APPROPRIATE

New dormer matches style of historic dormer.



NOT APPROPRIATE

Modifying historic dormers, and/or adding a dormer that is out of scale with the original is not appropriate

Example of an inappropriate dormer addition, which removed an original dormer and created non-historic proportions.

4.4.14 When **replacing a stoop** that has a historic handrail, salvage and reuse the historic railing, or replicate it whenever possible. Where historic railings do not meet code, explore adding height with a simple handrail extension and/or adding extra pickets to reduce the width of the openings between verticals.

4.4.15 **New stoops** should incorporate a metal railing of simple picket-and-rail design. Decorative railings will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

4.4.16 **New porches** should not be added to the primary or secondary contributing façades of historic buildings. If a porch was historically present on the original building and a new porch is desired, design the new porch with the same general dimensions as the original porch.

4.4.17 **Reconstruction of missing architectural features** should be supported through physical evidence (shadows or "ghosts" on walls), documentary evidence (photographs or drawings), or examples on similar buildings to document original conditions. See also "Porches and Stoops," 2.6.5.

Appropriate new metal railing element.

4.5 BUILDING MATERIALS AND FINISHES

4.5.1 **Brick masonry** is the primary traditional material of most of the existing historic buildings in the Mexican War Streets Historic District, with wood utilized for detailing, ornament, and trim. Modular bricks for residential use that closely match the dimensions of historic brick are preferred. These materials are still widely available today, and their use will create the most traditional appearance in new construction. Utility bricks for commercial applications or concrete masonry units with a brick look are not recommended.

4.5.2 **Incorporate local materials** and materials common in the surrounding neighborhood in consideration of durability and sustainability.

4.5.3 **Contemporary materials**, such as fiber cement siding, are permissible for new construction if selected to be complementary in scale and texture with the materials of adjacent buildings to blend with the traditional materials palette within the historic district.

4.5.4 **Substitute materials**, such as engineered wood, fiber cement, or synthetic cladding may be considered if they can adequately match the visual appearance, physical properties, and durability of historic materials. Synthetic "wood grain" finishes typically look less like historic painted wood than smooth factory finishes.

4.5.5 The style of new construction may be **contemporary or simplified** traditional, but should not attempt to directly imitate the style or detailing of historic buildings. Architectural ornament, if desired, should be simplified.

Brick and cast iron as traditional materials for new construction.

4.6 NEW ACCESSORY STRUCTURES

Historically, accessory structures included carriage houses, garages, and sheds located in the rear of the property. **These structures were often designed to be secondary or non-visible**. New accessory structures should retain the same historical relationship to primary buildings as historic accessory structures.

4.6.1 Locate **newly constructed accessory structures** at the rear of the property or in a location that is minimally visible from the public street.

4.6.2 New accessory structures should be **proportionate in mass and scale** to the primary building.

4.6.3 **New accessory structures** should generally reflect the size, shape, and proportions of nearby historic accessory structures.

4.6.4 New accessory structures should use a similar **palette of materials** to primary buildings. Traditional materials such as masonry and wood are more appropriate than synthetic materials, but high-quality synthetic materials that resemble traditional materials may be considered in this context.

4.6.5 New accessory structures should be enclosed. **Carports are not historically appropriate** to the period and character of the Mexican War Streets Historic District.

Appropriate new architectural element.

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CHAPTER 5

GUIDELINES FOR DEMOLITION

5.1 GENERAL GUIDELINES

Review is required for proposed demolitions of any building or structure in the Mexican War Streets Historic District. Demolition of an existing building or structure diminishes the fabric of the historic district and should be considered only as a last resort when all rehabilitation options have been explored and exhausted.

5.1.1 In lieu of demolishing an historic building, explore alternatives such as rehabilitation, adaptive reuse, relocation of the building, or a sale to another property owner. Investigative assessments and feasibility studies can be utilized to guide potential reuse options and configurations.

5.1.2 Maintain buildings and structures to prevent demolition by neglect. At a minimum, maintenance and repair of the roof, drainage, and exterior façade should be performed regularly to prevent water infiltration and material deterioration.

5.1.3 If demolition is to take place, follow best practices for "deconstruction" to ensure that building materials from the demolition can be salvaged for use on-site or elsewhere. Contact local construction material salvage organizations to explore the feasibility of transporting the demolished building materials if they will not be reused on site.

Demolition removes historic structures and creates a void in the streetscape.

DEMOLITION BY NEGLECT

"Demolition by neglect" is a phrase describing 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.

PROPERTY MAINTENANCE

The City of Pittsburgh Department of Permits, Licensing, and Inspections (PLI) enforces the International Property Maintenance Code as adopted by the City of Pittsburgh Code of Ordinances, Title 10 Chapter 1004. PLI also enforces the Zoning Code (Title 9). These codes apply to all properties within the City, regardless of historic district boundaries.

- Weeds and/or debris on a property
- Abandoned vehicles on private property only
- Sidewalks that are a tripping hazard
- Electrical violations
- Building Violations
- Zoning Violations

5.2 CONSIDERATIONS

If demolition of an historic building is proposed, the following questions should be asked and the answers reviewed with City of Pittsburgh Department of City Planning staff:

- What is the **historical significance** of the building?
- What is the building's contribution to the historic district—is it typical, distinguished, and/or expressive of one or more of the district's significant historical associations? Note that "typical" buildings establish much of the character of the historic district.
- More broadly, are there other buildings in the City similar to the building proposed to be demolished, or is the building individually unique in its architecture and/or historical associations?
- What condition is the building in? Is the building deteriorated or damaged to the point that it has to be demolished for life safety or blight removal?
- Can the historic building be modified to adapt it for a new use?
- What impact would demolition and new construction have on the surrounding buildings and the neighborhood as a whole?
- How do the costs of demolition and new construction compare with preservation and reuse in terms of financial viability for improving the property?
- If demolition is to take place, can the new building be designed in a way that is compatible with the surrounding fabric of the historic district?

Historic photos can provide insight on the history of buildings: Pittsburgh City Photographer Collection, 1901-2002, AIS.1971.05, Archives & Special Collections, University of Pittsburgh Library System

HISTORIC RESEARCH

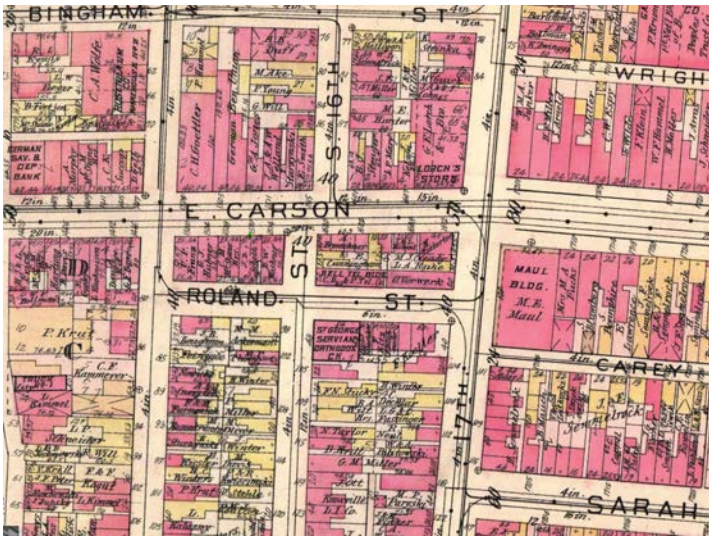
There are a variety of resources available for historic documentation on buildings and areas in the City of Pittsburgh, including:

- City of Pittsburgh Archivist
- 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

5.3 PROCEDURES FOR DOCUMENTATION

If demolition is to take place, complete the following steps to **document the historic building**:

- Take **photographs of the exterior and interior** of the building and its architectural details. Note the **condition and character** of these spaces and their details. Key the photographs to site and floor plans (sketch plans are acceptable).
- Take **measurements** of the outside of the building and record its dimensions as well as its setbacks from neighboring buildings. Include these measurements on the site plan (official survey or sketch plan).
- **Send** your photographs, notes, and measurements to the City Planning staff.



Sanborn and Hopkins Maps can help approximate the date and original materials of a building, and catalogue changes in the area.

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TECHNICAL APPENDIX