BOROUGH OF AMBRIDGE HISTORIC DISTRICTS

DESIGN GUIDELINES

Approved by Borough Council on April 28, 2026

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CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND

1.1 ABOUT THE HISTORIC DISTRICT GUIDELINES

ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

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

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

PRINCIPLES AND STANDARDS FOR THE DESIGN GUIDELINES

The Borough of Ambridge has been a **Certified Local Government (CLG)** since 2001. The CLG program is overseen by the National Park Service and administered in Pennsylvania by the Pennsylvania State Historic Preservation Office (PA SHPO). Municipalities that participate in the CLG program are required to adopt and apply illustrated design guidelines when reviewing applications for Certificates of Appropriateness (COAs) and other permits/approvals for locally designated historic properties and properties in local historic districts.

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

Through the Pennsylvania Historic District Act of 1961 (PA Act 167), municipalities are authorized to create, protect, and regulate historic districts. These are designated by local ordinance and are overseen by the Historic Architectural Review Board (HARB). The Borough of Ambridge's ordinance and Historic Architectural Review Board was established in 1971 through the adoption of Ordinance 900.

PRINCIPLES FOR DESIGN GUIDELINES

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

STANDARDS FOR DESIGN GUIDELINES

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

1.2 HOW TO USE THIS DOCUMENT

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

Buildings with local historic designation located outside of the Historic District are not subject to the Design Guidelines, though it is still recommended to follow the preservation principles in this document, as they are also relevant to such historic properties. Similarly, buildings in a National Register Historic District are not reviewed by the HARB; only local historic district properties that are performing work with a permit are under review.

The design guidelines historic districts include five categories of projects undertaken on a building in an Historic District: Existing Buildings, Supporting Elements, Additions to Historic Structures, New Construction, and Demolition.

It is recommended that whichever category of project applies to you, that you first review the Borough of Ambridge's requirements and process for performing work in the Historic District, described in Chapter 2: Procedures.

Next, review the chapter for your historic district to better understand its history, building style, and character-defining features:

- Chapter 3: Characteristics of the Economy Historic District
- Chapter 4: Characteristics of the Ambridge Commercial Historic District

After reviewing those sections, pick the chapter that most accurately describes the project that you are looking to undertake.

- Chapter 5: Guidelines for Existing Buildings
  - Exterior Walls & Materials
  - Roofs
  - Doors
  - Windows
  - Porches & Stoops
  - Accessory Structures
- Chapter 6: Guidelines for Supporting Elements
  - Signage
  - Accessibility
  - Fences, Walls, Walkways, & Other Landscape Elements
  - Technology & Equipment
  - Energy & Sustainability
  - Utilities & Building Systems
- Chapter 7: Guidelines for Additions
- Chapter 8: Guidelines for New Construction
- Chapter 9: Guidelines for Demolition

THE MOST COMMON USERS OF THE DESIGN GUIDELINES

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

1.3 PURPOSE OF THE DESIGN GUIDELINES

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

Communities such as Ambridge with historic preservation ordinances for local historic districts or individual landmarks require property owners to receive approval before making changes to existing buildings or constructing new ones within those designated areas. These proposals are reviewed by a the Historic Architectural Review Board (HARB).

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

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

There is one local historic district and two National Register Historic Districts in Ambridge. To the northwest, in the former Economy village area, the Economy National Register Historic District and the Ambridge Local Historic District encompass overlapping areas. To the south/central part of the borough, the Ambridge Commercial National Register Historic District encompasses Merchant Street between 3rd and 8th Streets. See Chapters 3 and 4 for more information about these districts.

- A **National Register Historic District** is an honorific designation.
- A **local historic district** is created through ordinance and is regulated through the HARB.

While properties within the local historic district are reviewed by the HARB for Certificates of Appropriateness, these Guidelines also serve as a resource for property owners, contractors, and residents performing exterior work within a National Register Historic District.

1.4 SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR'S STANDARDS FOR REHABILITATION

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

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

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

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

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

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

1.5 BENEFITS OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION

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

ECONOMIC BENEFITS

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

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

STATE AND FEDERAL HISTORIC TAX CREDITS

Tax credits have proven to be an effective way to provide an incentive for rehabilitating income-generating, depreciable, historic properties. Two programs are available, one at the federal level (reviewed by the National Parks Service), and the other at the state level. Both programs are reviewed by Pennsylvania's State Historic Preservation Office (PA SHPO).

For more information on the state and federal tax credit programs, see: https://www.pa.gov/agencies/phmc/historic-preservation/historic-tax-credits

OTHER PROGRAMS

Development programs, such as a facade improvement grant program, may be available to the county level. Review program requirements for eligibility.

ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS

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

Other ways in which historic preservation provides environmental benefits include:

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

CULTURAL AND SOCIAL BENEFITS

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

Unlike most modern buildings, historic buildings were built at a pedestrian scale, intended for people to walk in and out of multiple businesses without the need to drive. This walkability is an asset as areas with historic building stock are rejuvenated with new businesses and uses.

1.6 GENERAL BEST PRACTICES

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

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

1.7 CHARACTER-DEFINING FEATURES

WHAT ARE CHARACTER-DEFINING FEATURES?

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

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

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

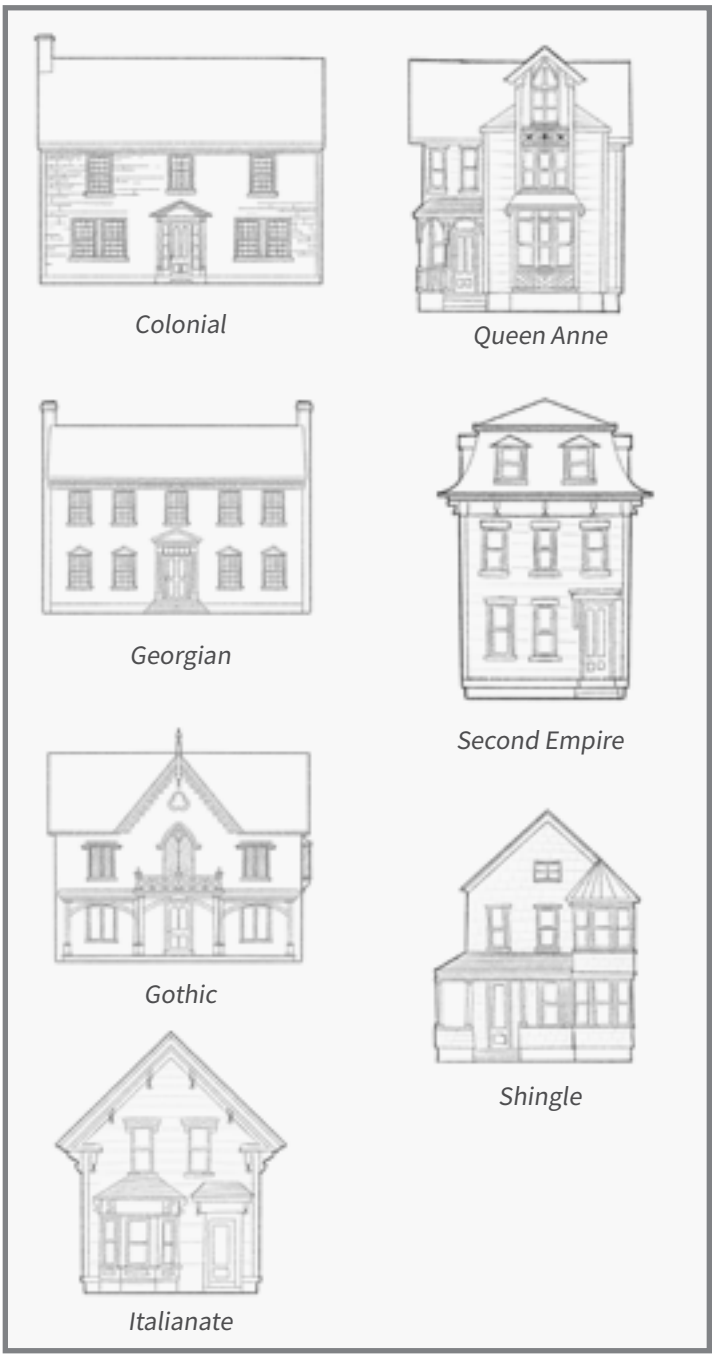
IDENTIFICATION CHECKLIST

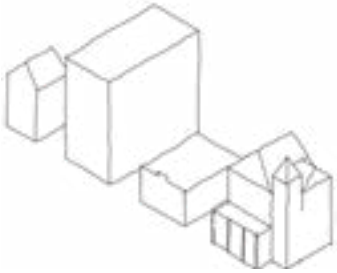
The following questions from the National Park Service may help property owners in the identification process of character-defining features:

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

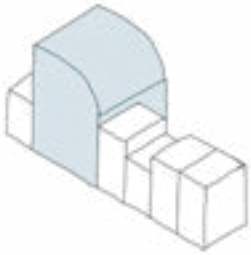
2. **Roof and Roof Features:** Does the roof **shape or its steep (or shallow) slope** contribute to the building 's character? Does the fact that the roof is **highly visible (or not visible at all)** contribute to the architectural identity of the building? Are certain **roof features** important to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

EXAMPLES OF ARCHITECTURAL STYLES





Consider the shape of the building and special features.



Is the shape or massing consistent with other buildings nearby?

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

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

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

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

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

Notice the rhythm and regularity of these two story attached buildings: each has similar window spacing and storefronts at ground level.

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

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

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

Craft details contribute to the overall look of a building.

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

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

1.8 GLOSSARY OF BUILDING FEATURES

Adaptive Reuse - refers to adapting an existing structure for a purpose other than its original use and/or in its original design.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Grandfathered - refers to an existing and nonconforming alteration that existed prior to the designation of the historic district.

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

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

Historic District Ordinance - local laws that regulate the alteration, demolition, or construction of buildings within designated historic districts. These ordinances aim to maintain the historic character and integrity of a district by ensuring that any changes or new developments are sensitive to the existing architectural and cultural significance.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Rehabilitation - refers to the process of returning a building(s) to a state of utility, through repair or alteration, which makes a use possible while preserving those portions and features of the building and its site and environment which are significant to its historic, architectural, and cultural values.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

FURTHER READING

For more Borough-specific zoning definitions, please refer to the Borough of Ambridge's Zoning Code, Chapter 310 Zoning, 310-3 Word Usage; Definitions.

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CHAPTER 2

PROCEDURES

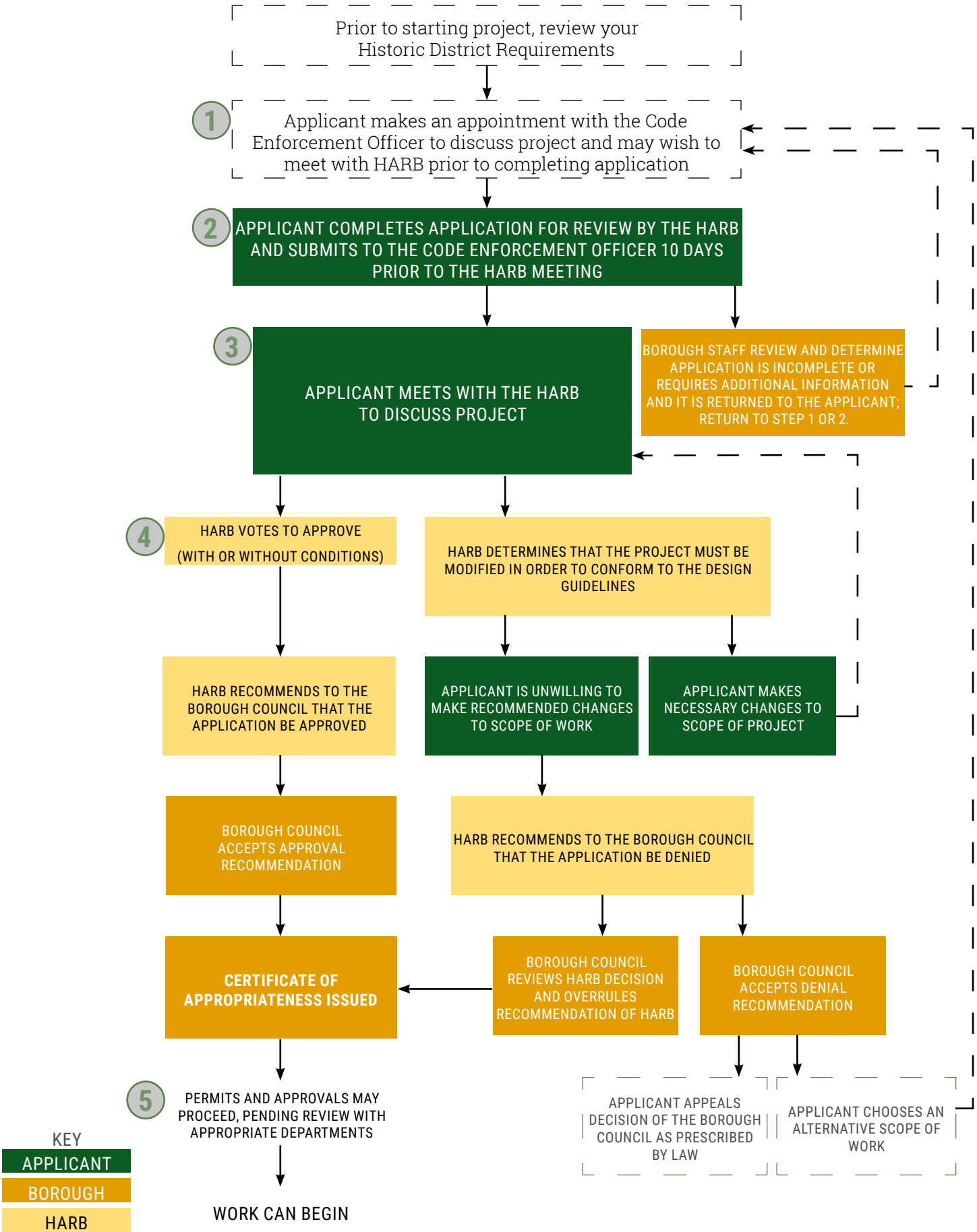
2.1 PLANNING A PROJECT

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

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

- Is the building located in the Historic District? If so, which district?
- How old is the building?
- What are the building's character-defining features (see Chapter 1)? What physical features on the exterior of the building convey its significance to the Historic District?
- Does the building retain its integrity? Has the building changed over time? Have there been additions, changes in scale, materials, and key defining features?
- Why is the exterior work being proposed? What is the desired outcome? What elements are required, and which of these are flexible?
- What are the short- or long-term costs of the work being proposed, and what are the expected lifespans of the proposed materials?
- If full or partial demolition is proposed, is demolition truly the last resort? What assessments or due diligence have been conducted that show that rehabilitation is not feasible, and what alternatives have been explored?

CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS PROCEDURES



2.2 HISTORIC ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW BOARD (HARB) PROCEDURES

ABOUT THE HISTORIC ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW BOARD (HARB)

The Ambridge Historical Architectural Review Board (HARB) is a seven-member volunteer body whose members are appointed by the Borough Council to a six-year term. Act 167, the state legislation which established the local historic district process, states that the HARB must include a registered architect, a licensed real estate broker, the Borough's Building Inspector, and persons with knowledge of and interest in the preservation of historic properties. At least four members of the HARB must be property owners in the Ambridge Historic District. The HARB members are appointed by elected Borough Council members from a field of knowledgeable people who are sensitive to the character of the Ambridge Historic District and who want to work with owners and tenants in developing successful construction plans.

In no way does the Ambridge Historic District require the creation of museums throughout the district or the application of museum-quality conservation treatments to the buildings within the district. 1971's Ordinance No. 900 added Article VII - H Historic District to the Ambridge Zoning Code, providing protection and a degree of aesthetic control only over the exterior architectural character of the buildings in the district. There is no restriction on the sale or leasing of any privately-held property in the district and it is not necessary to notify the HARB of sale or lease of property within the district. However, in order to avoid misunderstandings, it is recommended that existing and potential new owners or tenants become familiar with the process.

COA FIRST, THEN OTHER PERMITS

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

ARTICLE VII: HISTORIC DISTRICT

The section of the Borough of Ambridge Zoning Code outlining procedures, reviews, and enforcement related to the historic district can be accessed here: https://ecode360.com/15265494

FOR ALL WHO ARE PLANNING EXTERIOR ALTERATIONS, ADDITIONS, NEW CONSTRUCTION, AND/OR DEMOLITION

If a property owner, tenant, or contractor plans to undertake **any alterations or additions to the exterior of properties located in the historic district that requires a building permit** (including the installation of signs, awnings, or fences), 310-44 of the Ambridge Zoning Code states that the Code Enforcement/Zoning Officer shall notissue a permit until the Borough Council has issued a certificate of appropriateness. Other than the general requirements of the building permit process in Ambridge, no permit or review is required for interior alterations, except as such alterations may effect the exterior appearance of the property. However, **the HARB does review all business use applications in the district.**

Applications should be filed with the Borough at least ten (10) days prior to the HARB meeting at which the project is to be reviewed. This is an important part of the procedure for securing a Certificate of Appropriateness within the Ambridge Historic District, since the proposed work must be reviewed by the HARB before a Certificate of Appropriateness and a Building Permit are issued. The HARB's review will be based upon these Design Guidelines. Applicants will always be notified of the date and place of the HARB meeting when the plans will be reviewed so that they can attend and be an active part of the process.

After reviewing the proposed project, the HARB will offer its opinions as to the appropriateness of the work and its conformity to the Design Guidelines. **If the HARB finds that the proposed work meets the Guidelines**, the HARB will recommend to Borough Council that the Certificate of Appropriateness be approved. If Council supports the recommendation, a Certificate of Appropriateness will be issued and the project can proceed accordingly.

If it is the decision of the HARB that the proposed work does not conform to the Guidelines, the HARB will recommend to Borough Council that the Certificate of Appropriateness be denied. Council will review the issue and will either support the recommendation of the HARB or will reverse the HARB's recommendation and order the issuance of a Certificate of Appropriateness.

If for any reason the Building Permit is revoked, the Certificate of Appropriateness is automatically revoked as well and the applicant must begin the approval process anew.

WHEN IS A CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS REQUIRED?

Any treatment requiring a building permit which affects the exterior of the building and is visible from the street requires the approval of the HARB, before the work begins.

The HARB is aware that the needs of the twenty-first century are vastly different from those of the nineteenth, when most of the buildings in the district were built. **The HARB is keenly interested in helping owners and tenants to find appropriate and cost-effective ways to meet modern requirements without seriously affecting the architectural integrity of the property.** Seldom will an historical or exact reproduction be recommended by the HARB. Owners and tenants within the Ambridge Historic District are encouraged to consult with the HARB concerning physical aspects such as landscaping, paving, etc., so that the result will be in harmony with the general historic and architectural character of the district.

EMERGENCY REPAIRS

In isolated cases, the Building Inspector of the Borough of Ambridge may determine that a building within the Ambridge Historic District requires immediate repair or stabilization in order to protect the building, its contents, or the public. In such cases, the owner of the building may make temporary repairs to accomplish such stabilization as is necessary to protect the building, its contents, or the public. Owners should do no more work than is reasonable to provide such protection without complying with the other provisions of the Design Guidelines.

IN-KIND REPAIRS

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

2.3 FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What do the Design Guidelines provide standards for?

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

Are the Design Guidelines voluntary or mandatory?

While the Design Guidelines are not an ordinance or law, the more that property owners in the Local Historic District follow the guidelines, the greater the chance that the HARB will issue a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA). In addition, following the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation, upon which these Design Guidelines are based, is necessary to receive federal and state tax credits for improvements to historic buildings.

What does "rehabilitation" mean?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

To determine eligibility for alternative minimum standards, building owners must contact the Pennsylvania State Historic Preservation Office (PA SHPO), who can provide guidance on feasible accessibility solutions. Contact the PA SHPO's Western Region Community Preservation Coordinator.

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

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CHAPTER 3

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE ECONOMY HISTORIC DISTRICT

3.1 INTRODUCTION

There are two historic districts encompassing a similar footprint, capturing the former village of Economy. One district is the Economy National Register Historic District, and the second, the locally-designated Ambridge Historic District.

- A **National Register Historic District** is an honorific designation.
- A **local historic district** is created through ordinance and is regulated through the HARB.

While properties within the local historic district are reviewed by the HARB for Certificates of Appropriateness when applicants seek a building permit, these Guidelines also serve as a resource for property owners, contractors, and residents performing exterior work within a National Register Historic District.

Given the overlap of these districts and the applicability of these Guidelines, this document will refer to both districts as the Economy Historic District.

It is also noteworthy that there are two additional historic designations within the local historic district: the Old Economy Village State Historic Site and the Old Economy Village National Historic Landmark District.

Location of the Economy Historic District within Ambridge

BOUNDARY OF THE ECONOMY HISTORIC DISTRICT

3.2 ABOUT THE ECONOMY HISTORIC DISTRICT

The Economy Historic District has two main eras of development: the Harmonist development from circa 1824 – 1890, and the Ambridge development from 1903-1944.

The district includes the former village of Economy, a settlement established in 1824 by the separatist religious community known as the Harmony Society. Led by George Rapp, 600 Harmonists settled the village, having previously settled in Harmony, Butler County, Pennsylvania, and afterwards, New Harmony, Posey County, Indiana. Both pious and industrious, the Harmonists thrived in a communal society, where all property and goods were held for the benefit of all.

In this development period, the Harmonists constructed over 100 dwellings and a variety of mills and community-serving spaces. Dwellings were separated by adjacent garden lots. At its peak, there were approximately 800 Harmonist members.

While there was some recruitment into the Harmonist society, the abstinent society's membership began to dwindle in the latter half of the 19th century. Two decades of legal battles regarding the Society's assets ensued. Parcels were sold and six acres of Economy and associated buildings became property of Pennsylvania in 1916, and in 1919 became the state historic site of Old Economy Village.

The early 20th century development included many single family residences infilling between Harmonist buildings in a variety of styles, including American Foursquare, Craftsman Bungalow, and vernacular front gable houses. The construction of these buildings reflected the development boom in Ambridge as the American Bridge Company and other industries established operations in and around the borough.

There are 273 resources in the National Register Historic District and as of the district nomination, there were 98 Harmonist and 128 early- to mid- 20th century resources.

Historic district banner on a streetlight pole.

OLD ECONOMY VILLAGE

The core of the Harmonist settlement is preserved within the state-operated Old Economy Village. For more information about the developmental history of the area, visit the Visitor Center or follow this link: https://www.oldeconomyvillage.org/

"Economy, Rapp's Colony on the Ohio," painted by Karl Bodmer in 1832.

3.3 HIERARCHY OF FACADES

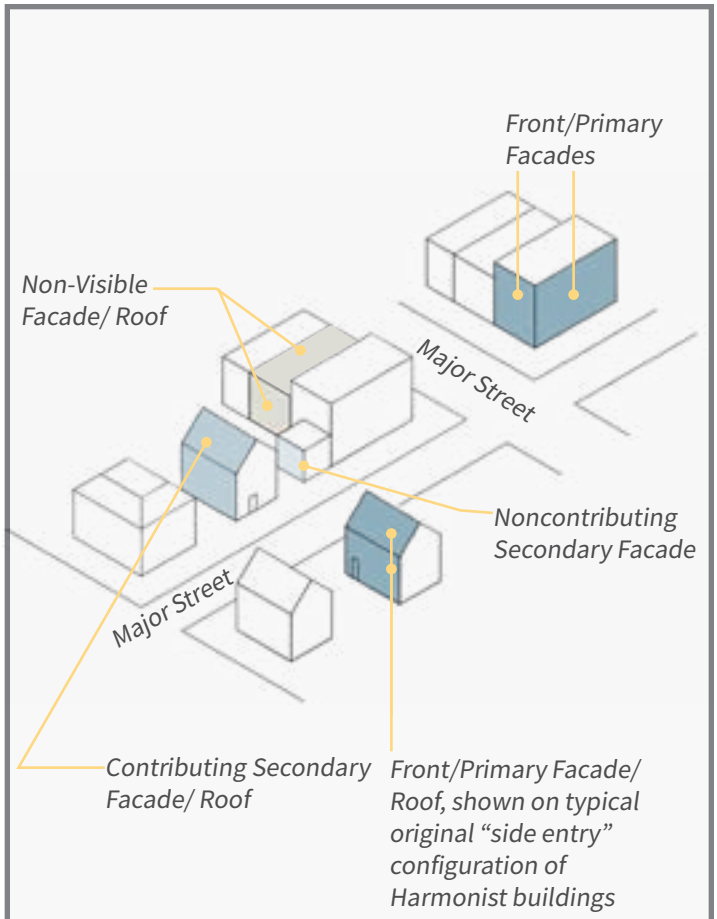
Buildings have multiple faces, some of which are visible from the public street and some of which are not. These Design Guidelines primarily focus on alterations, additions, and new construction that can be seen from the street or sidewalk, as those changes to the Historic District have the most impact 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 and most visible from and facing a public street, and includes visible roof surfaces. It contains the main entrance to the building and typically has the most character-defining architectural features. Primary facades include sides of corner buildings that do not contain the main entrance but are visible from a major public street.
- **Contributing secondary façades** are those that are visible from the public street but are not on the front of the building, and includes visible roof surfaces. This can include the sides of detached buildings, provided that those side walls are visible from the public street and the street-facing facade of contributing accessory structures such as historic garages. As with front façades, contributing secondary façades often contain character-defining architectural features.
- **Noncontributing secondary façades** are those that are in the rear of a building, visible only from an alley, or on the side of the building, only partially visible from a public right-of-way.
- A **non-visible façade** is one that cannot be seen from the public right-of-way and is not reviewed by the HARB.

The Old Economy Village National Historic Landmark District is within the boundaries of the local historic district. Other requirements for this area may supersede these Design Guidelines.

HIERARCHY OF FACADES



Property owners of Harmonist structures are encouraged to treat all sides of the building as primary facades, regardless of visibility, due to the historic significance of these structures.

3.4 KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF THE ECONOMY HISTORIC DISTRICT

The Economy Historic District is located in a residential, medium density area, consisting predominately of detached residential structures. Along Merchant Street there are more examples of attached commercial structures, sometimes with ground floor retail and residential above. The National Historic Site Old Economy Village is situated in the south-central part of the district, with many related structures scattered throughout the overall district. There are several building styles that offer a variety of details and features, and are indicative of the district's development since the 1800's.

Most structures are 2, 2 1/2, or 3-story residential structures, and there are some that are four or more stories. The variety of architectural styles and massing create a unique rhythm to the overall district.

Residential dwellings typically have a stepped entry and a stylized or decorative first floor entry door. Mixed-use and commercial structures typically have an at-grade entry. Detailing at window surrounds vary by building style, but typically feature expressive sills and lintels that are either flat, curved, or arched, and constructed of stone or brick. There are many extant examples of decorative wood lintels, sills, and door surrounds.

The streets throughout the district are typically asphalt or concrete, but portions of 12th and 14th Streets retain a brick surface.

Building Type: The Economy Historic District predominately features **detached residential buildings**, a mix of 1800s Harmonist structures and early 20th century styles. The Old Economy Village State Historic Site in the west central part of the district includes structures that supported the former village. At the western end of the district along Merchant Street there are several **commercial row buildings** and detached structures, a continuation of the early 20th century commercial development in the area.

Building Placement: Buildings in the Economy Historic District are **typically set back** from the street by a wide planting strip and a sidewalk. Harmonist buildings were sited and designed so that the main entry faced an adjacent garden plot. Many have been modified so that the front entry faces the street.

STREET SURFACE MAINTENANCE

The streets within the historic districts, including the brick street surfaces, are owned by the Borough of Ambridge and are maintained by the Ambridge Department of Public Works (DPW). If issues are observed concerning the condition of the street, DPW can be contacted at 724.266.4070.

Detached residential building in the Economy Historic District.

Detached residential building in the Economy Historic District.

Single story frame building in the Economy Historic District.

Building Form: Structures within the district generally range from two to two-and-a-half stories tall, creating a consistent scale along the street. Structures are generally two to four bays wide, though some commercial and multifamily residential structures are up to five bays wide.

Gabled roofs are the most common in the district. Harmonist structures are typically side-gabled. Early 20th century dwellings feature a variety of roof shapes, including front gabled, hipped, and gambrel. A small percentage of buildings feature dormers, consistent with their architectural style. **Low slope roofs** are most common on the commercial structures along Merchant Street.

Rooflines are often simple with shallow eaves and typically unadorned. Commercial brick structures usually feature a dentilated brick-work cornice. Some early 20th century buildings feature simple wooden brackets.

Façade Composition: The typical **composition of residential structures** include a centered or off-centered main entry door elevated from grade. Window openings are typically aligned vertically on the first and second levels. Dormer projections typically include smaller windows that are either aligned with or centered between the windows below.

The typical **composition of mixed-use and commercial structures** include ground-floor storefronts with recessed stepped or at-grade entries with transoms. Storefronts are typically framed by wood. The upper floors of two-story commercial structures typically feature evenly spaced windows with simple flat lintels.

The **typical window** is a double-hung configuration, usually short and narrow. Original Harmonist windows are 6-over-6. 2-over-2 and 1-over-1 window configurations are also commonly seen throughout the district.

Building Materials: **Brick** is one of the primary materials used for facades of buildings in the district. Brick masonry

Two-story commercial building in the Economy Historic District.

Residential building in the Economy Historic District.

Typical double hung windows in the Economy Historic District.

is generally installed in a typical running bond pattern, but there are instances of Flemish bond, especially in the prominent buildings in Old Economy Village, such as the Rapp House and the Feast Hall. Some structures have been modified and have alternative materials that covered or replaced original wood siding.

The predominant **brick color** used is red, but there are also some instances where tan or buff brick is utilized.

Wood is commonly used as a siding material for many Harmonist and early 20th century structures. It is also used on commercial storefronts and signboards. In all instances, the wood was painted for durability. There are several examples throughout the district where original wood siding is covered by, or replaced with, alternative siding materials.

The use of **stone masonry** is generally limited for the foundation of structures.

Wood shingles were the original roofing material for Harmonist structures.

Slate was the predominant roof material for early 20th century sloped roofs' a standard rectangular slate was the most common. Most slate roofs have since been replaced with asphalt shingle which has not replicated the aesthetics of the original slate.

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

Brick exterior materials are primarily used in the district.

An example of wood shingle roofing.

An example of wood siding on a Harmonist structure

3.5 MAJOR ARCHITECTURAL STYLES

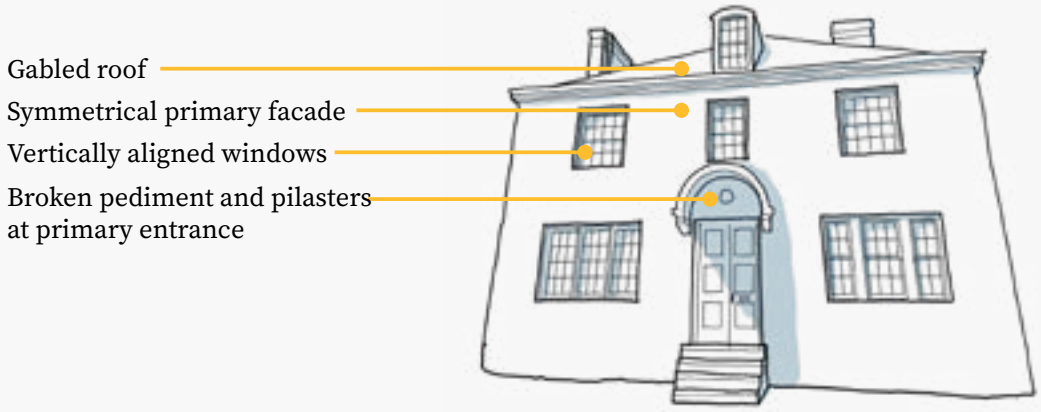
There are examples of Georgian High Style in major buildings associated with Old Economy Village and the Harmonist era of development in the area. Many residence and supporting structures are in a Georgian Low Style or vernacular with Germanic influences.

An example of a Harmonist residence.

GEORGIAN (1720-1830)

Influenced by Renaissance ideals of symmetry and balance, Georgian style reflects both those elements with simplified articulation often with brick, stonework and sometimes wood siding. Primary facades often display columns, pilasters and simplified pediments or portico entrances with transom lights, quoining along corners, and vertically aligned windows. Dormers may delineate a third floor in a gabled roof.

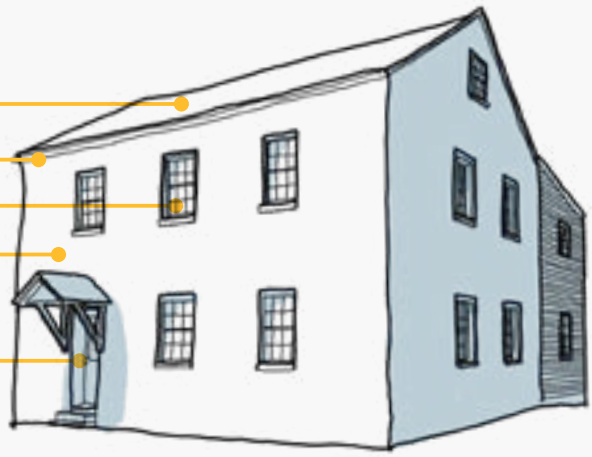
KEY DEFINING FEATURES OF THE **GEORGIAN STYLE**



HARMONIST (GERMANIC VERNACULAR) - (1824-1905)

The typical structure built during the Harmonist era is a vernacular style with Germanic influences. The design of dwellings was refined at the previous Harmonist settlements and enacted consistently throughout the historic district. Shed roof additions were added to most brick houses and clad in wood siding.

KEY DEFINING FEATURES OF THE **HARMONIST STYLE**



PRINCIPLE HARMONIST HOUSE TYPES

TWO-STORY BRICK HOUSE

This type is typically a three-by-two bay plan with laterally-oriented gable roof. Brick is common bond with flat arches above windows and doors. Shed-roof wood additions are common at the rear.

TWO-STORY FRAME HOUSE

This type is similar to the two-story brick house except that it is of wood construction with beaded weatherboard siding. Additions to these structures are rare.

TWO-STORY FRAME DOUBLE HOUSE

This type has a five-by-two bay plan. Windows are typically taller on this type, but are otherwise similar to the smaller frame house.

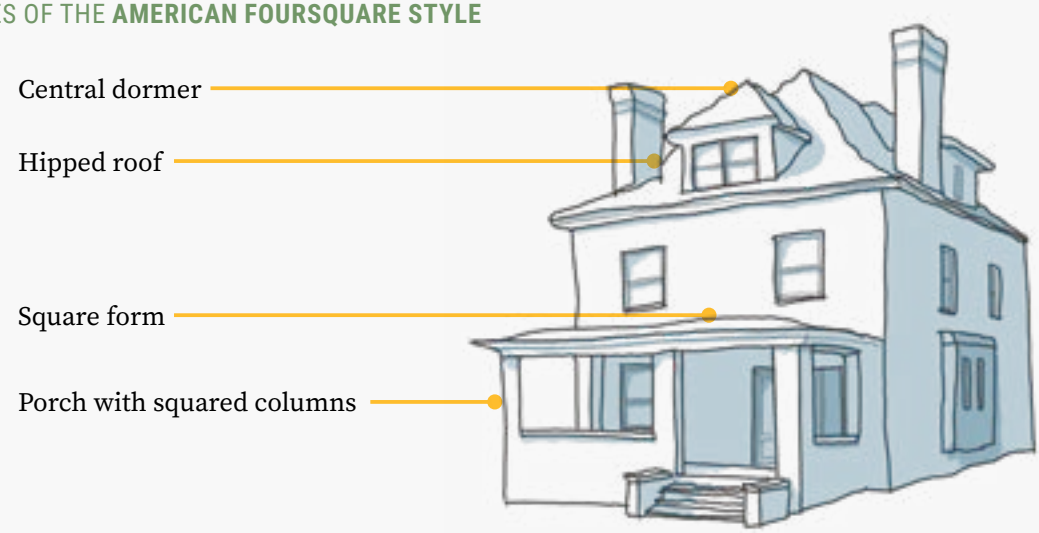
ONE-STORY FRAME HOUSE

This type has a two-by-three bay plan and is one story tall with a half-story attic.

AMERICAN FOURSQUARE (1890-1935)

Named after their typical box shape with a four-room floor plan, this style is a simplified version of the Prairie Style and is usually 2 ½ stories with a hipped roof and central dormer, full width porches with squared porch columns.

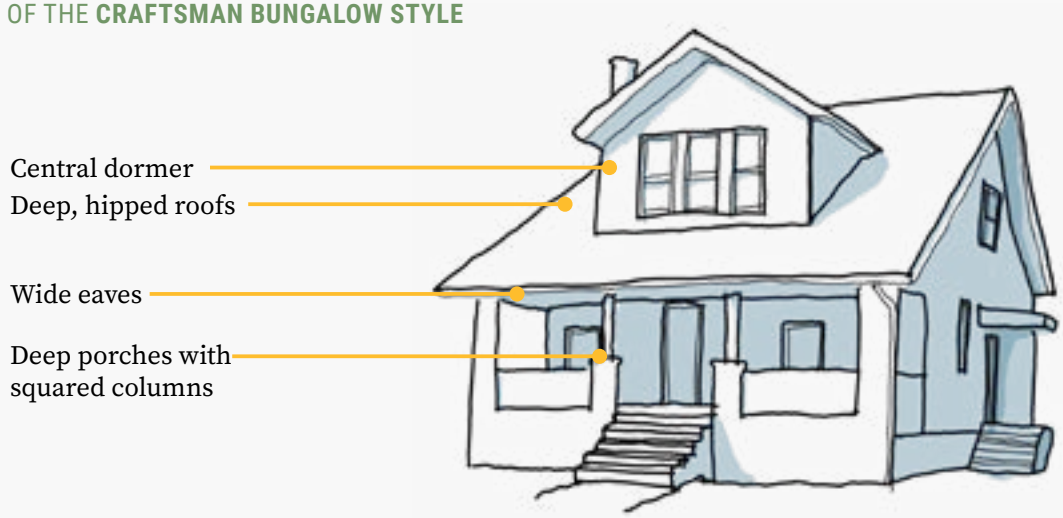
KEY DEFINING FEATURES OF THE **AMERICAN FOURSQUARE STYLE**



CRAFTSMAN (1900-1930)

The Bungalow or Craftsman style developed in California at the turn of the 20th century and was inspired by the English Arts and Crafts movement, which brought a renewed interest in hand-crafted materials and harmony with the natural environment. Hallmarks of the style include wide projecting eaves, deep porches, and heavy columns.

KEY DEFINING FEATURES OF THE **CRAFTSMAN BUNGALOW STYLE**



EARLY 20TH CENTURY VERNACULAR (1903-1944)

Vernacular architecture in the district reflect simplified versions of dominant styles with functional adaptations. These structures contribute to the character of both the district and the surrounding region, reflecting on common building practices and available materials from the time of original construction.

KEY DEFINING FEATURES OF THE **EARLY 20TH CENTURY VERNACULAR STYLE**

TWENTIETH CENTURY COMMERCIAL VERNACULAR (1903-1953)

Early Twentieth-Century Commercial structures are generally one to five stories, with flat or slightly pitched roofs. Often constructed of blond, buff, or red brick, these buildings have very little ornamentation other than some decorative brickwork along the cornice or parapet. Many entries feature deep recesses to allow shoppers to stop and examine window displays.

KEY DEFINING FEATURES OF THE **COMMERCIAL VERNACULAR STYLE**

CHAPTER 4

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE COMMERCIAL HISTORIC DISTRICT

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The Ambridge Commercial Historic District is a National Register Historic District, an honorific designation. Currently, there is no local historic district for this area.

- A **National Register Historic District** is an honorific designation.
- A **local historic district** is created through ordinance and is regulated through the HARB.

While properties within this district currently do not require a Certificates of Appropriateness, these Guidelines also serve as a resource for property owners, contractors, and residents performing exterior work within a National Register Historic District.

Location of the Commercial Historic District within Ambridge

MAP OF THE COMMERCIAL HISTORIC DISTRICT

4.2 ABOUT THE COMMERCIAL HISTORIC DISTRICT

The Ambridge Commercial Historic District is located along Merchant Street between 3rd and 8th Streets, an area that is approximately the geographic center of the Borough of Ambridge.

Adjacent to the former village of Economy, the borough developed rapidly in 1903, when American Bridge began construction of what would become the world's largest structural steel manufacturing and bridge building facility. Housing and the commercial Merchant Street developed, supported by the influx of workers and other industries.

Much development occurred between 1903-1925, and Merchant Street was filled with 2-3 story commercial row buildings. Storefronts provided a variety of goods and services and was a hub for Ambridge and the surrounding communities. At its peak, Ambridge was home to 20,000 residents.

The Post World War II period brought significant changes to the commercial district. Like in many parts of the country, suburban sprawl led to residents moving out of the borough and into deeper suburbs. Shopping centers and malls, namely, the Northern Lights Shoppers City, enticed shoppers to travel to new storefronts and centralized retail locations. The extension of Ohio River Boulevard through Ambridge along the western part of the borough created a bypass. Through-traffic that would once have passed through the commercial Merchant Street was now able to circumvent the commercial center entirely. With reduced traffic through town and the development of centralized shopping malls, many shops and retailers vacated the area.

Over time, the breadth of American Bridge's steel manufacturing contracted and shut down entirely in 1984. and other industries followed.

Despite these changes in the commercial district, much of the original architecture remains intact. With minimal infill construction and limited unsympathetic alterations, the character-defining features along this corridor remain. The commercial district continues to serve as a shopping and service area for the Borough.

The Ambridge Commercial Historic District was entered into the National Register of Historic Places in 2020.

Commercial buildings along the 500 block of Merchant Street.

Historic photo of the Commercial Historic District.

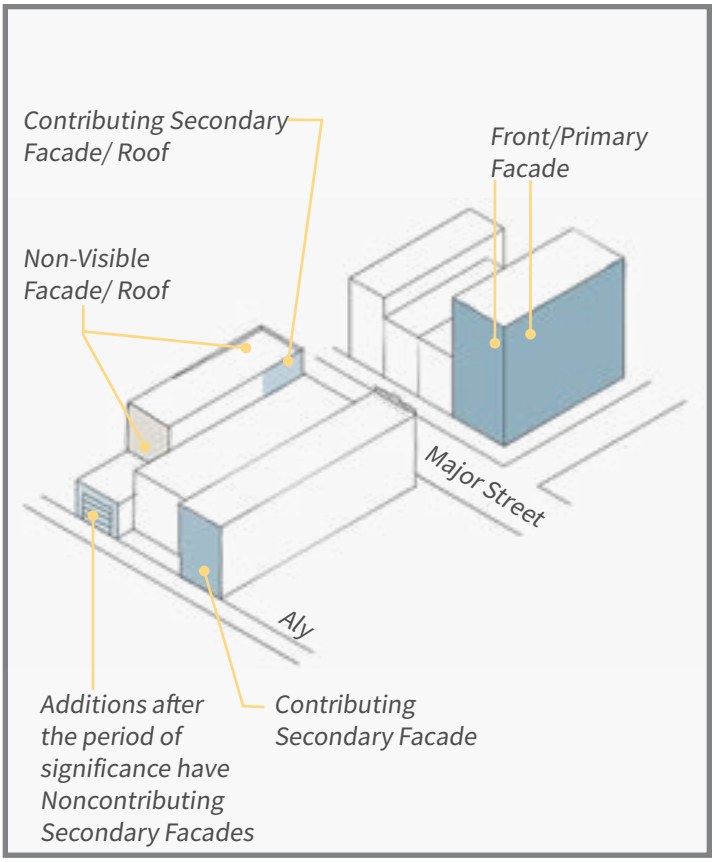
4.3 HIERARCHY OF FACADES

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

HIERARCHY OF FACADES



4.4 KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF THE COMMERCIAL HISTORIC DISTRICT

The Ambridge Commercial Historic District is located in a dense urban setting, consisting predominately of attached mixed-use structures, with ground floor commercial and commercial or residential dwellings above.

Most structures are 2-3 story structures with ground floor storefronts and brick detailing above. Most buildings are utilitarian and do not follow a particular style, but are consistent in general form, massing, and detailed elements in the upper floors of the facade and cornice.

At-grade entries are typical, due in part to modern streetscape improvement projects to create more accessible entries. Some storefronts have a stepped entry. Detailing around windows are generally simple, but may feature expressive sills and lintels.

Building Type: The Ambridge Commercial Historic District predominately features **commercial row buildings**, many which originally served mixed-use purposes, combining ground floor retail with residential functions above, or utilizing upper floors for commercial storage space. There are limited extant examples of other structures, namely, a social club and a single residence.

Building Placement: Buildings in the Ambridge Commercial Historic District are located along a single plane, **built up to the lot line** with zero setbacks, reinforcing the dense urban center of the area. Only a small number of structures deviate from this setback.

Parcels extend from Merchant Street to the next right-of-way, Upper Aly to the east and Lower Aly to the west. Service and residential entries are common along these secondary streets.

Blocks of attached structures create a cohesive and generally uninterrupted streetscape.

Two and three-story commercial buildings in the Commercial Historic District.

Buildings are typically built to the lot line in the Commercial Historic District.

Commercial building along Merchant Street.

Building Form: Structures with the district generally range from **two to three stories tall,** with some taller exceptions, creating a consistent scale along the street. Structures are generally two to four bays wide. The variety of building heights and widths mixed across the district creates a unique rhythm.

Low slope roofs are the most common in the district, and limited examples of shed roofs are typically located at rear additions or accessory structures.

Rooflines are often adorned with ornamental cornices and parapets, predominately constructed with brick masonry, but examples of wood are also common.

Façade Composition: The typical composition of mixed-use and commercial structures includes ground-floor storefronts with large display windows, recessed entries with transoms, framed by wood or metal. Upper stories feature evenly spaced windows with flat or arched lintels, and sills. Facades are further articulated with brackets, corbels, and intricate masonry work.

The **typical window** is double-hung configuration, and maybe be short and wide, or tall and narrow, with either a flat or arch top. Lintels are typically rectangular and flush with the surrounding facade, but there are variations depending on building style.

Prominent corner buildings often feature architectural embellishments on both facades on the corner.

Building Materials: Brick and stone masonry are the primary materials used for facades of buildings in the Ambridge Commercial Histrionic District, featuring wood or stone accents. Brick masonry is generally installed in a typical running bond pattern, but there are many instances of decorative brick patterns at the cornice.

Thre is no predominant **brick color** used in the district. Shades of red, buff, tan, and brown are seen along Merchant Street. Some brick structures have been painted, which may be causing damage to the underlying brick.

Stone masonry is generally used for the foundation of buildings, but is also the preferred material for the facade of some structures.

Wood is generally used at storefronts and signboards. Wood is also used for decorative brackets and cornices in a number of structures. In all instances, the wood was painted for durability.

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

An example of two and three-story commercial buildings along Merchant Street.

An example of two-story buildings with ornamental parapets.

There is a wide variety of brick colors used along Merchant Street.

4.5 MAJOR ARCHITECTURAL STYLES

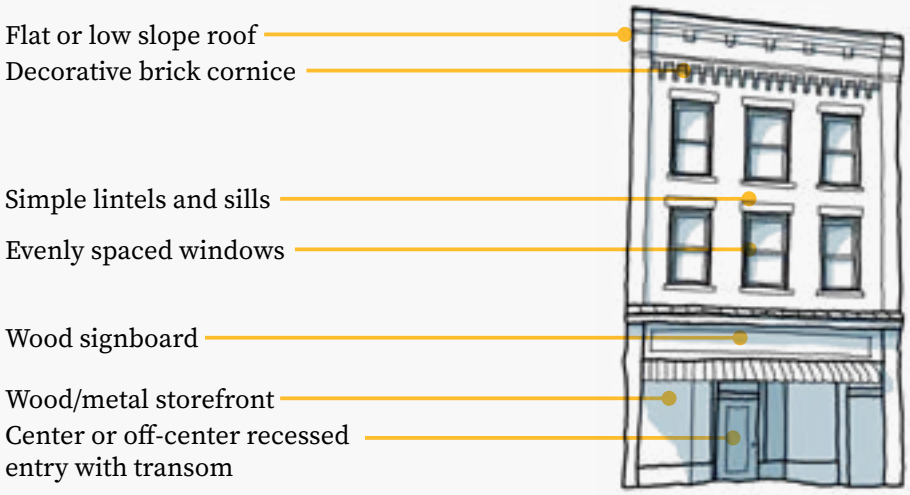
The Ambridge Commercial Historic District primarily consists of utilitarian commercial buildings, featuring limited ornament and not prescribing to any particular style. There are limited examples of various architectural styles scattered among the commercial row buildings of the district.

An example of a commercial building with a storefront along Merchant Street.

TWENTIETH CENTURY COMMERCIAL VERNACULAR (1903-1953)

Early Twentieth-Century Commercial structures are generally one to five stories, with flat or slightly pitched roofs. Often constructed of blond, buff, or red brick, these buildings have very little ornamentation other than some decorative brickwork along the cornice or parapet. Many entries feature deep recesses to allow shoppers to stop and examine window displays.

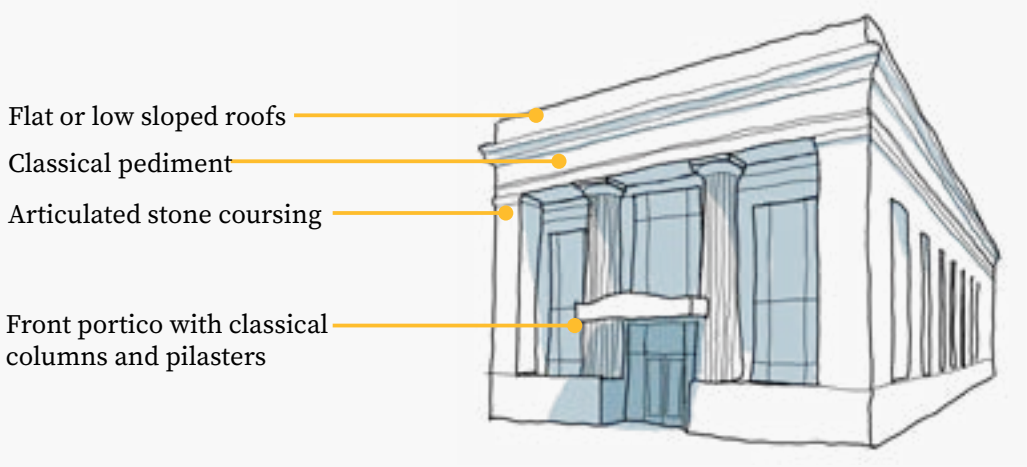
KEY DEFINING FEATURES OF THE **COMMERCIAL STYLE**



NEOCLASSICAL (1895-1950)

The Classical Revival, or Neoclassical, Style is one of the most commonly seen styles across the state and country. This style was inspired by the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago held in 1893 which promoted a renewed interest in the classical forms. It is often characterized by symmetrical design and balanced proportions with elements such columns and pilasters.

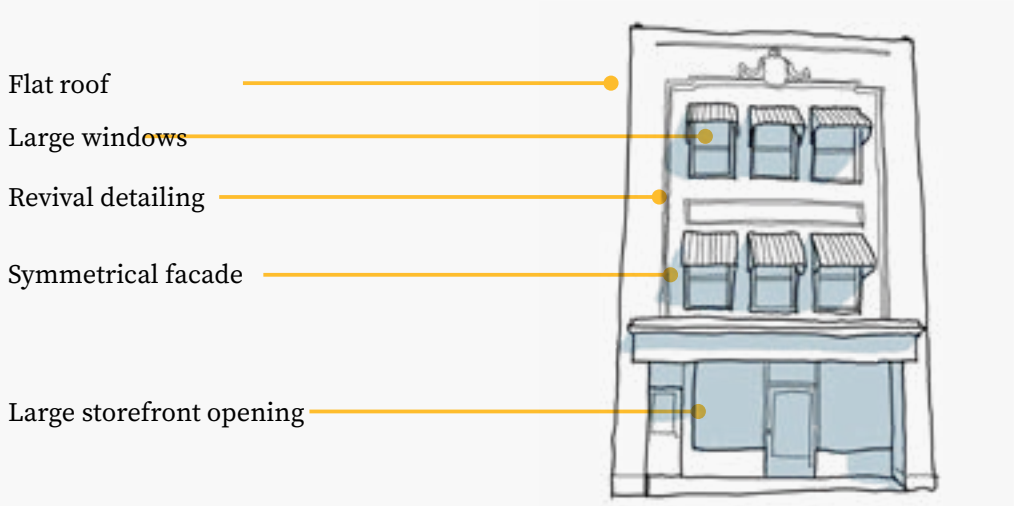
KEY DEFINING FEATURES OF THE **NEOCLASSICAL STYLE**



CHICAGO (1890-1920)

The Chicago Style, typically called the Commercial Style, was first developed in Chicago as steel-frame construction developed in the 1890s. These utilitarian, relatively unadorned commercial buildings sometimes featured decorative elements from other popular styles of the era surrounding large window or storefront bays.

KEY DEFINING FEATURES OF THE **CHICAGO STYLE**



ART DECO (1920 -1930)

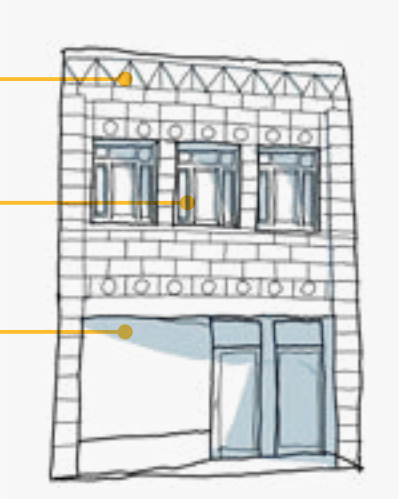
Art Deco buildings showcase geometric ornamentation, streamlined forms, and contrasting materials such as glass and metal. These structures often stand out for their modern aesthetic.

KEY DEFINING FEATURES OF THE **ART DECO STYLE**

Geometric patterns

Sleek appearance

Glass and metal as predominant materials



Springs

CHAPTER 5

GUIDELINES FOR EXISTING BUILDINGS

5.1 EXTERIOR WALLS & MATERIALS

Brick is the predominant building material across the Economy and Commercial Historic Districts, often complemented by decorative wood elements such as trim and cornices. Wood is also one of the primary materials used in Harmonist structures. These exterior materials not only enhance the architectural character of the district, but also play a crucial role in the building's structural envelope. When possible, maintaining and repairing existing materials is the preferred approach over replacement.

5.1.1 **Historic masonry** should be stabilized and repaired rather than replaced when possible.

5.1.2 **Stone and brick** should not be removed or covered with artificial or synthetic materials.

5.1.3 Masonry, whether stone or brick, **should not be painted.** These coatings can trap moisture and cause deterioration of masonry walls.

5.1.4 **Repainting** may take place if the masonry was painted during the period of initial construction.

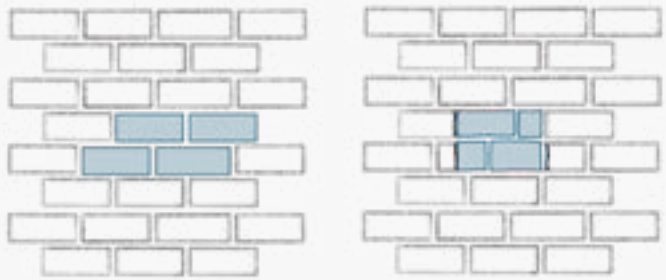
5.1.5 **Historically-appropriate colors** are preferred for masonry repainting. Reach out to a design professional or historian for consultation when a color scheme is being selected for a building.

5.1.6 **Repointing masonry walls** should include preservation methods that strengthen materials through consolidation, such as patching walls and repointing bricks with mortar of an appropriate strength, color matching existing, and using historically appropriate widths and joint profiles.

5.1.7 A **qualified person** who is familiar with mortar mixes for historic properties should do repairs and repointing.

5.1.8 Portland cement **mortar** is too high in strength for historic materials. A typical compatible mortar is Type N or S, using a combination of Portland cement, lime, and sand.

5.1.9 **Patching of masonry units** should be done by 'toothing-in' bricks to maintain the original coursing pattern.



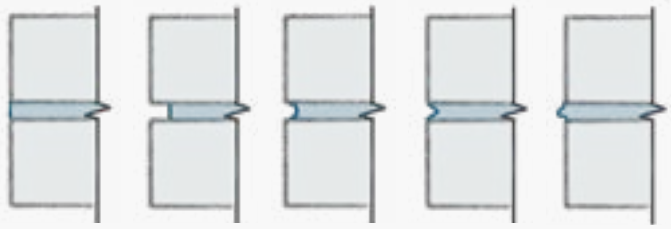
APPROPRIATE

"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



MASONRY CLEANING

Masonry may be cleaned to remove environmental staining or biogrowth, such as moss, algae, or lichen. These 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.

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

Example of inappropriate use of paint on masonry substrates, as well as inappropriate color choice.

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

5.1.11 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.

5.1.12 Wood siding should be retained in the same profile and configuration that exists.

5.1.13 Repair of wood elements may include limited replacement of deteriorated members. The replacement wood should match the same species, size, profile, and appearance of the original siding.

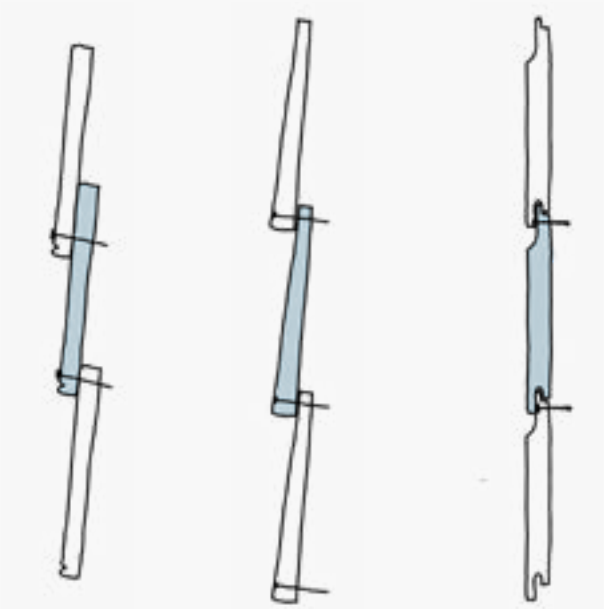
5.1.14 If there are **extensively deteriorated or missing areas of siding or trim** that make localized repairs or replacement infeasible, full replacement of siding may be appropriate. New materials should replicate the original as closely as possible in material, composition, size, profile, and appearance. Substitute materials, such as engineered wood, fiber cement, or synthetic cladding may be considered if they can adequately match the appearance, physical properties, and durability of the historic materials.

5.1.15 Installation of new cladding over original or existing building features is inappropriate.

5.1.16 Repair stucco by patching with new material that duplicates the old in strength, composition, color, and texture.

Masonry and wood elements should be maintained to ensure their longevity.

WOOD SIDING PROFILES



Beaded Weatherboard* | Weatherboard | Shiplap

**Beaded weatherboard is a Germanic profile of wood siding and was used on wood-framed Harmonist structures. It features a rounded bottom edge (bead).*

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.

WOOD ELEMENT CLEANING

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

FURTHER READING

While the use of matching materials to replace historic is preferred, it is recognized that flexibility is sometimes required. Substitute materials that closely match the visual and physical properties of historic materials are appropriate. Refer to National Park Service, Technical Preservation Services, Preservation Brief 16: The Use of Substitute of Historic Building Exteriors for more information.

PAINT COLOR

Paint color selection should be appropriate to the architectural style and complement the building and its surroundings. However, the HARB does not generally prescribe paint color.

Using a color scheme that is compatible with the historic character of the structure can highlight the structure's historic appearance. Historic paint analysis of original layers of paint or appropriate historic research can inform the building's original colors or other color schemes used historically. Use color schemes that are simple in character, generally one to three accent colors for trim elements.

Nineteenth and early twentieth century wood and masonry buildings were often painted in a variety of earth-tone colors. Wood window sashes, door panels, and architectural details were often painted in an accent color.

Many major paint manufacturers have developed "historic" paint palettes which contain a range of colors similar to what existed historically and can be considered if the structure's original colors cannot be determined.

5.2 ROOFS

The roof (geometry and material) of a residence 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. Every effort should be made to retain these elements in good condition.

5.2.1 **Repair and restore** original roofs when possible. Before replacing a roof, evaluate if repair or localized areas of in-kind replacement of shingles is feasible.

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

5.2.3 If in-kind replacement of the roof is not feasible, use **new roofing materials** that resemble the original material in appearance, color, pattern, shape, and dimensions.

5.2.4 If photographic documentation of the original roof style is not available for an historic building, use materials that **resemble the original roofing materials** on nearby historic buildings of a similar style. These materials will likely be slate or clay tile. Asphalt shingles that match the color of nearby roofs on historic buildings may be used if original materials are not feasible. Corrugated metal roofs are generally not appropriate for historic buildings.

5.2.5 **Alternate 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 wood tile are not appropriate.

Existing slate roofs retain historic character and should be retained.

Harmonist structures were originally built with wood shingles.

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.

Alternate materials for **wood shingle** may include other woods that might not have been species available when the buildings were originally constructed, or composite materials that replicate the look of the original. Alternate materials should have the same durability and characteristics as the original, matching as closely as possible in color, dimension, exposure, and profile.

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

5.2.7 Avoid altering **dormer shape or roof pitch**. Avoid removing historic dormers.

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

5.2.9 **Built-in gutters** should be maintained and/or repaired in-kind.

5.2.10 **Hung gutters** should be half-round in profile, and downspouts should be round.

5.2.11 **Typical gutter materials** include stainless steel, terne plate, copper, and other metals. Plastic and vinyl materials are not appropriate for gutters.

5.2.12 **Drainage elements** should be painted 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)

"K" Style Gutter Inappropriate

HISTORIC METALS

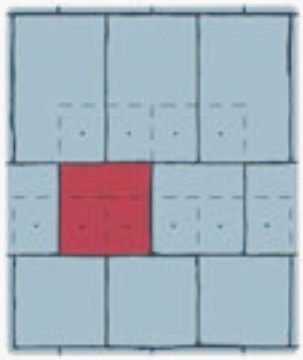
Metals originally used on Harmonist structures were grey, most likely tin, lead, or coated with a tin and lead alloy called terne. Alternative materials may be appropriate in replicating the look of this historic material, including matte stainless steel or alternate materials of a similar color and durability.

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.



5.3 DOORS

The composition of a door, including the framing, decorative trim, sidelights, and transom are significant architectural features. The proportion, shape, and detail of an historic door contribute to the architectural style of the building.

5.3.1 All **doors and associated features** should be retained and should not be replaced with modern styles or materials.

5.3.2 **Replace doors in-kind** if repair is not feasible. Replacement doors should match the original door in location, material, design, size, profile, and operation.

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

5.3.4 **Original doors** should not be replaced with modern styles or materials.

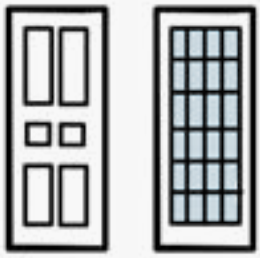
5.3.5 Wood **replacement doors** are highly preferable to synthetic materials or metal.

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

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

Primary entry is typically offset on the facade.

COMMON DOOR STYLES



Historic Doors include panelized wood doors and wood doors with lites in a variety of configurations.

Modern Doors include an appropriate 6-panel door. Doors with fan lites are not consistent with historic door styles seen in the district.

MAINTENANCE TIP

Maintain existing historic doors and door frames. If localized repairs can be made, such repairs are preferable to replacing the door or frame.

Entry doors are sometimes protected by bracketed overhangs.

5.4 STOREFRONTS

Ground floor commercial storefronts provide amenities throughout the Commercial Historic District and along Merchant Street in the Economy Historic District. Large expanses of glass and surrounding detail complement the character of the building as a whole. Light wells, door transoms, and light transoms helped illuminate merchandise on display. Many original storefronts have been modified to remove or cover these elements.

5.4.1 **Historic storefronts** should be stabilized and repaired rather than altered when possible.

5.4.2 If **extensively deteriorated** or poorly functioning storefront elements are to be replaced, they should match the original features as much as possible in material, design, scale, color, and finish.

5.4.3 Where storefronts were **previously altered**, the contemporary storefront may be removed and replaced with a storefront that is in keeping with original proportions and configurations of similar historic storefronts.

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

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

Recessed storefront with wood panels, detailing, and signboard.

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.

5.5 WINDOWS

Original windows are one of the most important characteristics of historic buildings. The shape, size, style, and material of the windows are distinguishable features of most architectural styles. Windows are highly noticeable and improper replacement windows can detract from a building's historic character. Every effort should be taken to retain and repair existing windows to the greatest extent possible.

5.5.1 **Repair and restore** original windows and associated components whenever possible.

5.5.2 Consider replacement of **previously altered non-original windows** with those that are more compatible with the original configuration, material, and style.

5.5.3 Replacing windows should only be done if repair is not possible due to **extensive deterioration** or poorly function.

5.5.4 **Replacement windows** should match the original historic window as much as possible in material, design, scale, color, and finish, including the window configuration (single-hung, double-hung, casement, etc.), The frame, the sash, the casing, the sill, and the configuration of the muntins.

5.5.5 **Storm windows** and improvements to energy efficiency are appropriate if they do not damage repairable original windows or restrict or reduce original sight lines.

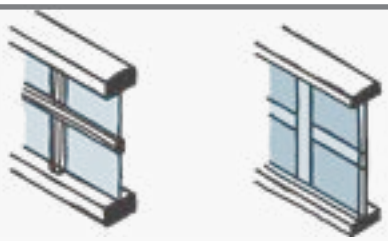
5.5.6 **New materials such as aluminum-clad windows** are generally appropriate replacements for wood windows, as they can replicate profiles of the original details. Composite wood or fiberglass windows may also be appropriate if they match the original appearance. Vinyl windows are not appropriate due to their inability to match historic profiles and their poor durability and performance.

5.5.7 **New openings or infill of existing openings** are not appropriate on primary facades. If creating new openings or infilling existing openings is necessary for new interior uses, locate openings on secondary or non-contributing facades.

Retain original windows when possible.

APPROPRIATE INAPPROPRIATE INAPPROPRIATE

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



APPROPRIATE INAPPROPRIATE

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.

STORM WINDOWS

Storm windows can be an easy way to increase energy efficiency of historic windows while also preserving the integrity of the windows.

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

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

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

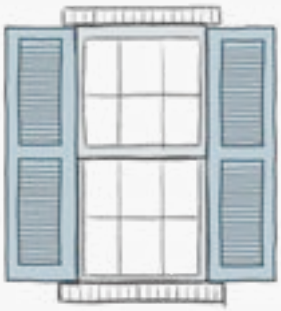
5.5.11 **Window grilles** should be a simple style or in keeping with historic profiles.

Example of replacement windows that are not appropriate.

SHUTTERS

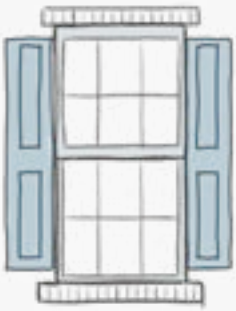
Shutters should be one half the width of the window, in order to cover the entire window when closed. The shutter shape should match the window.

Original shutters are rare as these elements tend to degrade from the elements. Shutters are important features and have a developmental history worth considering when replacing new. While contemporary life may not use shutters, it is important to restore these features as operable and accurate.



APPROPRIATE

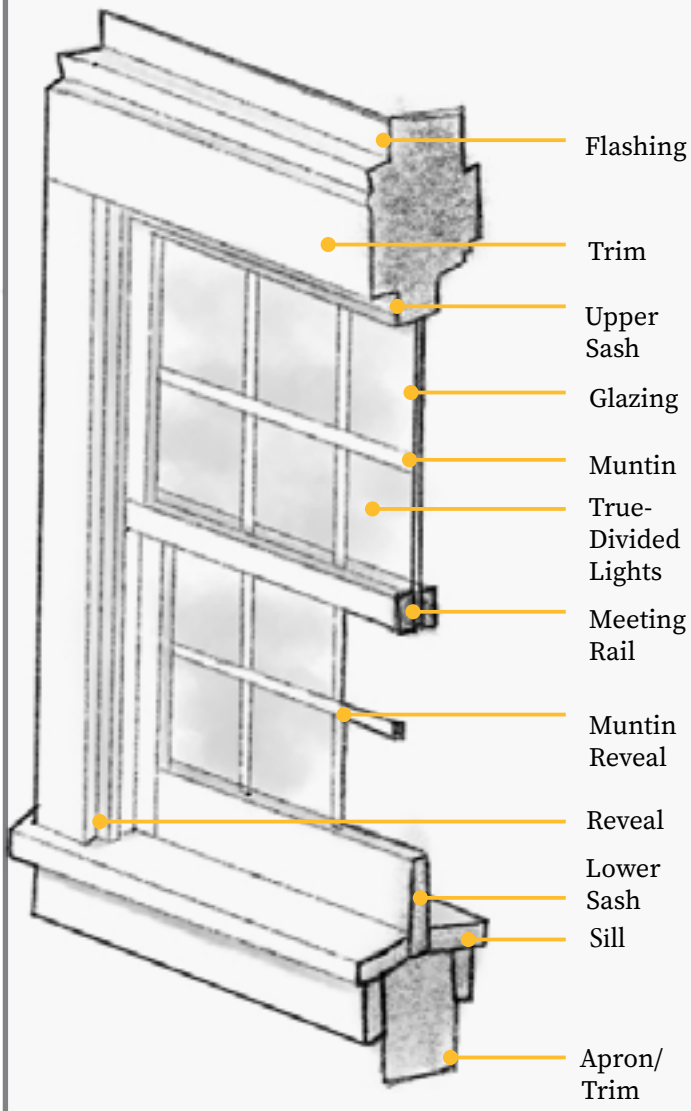
Each shutter is half the window width.



NOT APPROPRIATE

Shutter is undersized for the window width.

ANATOMY OF A TYPICAL WINDOW



5.6 PORCHES & STOOPS

Porches are important to each individual property and they are also important contributors to the streetscape. Removing porches or replacing items with inappropriate materials can greatly alter one of the most character-defining features and assets of a home and blight the streetscape.

5.6.1 **Retain** original materials and designs in elements like rails, spindles, posts, floors and roofs.

5.6.2 **Repair and restore** original historic porches whenever possible.

5.6.3 If repair is not feasible, replace porches **in-kind**, matching as closely as possible the materials, appearance, transparency, and height.

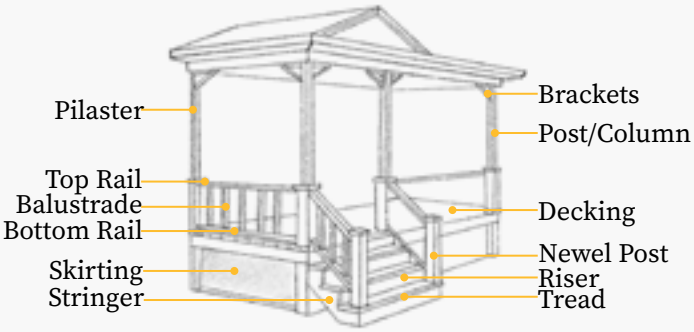
5.6.4 If in-kind replacement of the porch is not feasible, use a design that **resembles the original** in materials, appearance, transparency, details, and dimensions.

5.6.5 **Appropriate substitute materials** for wood elements may include cellular PVC or wood fiber/polymer composites. Alternate materials may include composite wood decking to replace tongue-and-groove wood floor boards if they match original dimensions. Use of dimensional lumber is not appropriate for visible replacement materials. Vinyl railings and trim are not appropriate alternate materials for wood elements.

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

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

ANATOMY OF A PORCH



Most entries consist of a few steps, often with a small overhang.

MAINTENANCE TIP

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

Porches are typically supported by wood or masonry columns.

5.7 ACCESSORY STRUCTURES

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

5.7.1 **Repair and restore**, rather than replace, historic accessory structures whenever feasible.

5.7.2 When completing work to historic accessory structures, **retain the dimensions** of the structure to the maximum extent possible. Accessory structures should remain subordinate in proportion to the primary building and property footprint.

5.7.3 If repair of an historic accessory structure is not feasible, replace the structure **in-kind**, matching as closely as possible the materials, appearance, and dimensions.

5.7.4 If in-kind replacement is not feasible, incorporate **architectural cues** from the primary building to influence the design of a new replacement accessory structure.

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

CHAPTER 6

GUIDELINES FOR SUPPORTING ELEMENTS

6.1 SIGNAGE

Signage in historic districts provides essential wayfinding and advertisement for commercial activity. Signs should complement the building's design and should not obscure or distract from the architectural character. All signage must comply with the Ambridge Zoning Code. Address placards do not require permits and are not subject to review by the HARB.

6.1.1 Repair and restore **historic signage** whenever possible.

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

6.1.3 **Avoid obscuring** character-defining features with an signage installation.

6.1.4 **Do not remove or destroy** historic elements to install a sign. Mount anchors in mortar joints, not in masonry units where applicable.

6.1.5 For **window signs** (and address labels at residential properties), maintain the transparency of the window by using graphics without a solid background.

Historic storefront that utilizes the historic signboard for business identification.

The building name is integrated in the stone, and limited to the awning above the entry.

AMBRIDGE ZONING CODE

Refer to the Ambridge Zoning Code for building signage requirements beyond address numbers.

6.2 ACCESSIBILITY

Sensitive solutions to ensure buildings are physically accessible to all are crucial for historic districts. There may be multiple appropriate solutions that can effectively address a project's need while minimizing impacts to the character-defining features of the building or district. Historic buildings are not exempt from the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), but there is additional flexibility for designated historic structures.

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

6.2.2 **Provide access** through a primary entrance whenever feasible. If another entrance is required, locate that entrance as close to the main entrance as possible on a secondary facade.

Example of an appropriate accessible entry modification.

Example of an appropriate accessible entry modification.

ADA COMPLIANCE FEASIBILITY

If full compliance with ADA standards is not feasible, the building may be eligible to meet alternative minimum standards. Contact the a design professional 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.

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.

6.3 FENCES, WALKWAYS & OTHER LANDSCAPE ELEMENTS

Fences, retaining walls, and walkways contribute to the visual character and rhythm of the streetscape, especially when they are located in front of primary facades. A variety of picketed wood and detailed wrought iron fences are seen throughout the Economy Historic District and in limited locations in the Commercial Historic District.

Fences

6.3.1 **Avoid removing** historic fences, including removal to add new walkways, driveways, parking areas.

6.3.2 **Repair and restore existing** historic fences whenever possible. This includes the rails, balusters, bases, and details.

6.3.3 **Replace fences in-kind** if repair is not feasible, matching as closely as possible the materials, appearance, transparency, and height.

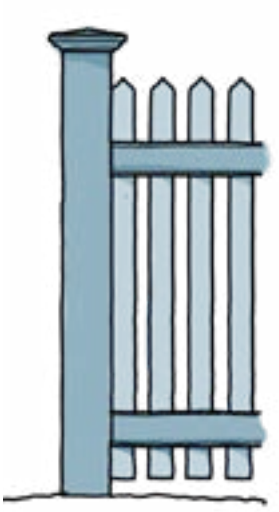
6.3.4 If in-kind replacement of the fence is not feasible, use **a design that resembles the original** in materials, appearance, color, pattern, transparency, and dimensions.

6.3.5 **New fences** should be designed to comply with zoning regulations. Fences 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.

6.3.6 Appropriate **fence materials** may include wrought or cast iron, wood, and vegetation (shrubs). Avoid synthetic materials such vinyl and plastics.

6.3.7 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. Harmonist properties should utilize the traditional Harmonist fence detail.

Example of metal fence.



The Harmonist-style wood fence utilizes simple pickets.

Walkways & Features

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

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

6.3.10 If in-kind replacement is not feasible, utilize a **compatible substitute material**.

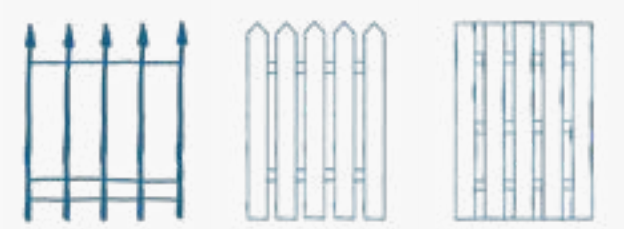
Existing paver sidewalk

MAINTENANCE TIP

Maintain walkways leading from the sidewalk to the main building entry.

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*

6.4 TECHNOLOGY & EQUIPMENT

Modern technology requirements, such as security cameras and telecommunications wiring, may have an impact on the integrity of a historic building if not sensitively located. If installed within a historic district, the goal is to have the least possible visual impact on the historic district.

6.4.1 **Locate equipment** on non-visible or non-contributing facades and/or roof slopes.

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

6.4.3 If equipment is necessary on a primary façade (such as a security camera), **place in a concealed location** and select finish or paint to blend into adjacent surfaces.

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

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

6.5 ENERGY & SUSTAINABILITY

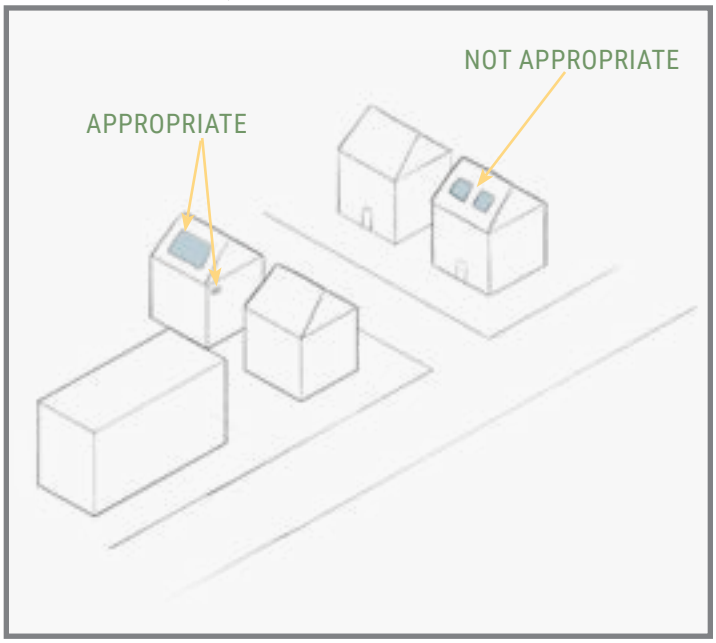
Historic Preservation is an inherently sustainable practice because it conserves the energy expended during the building's original construction. Historic materials are often more durable, though significant advancements have led to the development of highly efficient, energy-saving building products. Given the overall residential character of the Economy Historic District, some energy upgrades may not be applicable or permitted. The low-slope roofs of the Commercial Historic District may serve as a concealed location for solar panels.

6.5.1 **Alternative energy systems**, such as solar devices, should be as low-profile to the historic building as possible and should be only minimally visible from the public right-of-way (located on non-visible or non-contributing elevations only). Consult a solar energy contractor to determine if solar panels can be placed horizontally on a roof rather than at an angle.

6.5.2 **Windmills and turbines** are generally not recommended for direct placement on historic buildings or sites, unless they are not visible from a public right-of-way.

6.5.3 **Green roofs** can be an option for historic buildings in some cases. However, they should not be visible from a public right-of-way, and engineering studies will need to be completed to see if the historic building can accommodate the weight and water requirements of a green roof.

ROOF-MOUNTED EQUIPMENT



FURTHER READING

For more direction on implementing sustainability strategies on historic buildings, consult the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation & Illustrated Guidelines on Sustainability for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings (PDF).

Example of inappropriate solar panel installation on roof slope easily seen from a right-of-way along the primary elevation.

6.6 UTILITIES & BUILDING SYSTEMS

Modern building systems, including mechanical systems, air conditioning, and electric, are necessary to maintain comfort within historic properties, especially the residential properties of the Economy Historic District, but they should be installed and located sensitively in order to not disrupt the character of the historic district.

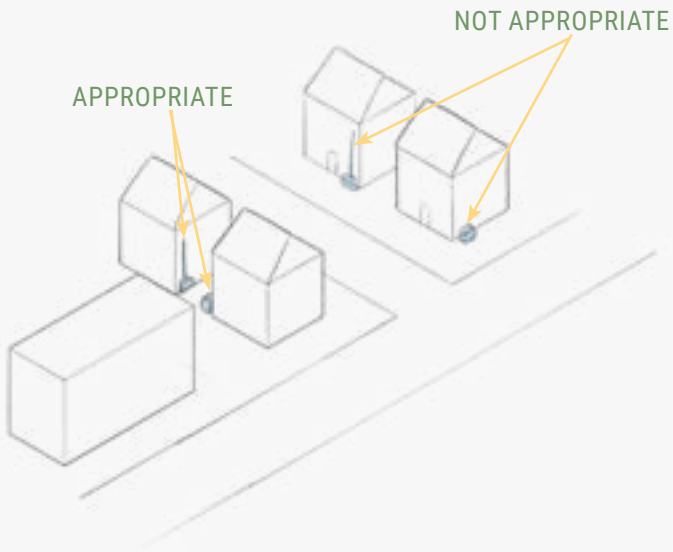
6.6.1 Install **new mechanical systems** that result in the least alteration possible to the historic building, its character-defining features, and its appearance from the public right-of-way.

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

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

6.6.4 When possible, **coordinate with utility companies** to install meters on secondary, non-contributing, or non-visible facades rather than the primary façade.

6.6.5 Minimize the **visual impact of existing meters** through the use of fencing or landscaping if allowed 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.

Example of a meter located on a secondary facade.

Example of a vent placed on secondary facade.

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CHAPTER 7

GUIDELINES FOR ADDITIONS

7.1 GENERAL GUIDELINES

New additions to historic buildings should be considered only after determining that the existing interior spaces cannot be altered to fit the intended new use.

7.1.1 Additions should be **differentiated** in material, scale, and geometry from the original historic building. Historicizing, or creating the impression of original historic aesthetic, should be avoided.

7.1.2 When constructing an addition, take steps to **minimize changes** to the original historic building's exterior walls and materials and ensure that original building features are not irreversibly damaged, completely destroyed, or hidden.

7.1.3 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.

7.1.4 **Reconstructing** missing architectural features must be supported through physical evidence (shadows or "ghosts" on walls) or documentary evidence like photographs, drawings, or examples on similar buildings to document your choices.

7.1.5 For new additions, choose **materials** that complement the colors and textures of contributing buildings in the Historic District to promote compatibility of design.

Example of an appropriate addition, which has similar proportions and roof slopes, but is smaller than the original structure.

7.2 LOCATION OF ADDITIONS

7.2.1 **Avoid** constructing additions that alter the primary façade of the building.

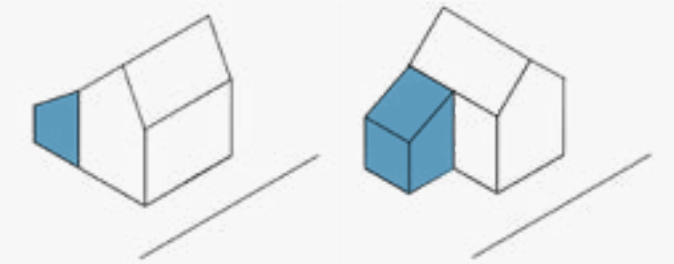
7.2.2 Additions should be subordinate to the original building, preferably **located** on a non-contributing façade, or on a secondary façade, if a non-contributing façade is not feasible.

7.2.3 **Side additions** should be set back from the primary façade of the building.

7.2.4 Rooftop additions, such as **rooftop decks or balconies**, should be set back from the vertical plane of the façade; these should be located on non-contributing or non-visible facades.

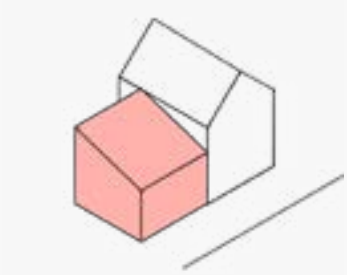
Addition and roof deck appropriately located at the rear.

LOCATION OF ADDITIONS



APPROPRIATE

Additions are located at the side or rear of the building.



NOT APPROPRIATE

Addition is located in the same plane as the primary facade.

Example of an inappropriate rooftop addition on the primary facade.

7.3 MASS & SCALE OF ADDITIONS

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

7.3.2 Additions should be shorter in **height** than the original historic building. If an addition is to be the same height as the original building, it should be set back considerably from the front façade of the building or connected to the original building by a passageway or hyphen. Additions should never be taller than the original building.

7.3.3 **Dormer additions** should be subordinate to the dimensions of the existing roof. They should not be taller than the existing roof, span across the building or the majority of the building, or extend from the eave of the roof to the roof's ridge.

MASS & SCALE OF ADDITIONS

APPROPRIATE

APPROPRIATE IF SET BACK OR CONNECTED WITH A HYPHEN

NOT APPROPRIATE

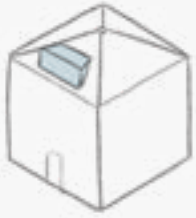
MASS & SCALE OF DORMER ADDITIONS

APPROPRIATE

New dormer matches style of historic dormer.

NOT APPROPRIATE

New dormer has a stylistic difference compared to 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 appropriate dormer addition, which removed an original dormer and created non-historic proportions.

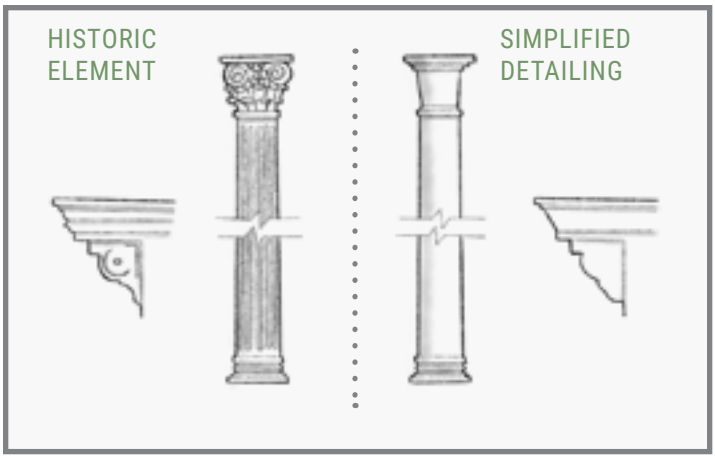
7.4 NEW ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENTS

7.4.1 When designing new buildings or additions, it is generally discouraged to create exact replicas of historic buildings or ornamentation details. Instead, the focus should be on general building form, placement, organization, materials, colors, and textures. **Simplified interpretations** of the original features are recommended.

7.4.2 **Windows** in an addition should largely match the size and shape of the windows of the original building.

7.4.3 **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.

7.4.4 **Roofs** of additions should match the pitch and materials used on the original historic building.



CHAPTER 8

GUIDELINES FOR NEW CONSTRUCTION

8.1 GENERAL GUIDELINES

New construction within the historic district should fit the character of the neighborhood in terms of scale, materials, massing, proportion, size, and setback. While new buildings will not be historic, they should relate to the surrounding buildings and neighborhood. New buildings should fit in without seeming to be falsely historic.

8.1.1 **Designs, materials, and setbacks** from the street that are similar to those of existing buildings on the same lot or in the same neighborhood should be considered for new construction.

8.1.2 Traditional window and door openings, designs, materials, and roof shapes can also help new buildings to **blend in** with their older neighbors.

8.1.3 **Reconstructed façades** are generally discouraged for use on new buildings. Sourcing salvaged materials is recommended, but care should be taken to ensure the style and time period of the salvaged material is appropriate.

8.1.4 New buildings shall comply with all **Zoning Ordinance** requirements.

Example of new construction that is incompatible with the surrounding district.

8.2 LOCATION OF NEW CONSTRUCTION

8.2.1 New construction to **fill existing gaps or utilize vacant or underutilized lots** is encouraged. The design of new construction buildings should be compatible with the existing historic context but differentiated as new construction. This approach will allow the new construction to fit into the visual patterns of the neighborhoods but allow contemporary design, materials, and techniques. Although there are buildings from different time periods in the district, there are unifying features that create cohesive character.

8.2.2 Construct new buildings with the same **setbacks** as neighboring structures.

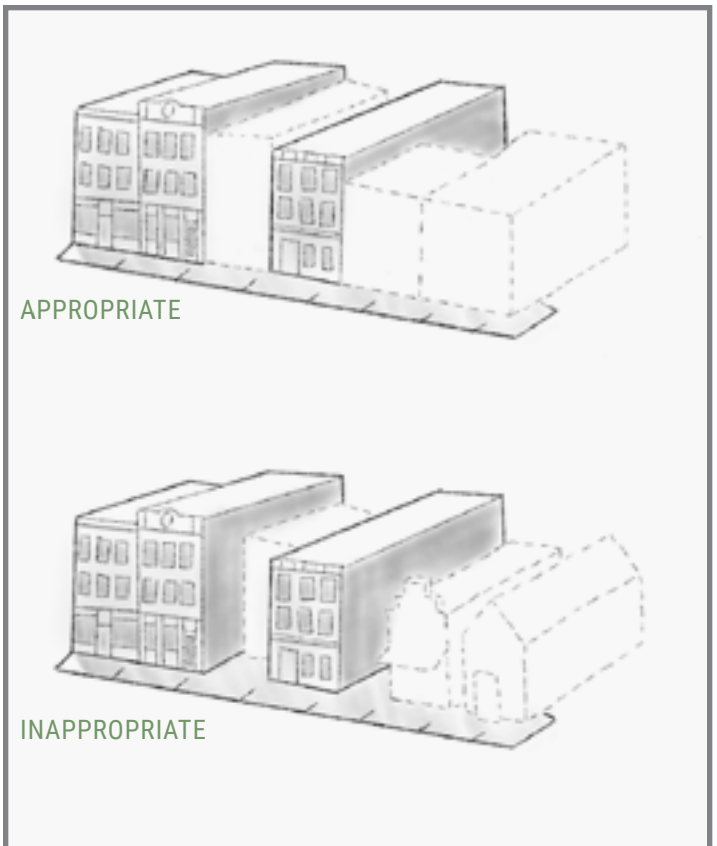


Diagram indicating appropriate infill construction in regards to setbacks and proportions/roof shapes.

8.3 MASS & SCALE OF NEW CONSTRUCTION

8.3.1 New construction should **take cues from contributing buildings** in the Historic District with respect to their scale, form, mass, height, setbacks, dimensions, orientation, proportions of wall openings, materials, textures, and colors.

8.3.2 Design new buildings to be the same approximate **height** as existing surrounding buildings. The new building should not stand out in a way that is incongruent with the character of the Historic District.

8.3.3 New buildings should be of the same **scale** as existing historic buildings, in terms of building width and mass.

8.3.4 New **corner buildings** should be designed so that there are two primary façades that are treated equally when it comes to design, materials, and details.

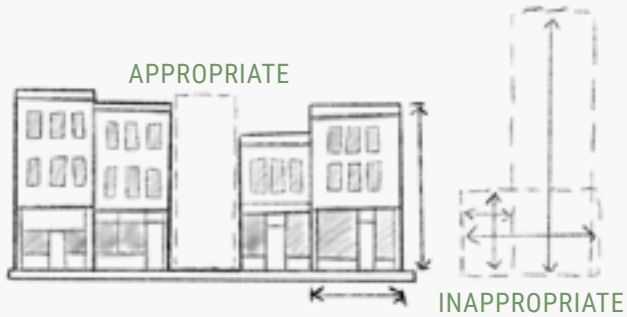


Diagram indicating appropriate scale and massing for new construction.

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

8.4 BUILDING FEATURES

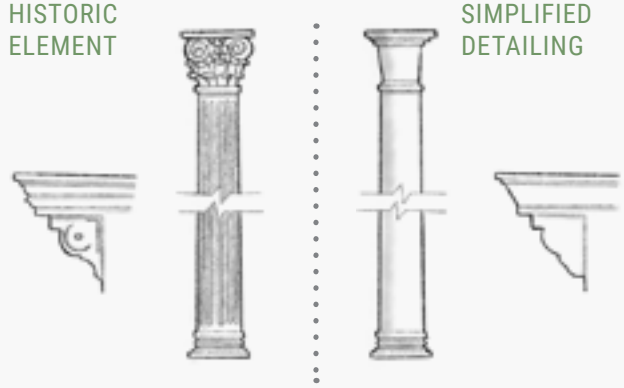
8.4.1 The **ratio of solid/void** (wall to window) creates a rhythm of openings within a façade. New construction should respect the pattern and proportion of openings (windows and doors) to unify the streetscape.

8.4.2 New construction should utilize **similar composition** techniques to existing historic buildings and create prominent horizontal and vertical emphasis through belt courses, lintels, cornices, pilasters, and other contemporary methods.

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

8.4.4 **Doors and window**s of new buildings should reflect the size and scale of such building openings in adjacent or nearby historic buildings. New windows and doors should not be inappropriately large, nor should they be smaller than those of the surrounding historic buildings.

8.4.5 New construction should employ similar **roof shapes** to those of the adjacent historic buildings.



Ornate, original cornice on historic building.

Simplified cornice detailing on new construction.

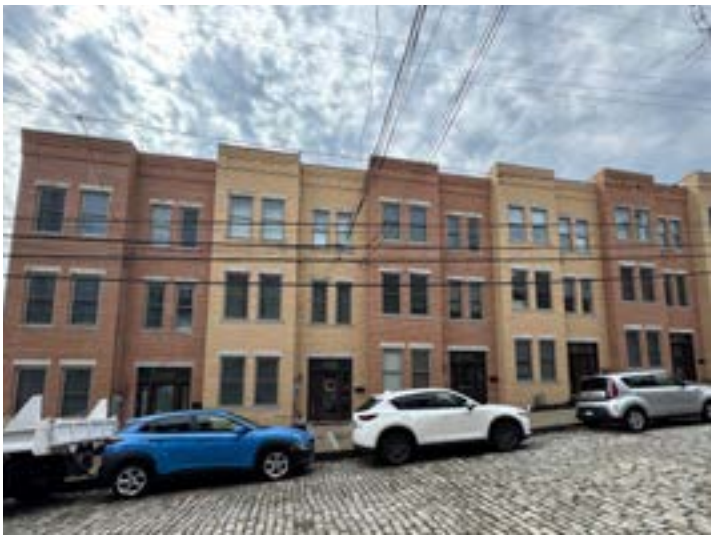
8.5 BUILDING MATERIALS & FINISHES

8.5.1 **Brick and stone masonry** are the primary materials used for the existing historic buildings, with exposed timber, wood trim and shakes, and stucco also utilized for detailing. New materials should be compatible in color and texture with the adjacent structures to create a unified design within the Historic District.

8.5.2 The style of the new construction should be **contemporary** and should not attempt to imitate the style or detailing of existing or historic buildings. Detailing elements utilized, if desired, should be simplified.

8.5.3 **Synthetic materials and metal siding** such as vinyl, plastics, and aluminum should be avoided for use on exterior walls for new construction and renovations.

8.5.4 Incorporate **local materials** and materials that are dominant in the surrounding neighborhood with consideration for durability and sustainability.



Example of new construction following rhythm and form of the surrounding historic streetscape.

Example of new construction emulating rhythm and variation of a densely built district.

8.6 ACCESSORY STRUCTURES

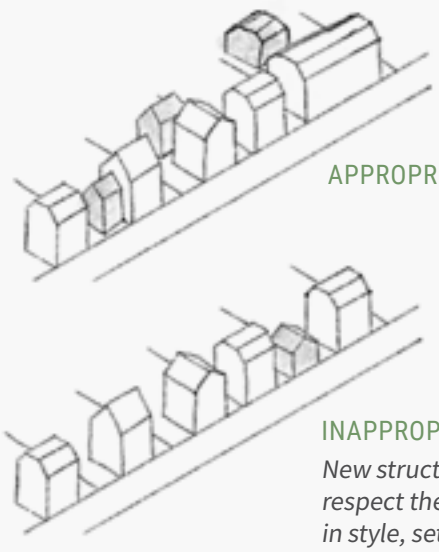
Historically, accessory structures included garages and sheds located in the rear of the property; these structures were typically designed to be secondary or non-visible. New accessory buildings should retain the same historical relationship as primary buildings and historical accessory structures.

8.6.1 Newly constructed accessory structures be **proportionate** in mass and scale to the primary building.

8.6.2 Accessory structures should be **located** at the rear of the building or in a location that is minimally visible from the public street.

8.6.3 Accessory structures should use the same types of **materials and colors** as primary buildings. Masonry and wood are more appropriate material choices than synthetic materials.

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



New structures should respect the historic building in style, setback, and overall relationship surroundings.

Accessory structures include garages and sheds.

CHAPTER 9

GUIDELINES FOR DEMOLITION

9.1 GENERAL GUIDELINES

Review is required for proposed demolitions of any structure in the Economy Historic District. Demolition of an existing structure should only be considered as a last resort when all rehabilitation options have been explored and exhausted.

9.1.1 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.

9.1.2 Structures should be maintained to prevent **'demolition by neglect'**; at a minimum, maintenance and repair of the roof, drainage, and exterior façade should be performed regularly to prevent deterioration.

9.1.3 The **design of a new building** to occupy the existing site should follow the guidelines in Chapter 8 - Guidelines for New Construction.

9.1.4 If demolition is to take place, ensure that building materials from the demolition can be **salvaged**. Contact local construction material salvage organizations to explore the feasibility of transporting the demolished building materials to be reused elsewhere.

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 Borough of Ambridge enforces the International Property Maintenance Code as adopted by the Borough of Ambridge Legislation Part II, Chapter 115. The Borough also enforces the Zoning Code (Ch. 310). These codes apply to all properties within the Borough, 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

9.2 CONSIDERATIONS

If demolition of an historic building is proposed, the following questions should be asked and the answers reviewed with Historic Architectural Review Board:

- What is the **historical significance** of the building?
- What **condition** is the building in? Is the building deteriorated to the point that it has to be demolished for life safety purposes or blight removal?
- Are there **other buildings** in the City similar to the building proposed to be demolished, or is the building individually unique?
- What **impact** would demolition have on the surrounding buildings and the neighborhood as a whole?
- Is demolition the most **cost-effective** means of improving the property, or is preservation a financially viable option?
- Can the historic building be **modified** in a way to make it more usable for a new use?
- If demolition is to take place, can the **new building** be designed in a way so that it is compatible with the surrounding buildings in the Historic District?

Historic photos can provide insight on the history of buildings.

HISTORIC RESEARCH

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

- Ambridge Historic District Economic Development Corporation (AHDEDC)
- Old Economy Village
- 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

9.3 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.
- Take **measurements** of the outside of the building and record its dimensions as well as its setbacks from neighboring buildings.
- **Send** your photographs, notes, and measurements to the Borough Staff.

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

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