IV
DESIGN GUIDELINES FOR NEW CONSTRUCTION AND ADDITIONS

IV.1 INTRODUCTION

The careful and thoughtful design of any new construction in Chestertown's Historic District is of the utmost importance because it must harmonize with the character of the neighborhood and also be compatible with existing structures. A lack of attention to general design, to details, and to the context within which the building will be placed can have severe adverse impacts for the area. As a result, proposals for new construction receive serious scrutiny.

The following guidelines are not intended to require particular architectural features or dictate architectural style. Instead, they are very general in nature and are intended to identify a range of design options that will encourage development compatible with the existing character of the district.

Contemporary designs and materials executed in a manner sensitive to the district are strongly encouraged. Economic feasibility and durability of proposed improvements, in addition to aesthetic harmony, should be primary concerns. The primary principle behind new construction is that it should recall historic themes, style, scaling, and detailing, without trying to precisely duplicate any one building or specific element. The challenge is to design a building or addition that is clearly a product of the present, while at the same time being sensitive to existing design traditions and neighboring buildings.

The following factors should be taken into account when planning and designing new construction. They apply both to entirely new structures and additions to historic buildings.

IV.2 PROCESS & PROCEDURES FOR REVIEW OF NEW CONSTRUCTION

For all projects involving major new construction, there is a two hearing process. Small additions or minor construction projects such as a shed or garage may be require only one hearing, but photographs of the building site, façade elevations, samples of materials, and scaled drawings will be required, possibly with additional information. At the first hearing, the HDC will review the project in general terms, while details and specifics of the project are considered at the second hearing.

IV.2.1 Required information

The following information, at a minimum, is required for all new construction projects:

- a written scope of work

- photographs of the building site and its surrounding street
- elevation drawings for the exterior of the structure
- samples of all exterior building materials, including doors, windows, siding, roofing

For major projects, the Commission may also require scaled drawings that show the street elevations, with existing buildings and the proposed new structure. A scaled model, three-dimensional drawing or axonometric drawing may be required, showing the proposed building in context. Since the project is heard in two hearings, the application for new construction is best broken into two parts, which are described more fully below.

IV.2.2 Hearings

At the first hearing, the project will be reviewed in general terms. For this hearing, the following criteria will be considered:

- location
- footprint of the new building
- massing
- height
- setback
- scale
- façade
- roof forms
- materials

When these issues have been addressed and approved by the HDC, the next level will be considered. In the subsequent part of the application, details and finishes are considered.

- texture
- openings (doors, windows, etc.)
- lighting
- site plan
- landscaping
- detailed facades and elevations
- final articulation with the surrounding area

When both parts of the hearing process have been approved, the project may proceed.

NOTE: FOR MAJOR PROJECTS SUCH AS NEW HOMES OR COMMERCIAL STRUCTURES, THE TWO HEARINGS MAY BE SPREAD ACROSS TWO SEPERATE MEETINGS TO ALLOW FOR ADEQUATE CONSIDERATION.

Most major construction projects will also require approvals from other review bodies or commissions. If a variance is required, this should be acquired prior to submission of an HDC application. Planning Commission approval, if required, can be pursued concurrently to HDC

approval. If final site plan approval is required from the Planning Commission, that review should occur between the Level I and Level II HDC hearings.

For new buildings and additions, the following design elements should be considered when designing the project.

IV.3 DESIGN ELEMENTS

IV.3.1 Style

As described in Chapter I of these Guidelines, Chestertown's Historic District is comprised of buildings in a wide range of styles. No single style is mandated for new construction, but designs should complement and reflect the architectural heritage of the town. New construction should avoid the introduction of historic styles that are not commonly found in the District, and it should also avoid a false sense of history through the precise duplication of other historic buildings.

IV.3.2 Rhythm

The relationship between the width and height of the front of the façade of a building should be visually compatible with adjacent buildings. Additionally, the relationship of the new building to the open spaces between it and adjoining buildings should be visually compatible with the spacing of adjacent buildings. When one moves past a sequence of buildings, one experiences the proportion of the width to height of the buildings as well as a rhythm of recurrent building masses to the open space between them. New construction designs should analyze existing patterns or rhythms and incorporate them into the project.

IV.3.3 Height

As a small county seat in an agricultural region, Chestertown has few tall buildings. Most residential structures are two stories in height, and few commercial buildings exceed three stories. These historic characteristics should be taken into account during new construction design. The height of a proposed building should be visually compatible with adjacent buildings, both in the number of floors, the height of each floor and the height of the roof.

One of the most distinguishing features of any historic neighborhood is the strong horizontal line established by the structure's cornices. It is important that this line be introduced into the design solution for new construction, thus ensuring continuity from one building to the next. It is not necessary to duplicate an adjoining structure in terms of height but, instead, to maintain the appearance or feel of a strong horizontal line between the dwellings. There should not be more than a 10% difference in a visual field where the majority of buildings are similar in height. An exception would be in a visual field where there are original buildings of varied height. Porches, first floor elevations, and the number of stories should also be consistent with adjacent buildings.

IV.3.4 Scale

Scale may be defined as the relative sizes of architectural elements compared to each other, to the building as a whole, and to the observer. The size of a building and its mass will have a relationship to open spaces, windows, doors, porches, and balconies. On larger structures, for example, windows and doors tend to be somewhat larger. For new construction, these relationships should be compatible within the building and with other buildings in a visually related field. Scales for buildings vary according to style, and some of those scale issues were discussed in Chapter I of these Guidelines. Chestertown is above all a town for pedestrians, and new buildings should maintain that human scale.

IV.3.5 Mass

Mass may be defined as the enclosed volume formed by a building's exterior. Mass can be different for different parts of a building. Chestertown's commercial buildings, for example, have a dominant mass long the main street front, with smaller masses of varying heights in the rear. A new structure that reversed this sequence of massing would look out of place. New construction should instead try to maintain the pattern of primary and secondary masses.

IV.3.6 Materials, Texture, and Color

Relationship of materials, texture, and color of the façade of a building should be visually compatible with the predominant materials used in buildings to which it is visually related. Variety in the use of architectural materials and details adds to the intimacy and visual delight of the district. When first confronted with this variety, it is easy to overlook the overall thread of continuity provided by the relatively limited palette of materials available to earlier builders. This continuity is threatened by the availability of inappropriate building materials in today's market place. The materials and details of new construction should relate to the materials and details of existing adjacent buildings.

While slate, tin, and standing seam metal roofs are preferred, asphalt shingles of appropriate color and texture may be acceptable. Diagonal and vertical sidings are generally unacceptable. Imitative materials such as asphalt siding, wood-textured metal siding, or artificial stone, when well installed and carefully detailed, may be acceptable in some cases. Materials will be reviewed to determine their appropriate use in relation to the overall design of the structure.

Chapter III includes a detailed review of the types of building materials mot commonly found in the Historic District, while Chapter I discusses historic trends and styles. These sections provide information that will be useful in preparing sympathetic new designs.

IV.3.7 Roof Shapes and Materials

Roof profiles are an important element in defining the architectural character of an area. Various roof styles were described in Chapter I. The shape and orientation of a new building's roof should be visually compatible with the buildings to which it is visually related. Many struc-

tures in the District have dormer windows, and it may be desirable to incorporate these into a new building. This can be appropriate, but dormers must be of appropriate scale and not dominate the roof slope and elevation. The pitch of dormers should repeat that of the main roof. Shed dormers are likely to be appropriate only on secondary elevations.

As discussed in Chapter III, skylights can disrupt the continuity of a roofscape along a street and they must therefore be designed with care. If they are necessary, it is advisable to locate them on secondary facades where they are not visible from the public way. They also should be carefully integrated into the overall design, so that they do not stand out. Dome or bubble-shaped skylights are not appropriate and will be approved only on a case-by-case basis. The total skylight area should not exceed 10% of the corresponding floor area, and the proportion of skylight units should be comparable to those of façade openings.

Slate and standing seam metal are the traditional materials most appropriate for roofing new contemporary buildings. Although these materials are preferred, asphalt shingles of appropriate color and texture may be acceptable.

IV.3.8 Windows and Doors

The proportion, size, detailing, and number of windows and doors in new construction should relate to those of existing adjacent buildings. Fenestration patterns (the patterns of solids and voids on a building's façade) contribute significantly to the rhythm of a streetscape. The fenestration pattern on new construction should mimic that of adjacent buildings.

Many windows in historic neighborhoods have a vertical orientation, with a proportion of between 2 to and 3 to 1 (height to width). This varied with different architectural styles, but openings of existing buildings generally show a vertical orientation that should be maintained in new construction.

Alexander Building, High Street

Individual windows can be square or horizontal if the rest of the building conveys the appropriate directional emphasis. Façade openings of the same general size as those in adjacent buildings are encouraged, but the size and orientation of a building's openings also can be used to help define a building's bulk and mass. A tall building can be made to appear shorter by using horizontal openings, while the converse also is true; a short building can appear taller when given vertical openings.

Wooden double-hung windows are traditional and should be the first choice when selecting new windows. When ordering new windows, it is important to consider the directional emphasis of the muntins.

New construction within the commercial part of the District should incorporate into the design a strong storefront ele-

ment. The facades of such buildings also should follow the existing pattern of distinguishing between the street level storefront and the upper levels.

Side and rear elevations of new construction also should be carefully designed, harmonizing both with the primary façade and with neighboring buildings.

IV.3.9 Spacing, Setback, and Location

The spacing between individual buildings varies throughout the Historic District. A new building's relationship to adjacent structures should be consistent with the spacing along that portion of the block. Existing building widths also can provide a guide for dividing the facade of a larger building into a series of smaller and more compatible components. The location for a proposed structure, including its distance from the road or sidewalk (setback) and distance from other buildings (spacing) must be appropriate.


Cannon Street

In the commercial part of town and in some other areas, most building fronts are placed directly on the sidewalk, and new structures should maintain the setback common to that block face. Elsewhere, especially in residential areas, existing buildings may be set farther back from the street. In these areas, new structures should maintain a setback similar that of existing buildings. If there are good reasons for increasing or decreasing the setback from the street edge, the variance should not be more than five percent of existing street to façade setback of adjacent buildings. Reduced setbacks may also be acceptable at corners.

IV.3.10 Site Features and Landscape

Fences, landscaping, and other site features should be compatible with the surrounding streetscape, both in design and materials. Sidewalks and curbs must conform to Town standards, and paving materials and design of driveways and parking areas must be appropriate to the Historic District. New driveways, parking areas, and garages should be designed so that they are not visible from the public way; if this is not possible, they should be screened with appropriate plantings.

The landscaped setting in which a structure is placed helps to define the streetscape and establish its mood and character. The patterns and types of trees, shrubs, and flowers (possibly window boxes) should provide sufficient privacy and at the same time enhance, not hide, the appearance of the structure.

Trees act as natural air conditioners to cool streets, yards, and buildings in summer and admit the sun's warmth in winter. The location of plantings should be carefully chosen. For best results, select the types of trees that grow well on the property – whether sunny, partly sunny, a narrow lot, etc. It is always wise to check with a nursery for advice.

For additional information on landscaping and site feature guidelines, please refer to Section V below. The Town has published the highly useful *Chestertown Green Book*, which has numerous tips on landscaping curbside design.

IV.4 ACCESSORY BUILDINGS

Garages, sheds, and other small accessory structures are common historically and may be proposed as new construction. Such accessory buildings are usually associated with residential structures, and they contribute to the overall character of a property and the district. More modern accessory structures such as decks, patios and pools also may be proposed, but must be compatible with these guidelines and the character of the Historic District. Please refer to Sections IV.6 and V.6 below for additional information of decks, patios, and pools.

If possible, new accessory structures or construction should be located so they cannot be seen from a public right-of-way. If this is not possible, they should be sited as unobtrusively as possible. Accessory structures should meet all of the other design criteria for new construction and should be compatible with the size, shape, design, and materials of the principal building on the property. They should not obscure the view of the principal building or compete with or diminish it in any way.

IV.5 ARCHEOLOGICAL IMPACTS

Chestertown's Historic Zoning ordinance specifically calls for the preservation and protection of archeological resources in the Historic District. The best preservation method is leaving these resources in the ground, undisturbed. New construction usually requires significant ground disturbance, including trenching for utilities and footers, excavation of basements, digging holes for landscaping, and grading for driveways and parking areas.

For any major new construction project, it is recommended that a professional archeologist assess or survey the area prior to construction. If important resources are found, the best course of action is design construction to avoid them. Steps should also be taken to ensure that heavy equipment does not damage remains that are being left in the ground. If it is not possible to design construction to avoid archeological resources, archeology and recording should be done according to best practices prior to construction. Archeological investigations should conform to the Maryland Historical Trust's *Standards and Guidelines for Archeological Investigations in Maryland.* The Trust also maintains a list of professional archeologists that can conduct assessments and excavations. The list and the *Standards and Guidelines* are available on line at http://www.marylandhistoricaltrust.net under "Documents." Archeologists at local or regional colleges and universities also are sometimes available to conduct archeological assessments.

IV.6 NEW ADDITIONS

All of the guidelines outlined above in this chapter apply to additions to existing buildings, but several additional issues should be noted.

Addition to the rear of a house on Cannon Street

Because a new exterior addition to a historic building can damage or destroy materials and change the building's character, it should be constructed in a manner that preserves significant materials, features, and historic character. Avoid constructing an addition on a primary or other character-defining elevation to ensure the preservation of significant materials and features. Make sure that the size, scale, massing, proportions, and design of the new addition are compatible with the historic buildings to ensure that its form is not expanded or changed to an unacceptable degree.

Place the new addition on an inconspicuous side or rear elevation so that the new work does not result in a radical change to the form or character of the historic building. The Commission recommends setting an addition back from the historic building's wall plane so that the form of the historic building can be distinguished from the new work. Plan the new addition in a manner that provides some differentiation in material, color, and detailing so that the new work does not appear to be a part of the historic building.

Decks, patios and pools also must be compatible with these guidelines and the character of the Historic District. Decks built with pressure treated lumber are not recommended (please refer to III.3.5 above), nor are decks that would obscure, alter, or otherwise compromise the character of a significant building or building elevation. Please refer to Section V.6 below for additional information of decks, patios, and pools.

IV.7 SIGNS

This section of the Design Guidelines is intended primarily for historic areas which are commercially zoned. Generally, signs should be compatible with the character of the neighborhood and blend with the character of the structures on or near which they are placed. In evaluating permit applications for signs, the following guidelines will be used:

- Signs should not conceal architectural detail, clutter the building's image, or distract from the unity of the façade, but rather should compliment the overall design.
- Sign materials should compliment the materials of the related building and/or the adjacent buildings. Surface design elements should not detract from or conflict with the related structure's age and design.
- Panel and hanging signs should have a molding applied around the edges, which will help resist deterioration and fading of the sign.
- No façade should be damaged in the application of signs. On masonry buildings, fasteners must be used only in mortar, not in the masonry itself.
- Internally illuminated cabinet signs are discouraged, as are neon "Open" signs, and flashing or blinking lights will not be approved.
- Building directories are encouraged for multi-tenanted buildings, rather than individual signs for each business.

Chestertown has a separate sign ordinance, with requirements that vary by zoning district. These are available on the Town Office, and all applications must also meet these requirements.