

New Construction



St. Joseph Landmark Commission

A well-designed new building, structure, or addition can be an attractive aspect of an historic district and signal economic health and confidence in the area's future. New construction affords the opportunity to eliminate vacant lots and missing gaps in the urban fabric, thus reestablishing the streetscape and contributing to a community's sense of wholeness. New construction also provides an opportunity to participate in the architectural evolution of a community. By reflecting the period in which it is built, a new building or addition becomes part of a continuum of building design, style, and technology that demonstrates the ongoing growth of the City and its historic districts.

In evaluating new construction, the Landmark Commission shall take into account the impact of such construction on the character of the immediate area and of the overall historic district. The purpose of the new construction guidelines is not to prevent change and "freeze" buildings in time. Rather, it is to guide and manage change in a sensitive manner to protect the distinguishing characteristics that give the historic district its character. Some of the elements that impact the character of a historic district include: placement/orientation of structures, building scale/height and massing, texture, form and rhythm, materials, and details. Specific guidelines have been established for each design element.

Due to the importance and complexity of most new construction projects, consultation with the Landmark Commission early in the process is encouraged. A pre-application review of contemplated new construction projects by the Landmark Commission may be required. See page 6 for further information on the pre-application review process.



Construction progresses on a new Victorian Revival mansion at 520 S. 11th Street, Museum Hill Historic District.



The completed Victorian Revival mansion built at 520 S. 11th Street, Museum Hill Historic District, rises majestically from its corner lot and pays homage to the neighborhood's high style Victorian heritage.



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Placement/Orientation of Structures



Mount Mora Cemetery's "Monument Row" is achieved through the consistent placement and orientation of its mausoleums.

The way buildings are situated on their lots plays an important role in helping to define the character of a streetscape and district. Consistency in placement can serve as a unifying element of the streetscape that helps to visually tie together over a one hundred and fifty years of architecture. In St. Joseph's residential historic districts, building setbacks vary from block to block. However, there is generally consistency within a given block. Exceptions include properties that may be the oldest surviving structures in a given area that were constructed prior to peak construction periods or before the platting of building lots in the area. Properties that were constructed after 1950 that followed a more suburban

placement on the lot and tended to ignore older, established building traditions may also be an exception to the pattern of development that characterizes historic neighborhoods.

With the exception of some of the larger houses and mansions in the Hall Street Historic District that have generous front yard setbacks and large lots, most residential properties in the City's historic districts sit on compact urban lots and are sited relatively close to the street with small front yard areas. Side yards are typically narrow on interior lots and somewhat larger on corner lots. Thus, residential properties often sit relatively close together. Often there is pressure to "suburbanize" the City's densely built urban core by demolishing adjacent properties to provide larger lots. Such trends erode the richness of this urban character and should be avoided.

Most residential buildings have their front door facing the street. Sidewalks lead from the public sidewalk directly to the front door. Porches are a predominate feature and often extend forward of the main building footprint.

In the City's commercial core and small neighborhood business districts, buildings were traditionally built immediately adjacent to the public sidewalk with little or no front yard setbacks. The uniform placement of buildings creates a definable building edge at the street. Entrances are necessarily located in the front of the building directly on the public sidewalk. Institutional structures, such as churches, the county courthouse, and city hall, often incorporate public plazas or green space at public streets which provide a break in this continuous building setback line.

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Placement/Orientation of Structures: Guidelines

1. Position the building on the lot in a manner that is consistent with other structures on the block
2. Orient the building's front entrance in a manner similar to other structures on the block. The incorporation of architectural elements such as porches and stoops will help to reinforce the building's placement on the street. Maintain a consistent orientation for garage doors in alleys.
3. Coordinate new construction placement with the City's Community Services Department to ensure consistency with setback and lot coverage requirements as contained in the St. Joseph Zoning Ordinance.
4. Maintain the pattern of separation between buildings that is found on the block.
5. Place garages, sheds, and other accessory structures in side or rear yard areas.
6. Minimize disruption to the site to avoid unnecessary destruction of unknown archaeological resources and mature vegetation.



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Consistency in the scale of buildings and individual building components (e.g., windows) creates a sense of harmony in the Wholesale Row Historic District in Downtown St. Joseph.

Building Scale/Height And Massing

The scale of a building is determined by the size of the units of construction and architectural details in relation to the size of man and also by the relationship of building mass to adjoining open space and nearby buildings and structures (i.e., proportion). A building's scale is influenced by numerous factors including the eave or cornice height of the structure, proportion of building elements, and floor height. When a structure is inordinately low or disproportionately too tall in relation to surrounding buildings, a human being experiences a level of discomfort that is indicative of a loss of sense of scale. Consistency of scale creates a feeling of harmony and comfort that is

intuitive to the human experience. Changes in the size or positioning of an architectural element such as a cornice, eave, window or door can significantly disrupt the harmony of elements on a building and adversely impact the character of the historic resource. Building façade components such as doors and windows have definable opening sizes and spacing that divide the building visually into what is commonly referred to as "bays". Massing refers to the relationship between solids and voids, as well as the differentiation of planes of the façade. The surface of a building is made up of "solids" (i.e., siding and walls) and "voids" (i.e., window and door openings). The relationship between these two areas combined with the three dimensional aspects of projecting bays and overhangs defines the mass of a building. Each building element when analyzed individually and collectively has a definable height-to-width relationship and mass that should be maintained in new construction.

Present day construction practices generally favor buildings with lower ceiling heights. Most late 19th and early 20th century buildings have ceiling heights in the 9'-14' range. Today, most modern rooms have ceiling heights of 8'. This significant design deviation results in windows that are typically shorter in new construction and an overall floor to floor height ratio that is incompatible with older construction. New construction should conform to the floor to floor height ratio that is consistent with the facades of buildings on a given street.

In the City's residential historic districts, buildings are traditionally 2 to 2-1/2 stories in height. St. Joseph's hilly topography can greatly influence perceptions of a building's height, as a one story structure located on a steep lot may appear visually to be the same height as a two story adjacent structure that is located on a downhill lot. Such considerations should be evaluated when determining the appropriateness of the new construction. In commercial areas, while two story buildings are prevalent, there exists a greater variety in height. This is achieved not only by the presence of multi-storied buildings, but by the use of varied cornice and parapet treatments, towers, cornices, and other rooftop appurtenances.

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Building Scale/Height And Massing: Guidelines

1. Maintain a scale of building element relationships (proportion) on the new building that characterizes those on historic structures on the block, street, and in the historic district as a whole.
2. Use windows and doors that are compatible in proportion, shape, location, and size with windows and doors of contributing historic buildings in the historic district.
3. Maintain the relationship of “solids” and “voids” (i.e., massing) in new construction that is found in contributing historic buildings found in the historic district.
4. Design the height of the proposed building to be compatible with the height of surrounding structures on the block and street.
5. Use rooftop appurtenances such as spires, parapet cornices, and towers, when appropriate, to articulate the roofline and provide varieties in height. Such features should be used sparingly and should be scaled to both the building and the streetscape as a whole.



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Texture

The texture of a building, structure, or site is achieved through the use and interaction of a variety of materials and shapes. Roofs, porches, bays, chimneys, decorative exterior trim and siding, and windows articulate building facades and add to the visual interest of the historic districts in the same manner as the materials and details that comprise and embellish them. Every effort should be made to create in new construction a degree of texture that is similar to that found in neighboring buildings that comprise the immediate context for new construction.

Brick, rusticated stone, slate, and metal combine with gables, bays, and a tower to create rich texture on the B.R. Vineyard mansion, 1125 Charles Street, Museum Hill Historic District.

Texture: Guidelines

1. Create in new construction a degree of texture similar to that found in historic buildings located on the street and in the historic district. Materials and building shapes are often used to create texture.
2. Use materials traditionally found in the historic district such as brick, stone, terra cotta, metal, and wood to create texture.

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Form and Rhythm

Form and rhythm in architecture are created by the interrelationship of certain building shapes and elements. Roof forms and pitches; the ratio of solids and voids in the wall plane; and the placement of windows, doors and porches on a building's façade all work together to establish a certain pattern that characterizes a building, streetscape or district. Variations or repetition of certain forms and building features in the streetscape should be carefully evaluated and considered in any new construction project.

Form and Rhythm: Guidelines

1. Design new construction that reflects the basic shapes and forms found on the block and in the historic district.
2. Employ roof forms and pitches that are traditionally found in the historic district. Roof pitches of 7/12 or greater are generally characteristic of residential properties in the historic districts. Exceptions include many of the Greek Revival and Italianate style dwellings which typically have low hipped roofs with pitches of 4/12 or less. Flat or low sloped roofs, often disguised by parapets, are commonly found in St. Joseph's downtown and neighborhood business districts.
3. Maintain percentages of window and door openings that are similar to those of neighboring historic structures. Openings which vary significantly from that which exists in the area surrounding the proposed new construction will tend to have a disruptive effect and draw undue attention to the new structure.
4. Create form and rhythm in new construction through the use of details. Elements found on neighboring historic structures such as porches, columns, bracketed cornices, towers, and corbelled chimneys when viewed collectively help to establish a level of form and rhythm that should be emulated in new construction.



The repetition of arched windows and decorative stone panels establishes architectural rhythm on the c. 1882 Sheridan-Clayton Paper Company Building (now Downtown Furniture Emporium), 302 S. 3rd Street, South Fourth Street Commercial Historic District.



These modest, turn-of-the-20th century Queen Anne cottages found on the 200 block of West Rosine Street exhibit repetition of building form with their front-facing gables and porches. Developed largely by English-born contractor Charles Nowland, these houses are in a pending National Register Historic District. (Photo courtesy of the City of St. Joseph Dept. of Planning and Community Services.)



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Brick is a common exterior sheathing material found in most of the City's historic districts as evidenced here on the 500 block of N. 5th Street, Robidoux Row Historic District. In many of the City's historic neighborhoods frame and brick houses are located within the same block.

Materials

Consistency in the use of materials plays an important role in defining St. Joseph's historic districts' sense of place. While variations in building materials do exist, the palette of materials available to builders in St. Joseph and other communities over the past two centuries remained relatively limited until the mid-20th century. This created a thread of continuity in the evolutionary cycle of building styles. This continuity is threatened today by an ever-increasing number of building products that have become available in the marketplace to mimic or replace traditional materials.

Materials should be evaluated on the basis of their overall appearance, form, texture, color, sheen and method of application. Materials which were not traditionally used in the City's historic districts should not be used extensively in new construction projects. For example, the sheathing of new buildings shall be limited to the traditional palette of materials that are found on the City's historic buildings. This includes, but may not be limited to, brick, rusticated and smooth face stone, wood, and stucco. Materials such as aluminum and vinyl siding, asbestos shingles, artificial brick and stone sheathing, and other imitation/synthetic sidings shall not be used as the principal sheathing materials on new buildings or structures. Synthetic products such as Styrofoam or fiberglass cornices, polymer resin column bases and balustrades, and vinyl-clad wooden windows may be used as long as these products collectively do not overwhelm the new construction and erode the historic character of the surrounding area. Use of modern materials in limited applications is acceptable as a means of continuing the evolution of architecture through time and remaining true to the credo that new construction shall be a "product of its time".

Materials: Guidelines

1. Keep the predominant material of the new building within the palette of materials traditionally found in the City's historic districts. These include, but are not limited to, brick, rusticated and smooth face stone, wood, and stucco.
2. Materials such as aluminum and vinyl siding, asbestos shingles, artificial brick and stone sheathing, and other imitation/synthetic sidings shall not be used as the principal sheathing materials on new buildings.
3. Limit the use of contemporary and synthetic materials. Vinyl, aluminum, exterior insulation finish systems, fiberglass, and other materials may be used for window and door units and trim, architectural ornamentation, cornice treatments, etc.
4. Use materials in traditional ways. New materials should appear as if they were applied in a traditional manner so as to convey the same visual appearance as historically used and applied building materials.

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Details

St. Joseph's 150- year architectural evolution has produced a rich and varied palette of building styles, details, architectural ornament, and construction technology. The presence of these features creates a visually delightful setting for the student and admirer of architectural history alike. New construction should continue that progression, yet work within the established framework of architectural detailing that characterizes St. Joseph's historic districts. As contemporary but compatible new design is encouraged, new construction that reflects yet reinterprets traditional building details and styles is recommended.

Details: Guidelines

1. Ensure that the architectural details of the proposed building complement those of historic structures within the historic district. Creative reinterpretation of traditional detailing and ornamentation is encouraged.
2. Avoid using architectural ornamentation and detailing that is not traditionally found in the historic district.
3. Avoid copying detailing directly from historic buildings. Such efforts provide a false sense of history as they tend to confuse the age of the "new" building. (Note: The direct copying of details from historic buildings may be permitted for new additions and accessory buildings where the intent is to create a unified complex of buildings on the site.)
4. Introduce doors and windows that are compatible with historic structures in the historic district in terms of proportion, shape, position, location, and size. Multi-light windows must have true divided lights or three dimensional permanent grilles on the interior and exterior of the glass.
5. Locate mechanical and other rooftop appurtenances such as skylights, TV antennae, and HVAC equipment on side or rear elevations that are not highly visible from the public view.
6. Ensure that all proposed exterior lighting, signage, and landscaping meets the applicable guidelines for design.



A corner turret, wraparound porch, and brick exterior are some of the architectural details that relate this new house at 520 S. 11th Street, Museum Hill Historic District, to its neighbors.