

**CITY OF OXFORD  
HISTORIC DISTRICT PRINCIPLES AND GUIDELINES**

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## GENERAL GUIDELINES

Preservation of a building or district and its historic character is based on the assumption that the retention of historic materials and features and their craftsmanship are of primary importance. Therefore, the underlying issue of replacement materials is whether or not the integrity of historic materials and craftsmanship has been lost. Structures are historic because the materials and craftsmanship reflect in their construction tangible and irreplaceable evidence of our cultural heritage. To the degree that substitute materials destroy and/or conceal the historic fabric, they will subtract from the basic integrity of historically and architecturally significant buildings.<sup>1</sup>

Prior to contemplating any changes to their properties, homeowners are urged to read these guidelines as well as the pertinent "Preservation Briefs" which are listed in the Appendix to these guidelines. The Briefs are detailed discussions on many aspects of preservation published by the Technical Preservation Services of the National Park Service. They are very helpful in answering questions a homeowner may have in making decisions such as repair vs. replacement of historical features, and the type and use of replacement materials.

Every reasonable effort shall be made to provide a compatible use for a property which requires minimal alteration of the exterior of a building, structure, or site and its environment, or to use a property for its original purpose.

The distinguishing original qualities or character of a building, structure, or site and its environment shall not be destroyed. The removal or alteration of any historic material or distinctive architectural features should be avoided.

All buildings, structures, and sites shall be recognized as products of their own time. Alterations that have no historical basis and which seek to create an earlier appearance shall be discouraged.

Changes which may have taken place in the course of time are evidence of the history and development of a building, structure, or site and its environment. These changes may have acquired significance in their own right, and this significance shall be recognized and respected.

Distinctive stylistic features shall be repaired rather than replaced, whenever possible. In the event replacement is necessary, the new material should match the material being replaced in composition, design, color, texture and other visual qualities. Repair or replacement of missing architectural features should be based on accurate duplications of features, substantiated by historic, physical or pictorial evidence rather than conjectural designs or the availability of different architectural elements from other buildings or structures.

The surface cleaning of structures shall be undertaken with the gentlest means possible. Sandblasting and other cleaning methods that will damage the historic building materials shall not be undertaken.

Every reasonable effort shall be made to protect and preserve archeological resources affected by, or adjacent to, any project.

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<sup>1</sup> Preservation Brief 8, Technical Preservation Services, National Park Service, US Department of the Interior

Contemporary design for alterations and additions to existing properties shall not be discouraged when such alterations and additions do not destroy significant historical, architectural, or cultural material, and such design is compatible with the size, scale, color, material and character of the property, neighborhood, or environment.

Whenever possible, new additions or alterations to structures shall be done in such a manner that, if such additions or alterations were to be removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the existing structure would be unimpaired.

### **EXTERIOR FEATURES IN THE LANDSCAPE**

The “look” of the Historic District is determined by a synthesis of external features including the facades of structures. Critical to this “look” are the street trees, front yard landscaping and maintenance, sidewalks, parking or the absence of parking in front yards, building style and condition, the rhythm of space between buildings, and the continuity of sheltered front porches. The development of a site includes these design elements as well as walks, walls, fences, site furniture, and lighting. The design of the yard area should incorporate those items and spatial relationships within the historic district and on the specific site itself, thus complementing and augmenting the historic fabric of the district.

#### Fences and Walls

Fences and walls define a property, provide privacy, security and screening. Fences and walls should reflect and complement the style and materials of the predominant structure on the lot and the architectural character of the street. They should not violate or obscure the architectural features of the building. A number of the residences in the Historic District have fencing or walls which relate to their individual historic heritage. These existing fence styles should be reused as appropriate in the yards of similar structures. Several of these styles are documented in the Appendix of Details.

Solid fences such as stone or brick fences along front yards and front side yards should not exceed two (2) feet in height. For residential purposes, the decorative open iron type fence found in the District should not exceed four (4) feet in height when located in a front or front side yard. The traditional wooden picket fence should be in scale with the house and yard. Stockade style fences and chain link fences detract from the historic character of the Historic District. Their use is strongly discouraged, particularly when visible from the street.

Brick, wood and welded wire fabric are appropriate materials for rear yard and rear side yard fences. Often these fences have decorative gates which contribute to the character of the Historic District. The use of chain link fences is strongly discouraged, but if used in rear yards, the green or black vinyl coated type chain link fence is recommended because it is less obtrusive. Traditionally, rear and rear side yard fences have been planted with vines, evergreen shrubs or a combination of vines and shrubs to effectively soften the harsh fence lines and provide screening and definition of yard areas. Such plantings are strongly encouraged. Appropriate plant materials are listed and described in Section 600 of the Oxford Zoning Ordinance dated 2003.

### Site Furnishings

Benches and light fixtures visible from the street should enhance the streetscape and the site on which they are located. These elements should not stand out or draw attention to themselves. Appropriate materials include wood and metal. Plastic or contemporary styled elements detract from the historic quality of the streetscape and should not be used.

Modern playground equipment not from the period of the District, swimming pools, and decks should be placed in rear yards or rear side yards and screened with vegetation or fencing.

Mechanical equipment such as heat pumps and air-conditioners should also be located in rear or rear side yards and screened with vegetation.

Satellite dishes are incongruous with the Historic District and detract from its character. These are strongly discouraged. If permitted, they should be located in the least visible location in the rear yard and fully screened from view.

### Vegetation

The streetscape of the Historic District defines the character and feel of the District and contributes to its ambience and appeal. The streetscape, with its variety of street trees, is the key element which makes the District an attractive area for people to live in or visit. These street trees are a valuable resource to Oxford and should be carefully maintained.

In areas where there are gaps in the street trees, additional ones should be planted. Before selecting a tree to plant, check the area for power lines, sewer lines or other obstructions. Consider the mature size of the tree before planting. Avoid installing tall growing trees under power lines or trees over sewer lines. Section 609 of the Oxford Zoning Ordinance of 2003 lists and describes trees which are hardy in Oxford and available in the area.

Typically, yards in the District contain a small front lawn with foundation plantings and several small trees. The back yards normally contain several large trees or a small garden area. New landscape plantings should incorporate this theme. The view of the structure from the street should not be obscured. The yard should be maintained and not become overgrown and detract from the District. Native and commonly used vegetation is encouraged. On the larger lots, there may be several larger trees also. The back yards are separated by fences with hedges or vines covering them or by hedges.

### **EXISTING STRUCTURES: REPAIRS, RENOVATIONS AND ADDITIONS**

The design guidelines do not apply to interior changes unless those changes impact the exterior also. For example, if an attic renovation includes installing a skylight, then these guidelines would apply to the skylight.

## Integrity of Materials

The most common building materials in the Historic District are wood and brick. The original building material should be retained in its original form whenever possible. If it is necessary to replace missing or deteriorated materials, it should be with products that duplicate the original materials as closely as possible in appearance, texture and color. Aluminum siding, vinyl siding, asphalt siding and artificial stone detract from the character of the District and are discouraged. Masonite siding and hardiplank do not have the appearance of clapboard or German siding and are also discouraged. The use of these non-original materials is strongly discouraged. Preservation Brief 8 listed in the Appendix to these guidelines contains interesting information on the use of aluminum and vinyl siding on historic buildings and reading this is recommended.

Cleaning masonry (brick, stone, concrete, stucco and mortar) is only recommended when it is determined that the “dirt” is truly accumulated deposits and not simply the effects of weathering. Masonry should be cleaned with the gentlest possible method such as with low pressure water and soft natural brushes. Before using chemical cleaners, test a spot to assure that the cleaner will not harm the masonry material. Sandblasting of masonry is strongly discouraged because it is extremely detrimental to the masonry. It erodes the masonry surface and accelerates the deterioration of the masonry.

When repointing old existing mortar joints or adding to existing masonry, duplicate the old/existing mortar in composition, color and texture. Use only Type N or Type O mortar. Type S and Type M should not be used because they will promote deterioration of the masonry. The North Carolina Division of Archives and History will provide technical assistance in this area upon request.

Paint and Exterior Color - Appropriate choice and use of color can highlight the architectural details and features of historic district homes and buildings. Property owners should select colors appropriate to the structure’s architectural style and era. Many publications are available which recommend historically appropriate paint choices. Some owners may wish to recreate the structure’s original color(s) with the assistance of restoration experts who can analyze colors through paint scrapings. Paint protects wood and metals from the elements.

Roofing – The existing roofing material (such as, tin slate, shingles) should be retained whenever reasonable. If the exact material is not available for roof replacement, select a material which matches the existing in composition, size, color, shape and texture. Flat roofs not visible from the street do not need to be replaced with the existing materials. Details such as individualized patterns of shingles and ridge caps should be duplicated. Retain roof furnishings such as lightning rods and wind vanes. Do not alter the form of the roof. New skylights should not be the bubble type or visible from the street.

Windows – The windows on many historic structures are an important feature in defining the architectural character of the building and it is therefore important to preserve them through appropriate maintenance and repair. All original window openings shall be retained, including the sashes, glazing, sills, lintels, shutters, architraves, and hardware. If it is necessary to replace a window, such replacement shall match the original window in size, glazing, trim and exterior appearance. For energy conservation and efficiency storm windows may be added provided they

are of full-view type with painted or baked enamel finish which match the window trim. The frame shall not cover up the glazing of the window. Preservation Brief 9 listed in the Appendix contains helpful material on the repair of historic wooden windows and reading this is recommended..

New windows on additions or renovations shall match existing windows on the building. New windows shall not be added to the front of the existing building.

Doors – All original door openings shall be retained, including glazing, lintels, shutters, architraves, and hardware. If it is necessary to replace a door, such replacement shall duplicate the existing in size, glazing, trim and exterior appearance. Screen doors shall be wooden, painted to match the door trim and of a style to complement the building architecture. Storm doors may be added provided they are of full-view type with painted or baked enamel finish which match the door trim.

Shutters - Replacement shutters shall be the same style, size and material, with the same visual mounting condition and hardware.

Awnings on structures built before 1940 should be canvas, vinyl-coated canvas or acrylic. Awnings should not be installed on buildings where there are shutters or evidence of shutters. The color of an awning should complement the color and decorative scheme of the building. Common historic awnings colors are blues, reds, browns, greens, and tans. A wide variety of solid and striped colors are available today. Preservation Brief 44 contains helpful information on the appropriate choice of awning.

Porches - Front porches are a unifying and character determining element of Oxford's Historic District and should be retained in their original form. Front porches should not be enclosed. When maintained and furnished with period furniture, they create an ambiance beneficial to the District. The original style of the steps, flooring, rails, columns, roofs, trim and balusters should be retained. If replacement is necessary, these architectural features should be duplicated.

Changes to provide access for the handicapped may be necessary in the Historic District. Whenever possible, these modifications should be made on the rear or side façade (not the front façade) in the least intrusive manner possible. The addition should not harm the structure and be reversible. It shall be removed within sixty (60) days after special access is no longer needed. The style and detailing of the handicapped access should not detract from the structure or obscure character defining features of the façade. Whenever possible, the installation of handicapped access visible from the street should be easily reversible to the original condition.

## **GARAGES AND ANCILLARY STRUCTURES**

The preservation of early garages and ancillary structures requires regular maintenance and repair of the various building elements and materials as per these guidelines. If deterioration or damage is severe, the construction of a new garage or ancillary structure may be warranted. The proposed design should be reviewed according to the guidelines for New Construction and particular attention should be given to the compatibility of the new design with the principal

structure in terms of roof form and cladding materials. Every effort should be made to retain and preserve garages and outbuildings that contribute to the overall historic character of a district property including their functional and decorative features and details.

If needed, prefabricated, utilitarian storage sheds may be considered for the rear yard locations that are not visible from the street.

### **ADDITIONS AND OUTBUILDINGS**

Some of the homes in the Historic District have additions which are successful in terms of the historic context. These examples may serve as a guide in planning new additions. Additions should not violate the front façade and front porch. They should be subordinate to and compatible with the original structure. The same siding and roofing material should be used. The windows should match the existing windows. The form, size and style of the addition should be compatible with the existing building. Skylights should not be visible from the street. Roof lines should complement the existing structure. On sunroom additions visible from a street, use smaller panes of glass rather than large sheets of plate glass or sliding glass doors. Coordinate the window style to those in the house. Use the same materials, finishes and colors as on the existing structure. Consider exterior changes on the site including the view from the street, parking, tree location, drainage and landscaping when planning an addition.

Outbuildings should use the same materials, including siding, trim, roof and windows, as the main structure. The style of the outbuilding should complement the main structure. Do not impose a style different from the predominant house. The form of the outbuilding should complement and be subordinate to the main structure.

### **NEW CONSTRUCTION**

New construction should be compatible with and complement the existing architectural character of the street on which it is to be built. The existing streetscape should guide the design of the proposed structure. New construction should blend with the streetscape through the incorporation of the architectural features compatible with surrounding properties. Those features include building materials, fenestration, roof design and pitch and placement on the lot. On streets with structures which detract from the character of the District (streets with brick ranches), the design should reflect those elements of the more historic structures nearby. New construction should include the covered porch across the structure's front which is the dominant unifying streetscape element in the District. The porch should be deep enough for actual use.

Attached garages facing the street are not compatible and detract from the character of the District and should not be permitted. Garages should be detached and in the back yard or not visible from the street.

New structures should have the same street setback and side setback as structures on the same street. Structures should be located parallel to and facing the street. Lot coverage should be consistent with existing lot coverage on the same street.

New structures should occupy a similar volume and reflect the form of existing neighboring buildings. For example, on a street with one-story bungalows, new building should also be one-story with a gentle sloping roof and covered front porch rather than two-story with a steep pitch roof.

The slope of the roof, number and position of gables, and use of dormers, should be compatible with buildings in the area and reflect their form.

Buildings in the District display more ornamentation than most contemporary architecture. This ornamentation softens the appearance and contributes to the human scale. New buildings should not have a blank façade and should include ornamentation to articulate existing design elements in the district.

Windows should be a similar size, similar location and similar spacing to existing buildings on the street. Large unbroken expanses such as sliding glass doors and picture windows should not be used.

New structures should be constructed of materials commonly found in the District with similar color and scale properties. Materials should be used in traditional methods. Siding materials should be used for siding and roofing materials for roofs. Concrete block should not be used as a building siding material visible from the street.

The site should be landscaped to complement and enhance the streetscape. Street trees should be retained. Foundation plantings should be provided. Parking should be in the rear or side yard. Contemporary decks should be in the rear yards. Landscaping should be used to unify the newly developed site with the rest of the District.

## **STOREFRONTS AND SIGNAGE**

A variety of storefronts representing different eras add interest to historic downtown Oxford. For most historic commercial buildings, the storefront is the most prominent architectural feature. A change in building materials below a mid-cornice also differentiates the storefront from the rest of the street façade. Over the years, storefronts have often been altered to reflect a more up-to-date image. If previous alterations conceal original decorative work and other architectural features, the owner may consider rehabilitation to reveal, conserve and protect those features.

The maintenance and repair of storefronts is similar to that for any other structure in the historic district. Given the visual prominence of the storefront, every effort should be made to retain and preserve original storefronts using acceptable preservation methods. It is important to match original materials in dimension, pattern, scale, detail and color. The removal of a historic storefront significantly diminishes the architectural character of a commercial building as does the replacement of original materials and features with incompatible, modern materials.

Every effort should be made to retain and preserve storefronts that contribute to the overall historic character and form of an historic district commercial building, including their functional and decorative features and details.

Any portion of a storefront that is damaged or deteriorated beyond repair should be replaced, matching the original in design, material, dimension, detail, texture and color. Consider substituting compatible materials for the original only if it is not technically feasible to replace in kind.

Install fabric awnings over storefronts, if desired and historically appropriate, so that historic features of the building are not damaged or obscured.

Historic signage that is incorporated into the architectural detail of commercial buildings contributes to their historic character of the building and warrants preservation. Signage is often incorporated into the display windows or mid-cornices of historic storefronts or was added as a suspended signboard.

New signage within the commercial area of the historic district should be consistent with traditional locations for signage and should be designed and located so it does not conceal historic architectural features. It is always important to consider the design of the sign, including materials, legibility of the typeface, color, overall size, and means of support or attachment. Screening or stenciling signage onto awnings or storefront, transom or doorway can often provide effective and attractive signage. Billboards, plastic signs, internally lighted signs, and flashing signs are not congruent with the character of an historic district.

## **DEMOLITION**

### Denial of Authorization to Demolish

An application for a Certificate of Appropriateness authorizing the demolition or the destruction of a building, a site, or a structure determined by the State Historic Preservation Officer to have statewide significance as defined in the criteria of the National Register of Historic Places, may be denied except when the Commission finds that the owner would suffer extreme hardship or be permanently deprived of all beneficial use of or return from the property by virtue of the denial.

The Board of Commissioners may enact an ordinance to prevent the demolition by neglect of any designated landmark or any building or structure within an established historic district. Such ordinance shall provide appropriate safeguards to protect property owners from undue economic hardship.

### Delay of Demolition

An application for a Certificate of Appropriateness authorizing the demolition or the destruction of a designated landmark, building, site, or structure in the historic district may be delayed for up to 365 days from the date of approval. The intent of the delay is to provide sufficient time to exhaust all possibilities of saving the building or structure. During the delay, the Commission should actively seek to negotiate with the owner or other interested parties to find a means of preserving the building, structure or site by exploring viable re-use strategies, finding a willing purchaser, or as a less preferable option, relocating the structure to an alternative site rather than destroy it. The Commission should also make it widely known that a building is threatened with demolition and that alternatives are sought.

## Demolition Guidelines

If all alternatives have been exhausted, these guidelines should be followed:

- Make a permanent record of a significant structure before demolition. The record should consist of black-and-white photographs and other documents, such as drawings, that describe the architectural character and the special features of the building. The Commission determines on a case -by-case basis the precise documentation of a specific building that is required and the person who is responsible for producing that documentation. The documentation must be submitted for review by the Commission before demolition. The record is retained by the City of Oxford Planning Board , The Granville County Historical Society Museum and the North Carolina Room of the Richard H. Thornton Library.
- Work with the Commission to identify salvageable materials and potential buyers or recipients of salvaged materials. The removal of all salvageable building materials before demolition is encouraged, and may be required depending on the significance of the building.
- Clear the structure quickly and thoroughly.
- Submit a site plan illustrating proposed landscaping and any other site development to be completed after demolition.
- Plant the site or appropriately maintain it until it is reused. If the site is to remain vacant for over one year, it should be improved to reflect an appearance consistent with other open areas in the district.

## **RELOCATION**

Historic structures should be moved only as the last alternative. A structure should be moved as a single intact unit. If that is not possible, then the structure should be partially disassembled for relocation. Complete disassembly is strongly discouraged because it results in a substantial loss of building material.

Site selection: The proposed site should be in the Historic District. It should approximate the dimensions and topography of the original site. The neighboring structures should be of a harmonious architectural style and a similar form and size to the structure being relocated.

Siting: The structure should be sited on the lot with a compatible and similar orientation to the street and location on the lot to the neighboring structures. The lot should be landscaped to make the structure appear original to the lot and be harmonious with neighboring properties. Street trees should be planted as needed to provide continuity with the neighborhood.