

**DESIGN GUIDELINES**  
for implementing  
**Madison's Historic Preservation Ordinance**

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prepared by  
**The Mayor's Committee on Design Guidelines**  
for the **Historic Preservation Ordinance**

## Summary

The Madison Civic Commercial Historic District represents part of the history of the community. It shows the development of a local retail center between the 1870s and World War II in buildings that continue to be a vital part of the economic and social life of Madison.

Respect for this history - in all its diversity - is a key goal of the Design Guidelines of the Historic Preservation Ordinance.

Stylistic differences among buildings downtown are worth preserving. There is no one "style" to which all buildings in the downtown ever did, or ever should, conform. The buildings complement each other by their common scale and materials. Good craftsmanship and a clear relationship to the street are just as important as details like brackets or transoms.

Buildings should be maintained in their own original style, repairing and replacing damaged features with original materials. The Historic Preservation Commission encourages sensitive *rehabilitation* of existing structures as a way of finding solutions to design problems which respect the architectural integrity of the entire building. Rehabilitation retains elements which enhance the architecture of a structure, while removing those - such as later false fronts and competing signs - which detract from or conceal it. It should be noted that rehabilitation is not the same as restoration, in which meticulous care is taken to return a building to the state in which it existed at a particular point in time.

The Design Guidelines are not intended to be a follow-the-numbers formula for rehabilitation of a building within the Madison Civic Commercial Historic District. They are to stimulate good design respectful of the historic buildings which give our community identity, and to reinforce that identity for the future.

## Introduction

The goals of the Borough of Madison and its Historic Preservation Commission, are to preserve and respect the small-town "downtown" environment evident in the Madison Civic Commercial Historic District. **All** exterior architectural changes on **any** building within the historic district require a Certificate of Historic Review from the Historic Preservation Commission.

Exterior changes which are encouraged in the historic district are those which retain or restore character-defining elements of the building's historic and architectural character. Changes which alter the original appearance of a building within the historic district, and/or which detract from the streetscape, are discouraged.

In general, the original design will be best achieved by maintaining, repairing, or replacing original materials in kind. However, modern materials will be considered for replacement where the appropriate functioning of the material can be documented, and its close duplication of the original material in size, shape, color, texture, and performance is demonstrated.

## General Guidelines

The following guidelines are intended to help clarify the philosophy of the Historic Preservation Commission. They are based on the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation*, the only nationally articulated standards for American historic preservation.

- Every reasonable effort shall be made to provide a compatible use for a property which requires minimal alteration of the building, structure, site, or its environment, or to use the property for its originally intended purpose (i.e. commercial, institutional, residential).
- The distinguishing original qualities or character of a building, structure, or site and its environment shall not be destroyed.
- All buildings shall be recognized as products of their own time. There is no need to falsely create an earlier historic appearance or introduce historicizing alterations which have no historical basis.
- Changes which have taken place in the course of time are evidence of the history and development of the building, and of the town. These changes may have acquired significance in their own right, and this significance shall be recognized and respected.
- The removal or alteration of any historic material or distinctive architectural features should be avoided when possible.
- Distinctive architectural features or examples of skilled craftsmanship which characterize a building shall be treated with sensitivity.
- Deteriorated architectural features shall be repaired rather than replaced wherever 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 and replacement of missing architectural features should be based on physical, pictorial, or other historic evidence, rather than conjectural designs or the availability of different architectural elements from other buildings or structures.

- Wherever possible, new additions and alterations to historic 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 original structure would be unimpaired.
- New construction within the historic district shall not be discouraged when such alterations, additions, or new buildings 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, streetscape, and environment.
- Every reasonable effort shall be made to protect and preserve archaeological resources affected by or adjacent to any project.

Beyond the general guidelines, specific recommendations follow for several individual elements commonly found on buildings within the historic district. These are guidelines, and not a substitute for thoughtful consideration of how each individual building within the historic district can best be maintained and preserved using as much of its original fabric as possible while continuing to serve the needs of the twenty-first century.

### **Exterior Walls**

The original exterior walls and siding material should be retained and repaired, rather than replaced, whenever possible.

When an exterior wall is too deteriorated to repair, replace it with a material similar to the original and match the new material with the old in size, shape, texture, and integral color.

Do not resurface original materials with inappropriate new materials such as artificial stone, artificial brick veneer, asphalt shingles, or metal.

The use of modern replacement siding materials, such as vinyl, will be considered by the Historic Preservation Commission only when it can be demonstrated that the size, texture, and color of the siding is appropriate, and that its installation will be carried out without removing or damaging other elements of the wall, such as window and door frames, cornices, and other decorative details.

Good building practice requires that repairs to the walls, roofs, and gutters be complete before hiding the walls with artificial siding.

The Commission may require a sample of the artificial siding

for review before rendering a decision on its use.

Maintain the original color and texture of masonry walls. Stucco and paint should not be removed from historically stuccoed or painted masonry walls. Likewise, paint or stucco should not be applied to historically unstuccoed or unpainted masonry walls.

Clean masonry walls only when necessary to halt deterioration or remove heavy soiling, using the gentlest method possible. Sandblasting should not be used. Caustic solutions and high-pressure water blasting may be used only with extreme care, under the supervision of a qualified contractor.

Repoint masonry walls when there is evidence of disintegrating mortar, cracks in mortar joints, loose bricks, or moisture retention in walls. New mortar should duplicate the old in composition, bonding strength, color, texture, and profile. Care should be taken in removing old mortar to avoid damage to the original masonry material, and prevent widening the joint by destruction of the edges of the masonry material.

When removing deteriorated paint from wood siding, the recommended methods are hand scraping, hand sanding, and heat-guns. Avoid destructive removal such as sandblasting and water blasting. Use extreme caution with power sanders to avoid abrasive damage to old woodwork and trim. Avoid power sanding without filters to minimize the release of lead paint particulate into the atmosphere.

All buildings constructed and painted before 1970 are likely to have lead paint. If complete removal of all paint is required as part of a surface preparation job before repainting, make sure proper precautions are taken to remove and dispose of lead paint chips.

## Color

While there is room for individual expression and taste in the use of colors in the historic district, color is an important part of the perception of buildings and of the entire district. Historically, exterior paint colors varied from decade to decade, mirroring popular taste. In the late nineteenth century, when Madison's Civic Commercial Historic District came into being, the popular palette was predominantly dark-toned earth colors, and high contrast between different elements of a building was favored. Later, early twentieth century buildings in the Classical Revival styles would typically have been painted lighter colors, with little if any color distinction between different parts of a building.

The colors and color placement typical of the last quarter of the nineteenth century have been adopted for many of the buildings in Madison's downtown since the 1980s, with attractive results. The Madison Historic Preservation Commission recommends that existing and new construction within the historic district follow this precedent, but when diversions from this can be shown to be appropriate to the building and its setting, other colors will certainly be considered.

In a typical building, there are three main areas, each of which would have been painted a

different color in the historic period. The body of the building, comprising the walls, is the largest surface area, and should be a neutral or earth-toned color.

Recommended choices include tans, warm-hued beiges, tans, brown, straw-yellows, gray-greens and olive greens, and the like. White is rarely appropriate as the dominant color on a late 19th century building. Early twentieth century Classical Revival style buildings may use white and off-whites, or other light colors, such as pale yellow or pale gray, if they are to be restored to their original appearance.

Trim, including cornices, window or door frames, cornerboards, and other decorative elements, may be lighter or darker shades of the body color, or may be a contrasting color. The window sash and door are areas of accent color, or may be painted the same color as the other trim, for a simple two-color paint scheme.

Recommended trim colors include the body colors listed above, as well as deeper hues of browns, deep golden-yellows, greens, deep red-brown and burgundy-reds, and the like. Light-colored Classical Revival style buildings should have white or off-white trim.

Window sash in the nineteenth century were the darkest-colored part of a building. Black, deep greens, dark burgundy reds and terra-cottas or browns are all historically appropriate color choices for window sash. Storm windows, whether wooden, metal, or vinyl, should also use a dark color, preferably the same color as the main window sash.

Classical Revival style buildings and others from the post-World War I era may have originally used white window sash. Owners of these buildings may choose to use either white, off-white, or a darker hue harmonious with the design intent of the historic district.

In all cases, colors should be selected for their appropriateness to the architectural style of the building, and their compatibility with the appearance of the streetscape. Variation from the recommended colors may be accepted by the Historic Preservation Commission upon examination of a sketch and color samples indicating hue and placement on a building.

Soft, pastel colors are out of character for the historic district, and should be avoided. Extra-bright "neon" colors are also inappropriate as a color choice in the district.

"Picking out" different elements of cornices, window lintels, porches, or other decorative areas, with many different colors is **not** historically correct, and should be avoided. Property owners are encouraged to use trim colors appropriately to highlight the architectural features of their building.

Color not applied with paint, but integral to masonry, roofing, and other materials, should also stay within the earth-toned palette. Exterior metalwork, including light standards, sign brackets, and other street furniture, should not be bright metal, but painted or integrally colored to a non-reflective surface, or black or dark green.

Color for an individual building must be considered in relationship to any surrounding buildings, particularly those with integral color from masonry materials. Color choices should be made with an view toward the appearance of the entire streetscape, and not just the individual building.

## **Windows and Doors**

The number, size, and location of existing window and door openings should be retained. Do not "block in" windows or doors to reduce the size of the opening or to fit stock window or door sizes. Avoid adding new window or door openings on primary elevations.

Retain and repair window frames, sash, decorative glass, transoms, sills, moldings, and original exterior shutters and their hardware wherever possible. If replacement of any window is necessary due to deterioration, the replacement should duplicate the material and design of the original window.

Retain and repair doors, door frames, transoms, side lights, entablatures, and hardware wherever possible. If replacement of any door is necessary due to deterioration, the replacement should duplicate the material and design of the original.

Secondary doors, leading to upper floors or to rear service areas should also be designed to complement the appearance of the entire building.

Historic photographs of an individual building may be used to document early or original windows and doors, and may be used as a model for recreating appropriate windows and doors.

If duplication of the original window, window part, door, or door surround element is not technically or economically feasible, a simplified version of the original may be acceptable as long as it has the same size and proportion.

Appropriate new materials, such as anodized metal frames in place of bronze, may be approved subject to review of manufacturer's information and/or an actual sample of the substitute material by the Historic Preservation Commission.

Avoid using modern doors which are inappropriate in style and design to the original design of the building.

Modern window types which are inappropriate include large picture windows, casements, and bow windows. Vinyl replacement thermopane windows are usually visually inappropriate, particularly when fitted with "snap-in" muntins.

Inappropriate modern window features such as plastic or metal awnings, and non-operable synthetic shutters and blinds distract from the historic appearance of a building and should not be used.

Storm windows may be of any material, provided they follow the contour and sash configuration of the original window. Storm windows should be painted or be installed factory-colored to match the window sash, and harmonize with any integral color on the building. Interior storm windows may be used where a decorative exterior window would be covered or harmed by installation of an exterior storm window.

## Storefronts

Traditional storefronts in the Madison Civic Commercial Historic District were composed of a single-story shopfront, two or three upper stories, and a decorative top, cornice, or parapet. Each storefront and entry was originally designed as part of the entire building, and may repeat design elements or materials found elsewhere on the facade. Few of the historic district's original storefronts have survived intact, but efforts should be made to maintain high-quality storefront and entry designs of all historical periods, and to restore the original design unity of storefront and upper floors when renovations are considered.

Storefront design should relate to the composition, material, style and detailing of the upper floors. Storefronts should be designed to fit within the original opening, and not made to extend beyond it.

Retain the original features of storefronts wherever possible. These include doors, early or original display windows, transoms, entablatures, pilasters, bulkheads or kickplates, and hardware. Historically, commercial buildings had large windows, to pass light into the rear of stores, and to put the merchandise on full view. The transom, located above the door and display windows, was particularly common on traditional storefronts, and was often removed in twentieth century renovations.

Maintain the size, shape, and location of door openings in a storefront, and maintain the relationship of window size, door size, and wall area. Historically, doorways were slightly recessed into the building, providing an inviting, protected entry and focusing attention on the wares in the large display windows.

Historically, storefront doors were usually wooden, with large vertically-oriented windows in them. If modern steel or aluminum frame doors are to be used on a storefront, use a dark anodized metal finish rather than the raw metal. Avoid overdecorating the door with too many panels, etched glass designs, and arched or mullioned windows.

Recreation of original storefronts is encouraged, based upon photographic or other pictorial documentation for that particular building. Salvaged historic materials from some other building are not appropriate, unless documentation can be provided to prove the use of identical elements on the subject building.

Generic "historic" designs, without specific documentation to the building or the community are not acceptable. Do not introduce modern versions of historic features, such as mansard roof overhangs, wood shakes, coach lanterns, or "lumberyard



colonial" detailing such as balustrades or pediments.

If deterioration makes it necessary to replace part or all of a storefront, the replacement should be similar in material and design to the original. New storefront materials should consider and respect the materials and design of adjacent storefronts. Junctures between storefronts of varying heights, materials, and styles, should be as sensitive as possible to the overall streetscape.

Do not alter storefronts so they appear residential in character rather than commercial.

## **Roofs and Cornices**

Roofs are an important part of identifying a building's historic character. Most of the structures built as commercial buildings in Madison since the last quarter of the nineteenth century have flat or low-pitched roofs hidden behind parapets and cornices. As a result, other roof types - especially gables and mansards - are distinctive within the district, and help identify earlier surviving structures or structures built for non-commercial use.

A sound roof is essential to maintaining the structural integrity of the entire structure. Frequent inspection of roofs, appropriate roof repair and maintenance is encouraged by the Historic Preservation Commission as a significant aid to preservation of the building stock in the historic district.

The original shape, pitch and materials of a roof should be retained whenever possible.

The functional and decorative features of the roof, such as eaves, cornices, chimneys, dormers, cupolas, gutters, and flashing should be preserved. If a particular feature is too deteriorated to repair, the replacement should match the original in material, size, shape, texture, and color as near as practicable.

Recreated versions of original historic features in modern materials, such as the use of fiberglass for original pressed metal cornices, may be approved subject to review of a sample of the substitute material by the Historic Preservation Commission.

Spot roof repairs should use materials compatible with those found on the existing roof. When entirely re-roofing, new materials may be used, provided their color, texture, and installation are compatible with the design of the entire building. Appropriate new technologies, such as synthetic slates in place of authentic slate, may be approved subject to review of a sample of the substitute material by the Historic Preservation Commission.

Additions to roofs such as dormers, skylights, solar collectors, mechanical and service equipment should be placed so they are not visible from the public right-of-way. Roof additions should not damage or obscure the historic character of the roof or of the entire building.

## **New Construction**

The design of any new structure in the historic district is important because it must be compatible with existing structure and must harmonize with the visual characteristics of the streetscape.

The following guidelines for new construction cover additions to existing buildings as well as entirely new "infill" structures within the district. These guidelines are not intended to dictate particular architectural styles or features. They are intended to identify a range of design options which will encourage new development that is harmonious with the architectural character of the district. The important elements to consider in new construction are scale, proportion, design quality and relationship to neighboring buildings.

Building details or decorations which are based upon historic styles are not as important as creating an architectural composition which is harmonious with the existing structures in the historic district.

New construction is reviewed in terms of the following: siting, size and scale, rhythm and directional emphasis, materials and building elements.

### **Siting**

The setback and orientation of a new building within the historic district should align with neighboring historic buildings. In Madison's Civic Commercial Historic District, siting is different in the "civic" and "commercial" areas. The commercial buildings are located right on the sidewalk, with a facade the full width of the lot and oriented to the street. In the civic area of the historic district, south of the railroad, institutional buildings are set within large lots, with generous setbacks.

The municipal zoning ordinances specify the setback and side yard distances, and other siting requirements for properties within the historic district.

### **Size and Scale**

New construction should conform to the massing, proportions, volume, scale, and height of neighboring buildings.

The municipal zoning ordinances specify maximum height and area coverage of buildings in the historic district.

### **Rhythm and Directional Emphasis**

New construction should be compatible with the rhythm of neighboring buildings along the street. Rhythm is defined by the relationship of buildings to open space along the street, the relationship of solids to voids on building facades, and the relationship of entrances to the street.

Directional emphasis - whether vertical or horizontal in character - of new construction should relate to that of neighboring buildings. Division of a facade into horizontal areas (such as a storefront on the first floor and a cornice on top) within a vertically oriented building is common in commercial buildings in the historic district. Successful infill buildings will take their cues from this traditional facade arrangement and maintain the proportions found in the existing buildings.

### **Materials**

The exterior materials used in new construction should be compatible with historically appropriate materials of neighboring buildings or the district as a whole.

### **Building Elements**

The various individual elements of a building - roof, windows, doors, porches, trim, and cornice, should be carefully integrated

into the overall design of new construction. These elements should complement those on neighboring structures.

Window and door proportion, size, design, and pattern of spacing between openings should be compatible with historic treatments of windows and doors in this district.

### **Street Furniture**

Street furniture means the light standards, trash cans, benches, and planters which occupy downtown streets and sidewalks. For many items of street furniture, there are no historical precedents. Like the buildings themselves, street furniture should be harmonious with its surroundings, and avoid applied, fussy historicizing details. Good design and quality materials, in the recommended color palette, should guide the selection of these elements.

Every effort should be made to have street furniture of a consistent design throughout the historic district. The same design may also be used outside the historic district if desired.

### **Landscaping**

Landscaping is limited in the commercial zone of the historic district, where buildings typically occupy most of the lot. "Landscaping" with potted plants outside the storefront is appropriate only as a temporary, seasonal, and easily removable element. Window boxes may be installed at upper floor windows where the window boxes are removable for the winter months. Window boxes cannot damage historic walls or window sills by their attachments or through contact with the building.

Landscaping in the civic zone of the historic district may be more expansive. Open grass lawns form the defining characteristic, and should be maintained. Street trees characterize

this portion of the historic district, and should be maintained. Individual specimen trees are appropriate within the lawn areas of the historic district.

Large areas of ground cover, exposed large-nugget mulch, pebble or gravel lawns, and low spreading evergreens are not historic landscape materials, and should be avoided within all areas of the historic district.

## **Fences**

Fences in urban areas like Madison's Civic Commercial Historic District are typically used for security or concealment. Therefore, depending on the primary use of the fence the material may vary. Security fencing is more appropriate in metal. Fencing recreating historically appropriate designs is available from contemporary manufacturers. Where there is photographic documentation of original or early fences, the historic example should be replicated.

Fencing is required for concealment, especially around service areas and garbage containers. For many of these uses, there is no appropriate historic model. However, wooden or synthetic wood-looking solid enclosures are acceptable. Such fencing should be firmly anchored, of a height adequate to completely screen the nuisance, and without color, texture, or design which draws attention to itself. In all necessary fencing, simpler designs are more appropriate than elaborate ones.

Chain link and other modern security fencing may not be installed unless screened by a hedge of equal or greater height to the fence. Rustic wooden fences, "paddock" style rail fences, and temporary wooden barriers used as permanent fencing are not appropriate in the historic district.

## **Walkways**

Historic walkway materials such as bluestone or slate should be retained wherever possible. New walkways should be concrete, in a neutral color and simple, utilitarian grid form. Asphalt walkways are not appropriate. Brick was not historically used as a walkway material in Madison, and its associations with successful restorations in the southern United States do not make its use appropriate here. Concrete pavers imitating brick in size and color are not appropriate where bricks themselves are not appropriate.

Concrete "pavers" and plain concrete are encouraged. Concrete colored and worked to imitate natural stone, such as slate or bluestone, may be permitted for walkways subject to review of a full-size mock-up of the material, color, and pattern by the Historic Preservation Commission.

## **Signs**

Appropriately designed signs enhance the building facade and contribute to the visual harmony of the overall streetscape. The size, type, and placement of signs are governed by

the Madison Sign Ordinance, part of the Borough Land Development Ordinance, section 195-25L. In the historic district, signs are also subject to review and approval by the Historic Preservation Commission. The following guidelines complement and complete the existing sign ordinance relative to commercial buildings in the historic district.

Every historic building constructed for commercial use was designed to include a location for a sign. This historic location should be identified and considered as a first choice for the location of modern signs.

The size, shape, materials, color, and placement of signs should complement the composition and design of the building and neighboring buildings. Signs should not conceal important architectural detail, overpower or clutter the facade, or otherwise detract from the historic character of the building.

Historically appropriate types of signs recommended for use in the historic district include:

**Flat signs:** Signboards were usually placed in a specifically designed spot above the transom, between storefront and first floor. As a general rule, 60% of the signboard should be devoted to lettering. The signboard itself should not exceed two feet in height. Signboards can be made of wood, with raised, carved, or painted letters. Signboards can also be created from painted or enameled metal, if appropriate to the style and design of the building. The addition of a molding around the edges of the sign will enhance its appearance, and should be compatible in style and materials with the sign itself.

**Window signs:** Common in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, window signs were painted directly on the inside face of the glass display windows. Typically, these signs were gold-leafed, although other paints and colors were used. Positioned at eye level, this type of sign is typically limited to letters and numbers. Such a sign is part of the calculation of total sign area for a building, but it only includes the actual area of the glass covered with letters or numbers.

**Hanging signs:** Signs hanging perpendicular to the facade have been used since the first commercial buildings were constructed in early America. Hanging signs are particularly suitable for displaying symbols and logos, and can be designed in many shapes and hung with attractive hardware. Hanging signs should not interfere with the rhythm of windows across the upper floors of a building, and they should not obstruct the view of important elements of a historic building or of its neighbors. Both sides of the sign are included in the calculation of signage size for a building. Please note that because a hanging sign extends into the public right-of-way, special consideration must be given to its placement to avoid physical and visual

obstructions or potential pedestrian hazards.

Existing signs from all periods of the past, when made of quality materials and created with a distinctive and recognizable design, should be preserved in place where possible. New signs are not required to emulate any one period or style in their design, but should incorporate the same principals of good-quality design and materials to communicate a contemporary message.

### **Awnings**

Awnings are a traditional way to shield windows from bright sun, or provide shelter over an entry. Awnings should fit the space they are designed for, and should not conceal important historic detailing. Attachment of awning hardware should not damage important historic elements of a building. Awning color and material should be complementary to the historic building and its streetscape setting. Lettering or logos placed on the awning constitute signage, and are considered in the calculation of the maximum allowable signage area for a business establishment. Proper maintenance, and replacement of tattered, worn, and faded awnings is important in maintaining the character of the historic district.

### **Utilities**

Any utility, including public or private telecommunications companies, cable companies, electrical or gas utility, must receive a Certificate of Historic Review from the Historic Preservation Commission for any and all publicly visible structures, objects, or accessories in the historic district. The general principals of the design guidelines will be applied to any and all telephone booths, light poles, switching boxes, etc. Although generally without historic precedent, modern utility items should be compatible and visually non-competitive with the historic buildings and the overall setting of the historic district.

### **For more information**

There are numerous books, magazines, and pamphlets available through local libraries and the Madison Historic Preservation Commission, which can offer more information on various aspects of building maintenance and restoration. Some of the most readily available books are noted here.

### **For an overall guide to rehabilitation:**

National Park Service. *Respectful Rehabilitation: Answers to Your Questions about Old Buildings*. The Preservation Press, Washington, D.C. 1982.

### **Information about masonry repairs and cleaning:**

London, Mark. *Masonry: How to Care for Old and Historic Brick and Stone*. The Preservation Press, Washington, D.C., 1988.

**Information about historic exterior colors:**

Moss, Roger. *A Century of Color*. The Athenaeum of Philadelphia, 1977.

Moss, Roger. *Victorian Exterior Decoration*. The Athenaeum of Philadelphia, 1987.

**Information about window types, common problems, and restoration solutions:**

New York Landmarks Conservancy. *Repairing Old and Historic Windows*. The Preservation Press, Washington, D.C. 1992.

**Information about storefronts:**

Longstreth, Richard. *The Buildings of Main Street: A Guide to American Commercial Architecture*. The Preservation Press, Washington, D.C., 1987.

**In addition:**

The National Park Service has published a series of "Preservation Briefs" annually since 1975, covering the restoration, rehabilitation, and maintenance of historic buildings. They cover masonry cleaning and repointing; identifying and correcting moisture problems; preservation of architectural terra-cotta and glazed tile; the relative merits of wood siding versus synthetic siding, etc. For a complete list of titles, and to order the pamphlets for a minimum charge, contact the New Jersey Historic Preservation Office in Trenton (phone 609.292.2023).