



# City of Easton, Pennsylvania HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION

## GUIDELINES FOR NEW CONSTRUCTION AND ADDITIONS

This brochure, published by the City of Easton Historic District Commission, contains guidelines for new construction and additions to buildings within the Historic District. Please review this information before planning new construction or an addition to your property. Familiarity with HDC standards can help move a project quickly through the approval process, saving applicants both time and money.

The Easton Historic District has evolved over time. As the 21st century continues, the city will continue to develop, introducing new elements to the city's streetscape and skyline. This development has the potential to positively impact the Historic District's character.

New construction in historic districts poses a unique set of challenges. Because of their impact on the streetscape, new structures should take design cues from the older, historic buildings nearby. A new building's design should clearly identify it as a product of its own era. However, that design should show respect to its existing neighbors.

In conformance with *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards*, any addition to a building within a historic district should be secondary to the historic building and clearly seen as an addition. If possible, additions should be constructed so that the essential form and integrity of the historic building would be unimpaired if the addition were removed in the future. Ideally, additions should be constructed at side or rear elevations, subordinate to the historic building. In any case, additions should be constructed so that the historic

building fabric is not radically changed, obscured, damaged, or destroyed.

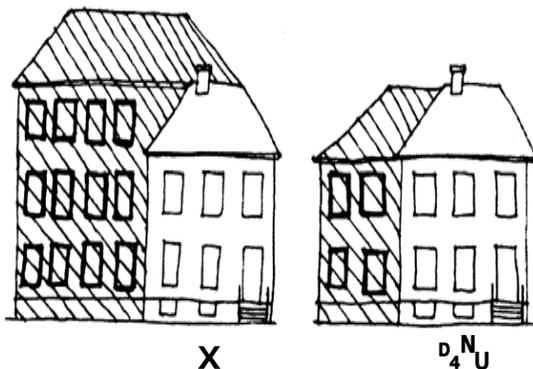


Since additions to historic buildings and new construction within a historic district can dramatically alter the appearance of the district, contemporary design must be reviewed within the context of the historic district. Although the duplication of



whole, including the location, siting, setbacks, and façade treatments.

Additions to existing buildings should be smaller than the original building with similar floor-to-floor heights, and first floor heights.

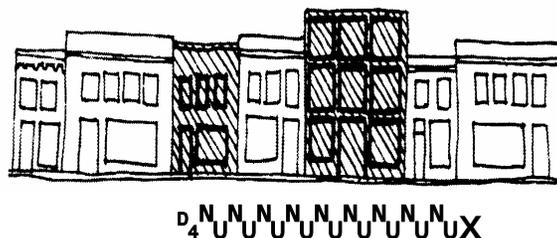


The addition to the left complements the scale, proportion, overall form and window pattern of the existing building. The addition to the right is significantly larger than the existing building, and is inappropriate.

**Proportions:** New construction should complement the dominant proportions of the buildings on the streetscape, while new additions should complement the dominant proportions of the existing building. Proposed designs should closely reflect the height and width ratios of the overall building proportions as well as that of doors, windows, porch bays, and storefronts.



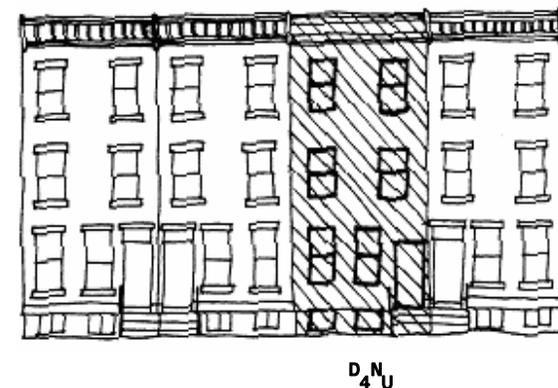
The window proportions on the third building from the left are significantly taller at the first and third floors and shorter at the second floor than those of the adjacent buildings. The proportions are not appropriate for the streetscape.



Many commercial buildings in the LHD were constructed of masonry with similar window openings at the upper floors, and large storefront windows. The third building from the right is inappropriate while the third building from the left with the punched window openings is appropriate.

**Massing:** The facades of new construction should reflect the feeling of “lightness” or “weight” of neighboring buildings. Facades with similar proportions of solids (walls or siding) to voids (storefronts, windows, and door openings), and projecting porches, bays and overhangs are appropriate. The massing of

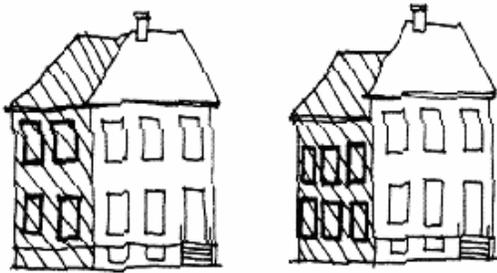
additions should be compatible with, but not necessarily match, the original building. For example, a glassed-in side porch might be a “lighter” variation of the massing of the original façade, whereas a solidly infilled side porch might not be appropriate.



Although simpler in detail, the new buildings’ rhythm and pattern of window openings are similar to the existing buildings.

**Rhythm and Patterns:** Rhythm and patterns across a façade typically include number of bays, and the location and spacing between doors and windows. Vertical considerations include floor-to-floor heights, first floor height above the ground, the vertical distance between rows of windows and windows and cornices, and cornice heights. The principal façade of new construction should reflect and maintain neighborhood and streetscape

patterns. The principal facades of an addition should reflect the rhythm and pattern of the original building. Where the proposed use for a new building prevents maintaining rhythms and patterns, the property owner is encouraged to incorporate detailing to suggest them.



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The drawing to the left where the floor-to-floor and roof heights are similar to the existing building illustrates an appropriate solution.



X

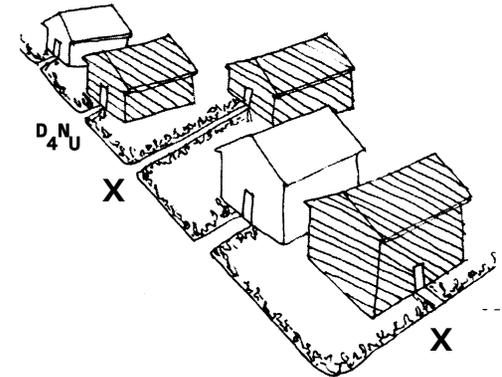
The rhythm and pattern of the windows of the new building alters the character of the streetscape and is inappropriate.

**Window and Door Openings:** The size, shape, design, proportions, and placement of storefronts, windows, and door openings should be similar to the surrounding historic buildings for new construction. For additions, the size, shape, design, proportions, and placement of windows and door openings should be similar to the existing building. Windows should be functionally similar (e.g., double-hung windows), and have similar muntin or grid patterns as surrounding historic buildings. Doors should reflect the historic proportions of windows and panels.



Many historic buildings have rich architectural details. Some of the features of this building include ornate pressed metal cornice and decorative brick window surrounds, banding corbelling and transom panels.

**Architectural Details:** New construction design should generally not copy existing structures, but should be consistent with the character and style of surrounding buildings. This includes using similar roof forms, door and window height-to-width ratios, and having the percentage of glass to wall approximate that of adjacent structures. Façade elements such as windows and lintels, entrance porches and balustrades, cornice lines, chimneys, friezes, gables, and columns and pilasters can help give new construction a historically compatible appearance. More often than not these details can be “simplified” to provide compatibility without requiring duplication of historic features.



Although the new buildings have the appropriate form, the setback of the middle building from the sidewalk is much greater than the existing buildings. Also, the entrance of the corner building is oriented towards the intersecting street.



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texture, scale, craftsmanship, and applicability to the function performed.

Materials and textures for new additions should either match or be sympathetic to those found on the original building. If using matching materials is not possible, non-obtrusive substitutions are acceptable. For example, using grey finished stucco near granite block foundations (rather than concrete blocks). Building finishes should likewise be compatible. If the materials for the addition are different, they should be subordinate to the original building. In the case of Easton, where many of the buildings are constructed of brick, brick, stone, and wood siding are appropriate wall materials for an addition. However a brick addition would not be appropriate for a wood building.

The following materials will not be recommended for approval:

- Vinyl or metal siding or capping
- Asphalt siding on wall surfaces
- Antiqued brick
- Synthetic stucco (EIFS or Exterior Insulation and Finish Systems)
- Painted or exposed concrete or concrete

block masonry

- Unpainted wood
- Ornamental pierced concrete masonry walls and screens
- Wrought iron or aluminum porch columns and balusters
- Colonial picture windows, jalousie windows, dark or tinted glass windows
- Chain link or vinyl fencing
- Carpeting for porch floors or entry steps.

### WHEN IS RECONSTRUCTION APPROPRIATE?

Reconstruction is defined as new construction that reproduces the exact form and detail of a vanished building, or part of it, to its original appearance at a particular point in time. Reconstruction may be appropriate in cases where a natural disaster or fire destroyed the original historic structure.

The HDC discourages reconstruction unless the lost building is clearly documented (including photographs, architectural drawings and other surviving

physical evidence), and the reconstruction will utilize materials, detailing and decorative features that match or closely approximate the original building.

### WHO CAN HELP ME?

If you are considering a new construction project or an addition to an existing building in the historic district, contact the HDC to review your project in its earliest stages.

The HDC has reserved 15 to 20 minutes at the end of its monthly meetings to provide consultation and advice to members of the public. Contact the Bureau of Codes and Inspections at (610) 250-6724 to confirm the date of the next HDC meeting and schedule a consultation.

### *Additional Sources of Information*

Contact the National Trust for Historic Preservation or visit online at [www.nationaltrust.org](http://www.nationaltrust.org).

Contact the US Government Bookstore or visit [www.nps.gov](http://www.nps.gov) for *Preservation Briefs*, National Park Service.

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### ***Further reading:***

*National Register Bulletin 39: Researching a Historic Property*, U.S. Department of the Interior (Washington, DC, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1994)

*Historic Building Façades: The Manual for Maintenance and Rehabilitation*, William C. Foulks (ed.) (Washington, DC, Preservation Press, 1997)

*Caring for Your Historic House*, National Park Service/Heritage Preservation Services (New York, Harry Abrams, Inc., 1998)

*The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties: with Guidelines for Preserving, Rehabilitating, Restoring & Reconstructing Historic Building*, Kay D. Weeks and Anne E. Grimmer (National Park Service, Technical Preservation Services, 1995)

*Preservation Sourcebook, Mid-Atlantic Edition, 1998: The Comprehensive Directory of Products and Services for Historic Preservation and Restoration* (Vienna, VA, Preservation Publications LLC, 1997)

*Preservation Brief No. 14: New Exterior Additions to Historic Buildings: Preservation Concerns* (National Park Service)

## **Acknowledgments**

This publication was prepared for the City of Easton and the Historic District Commission with help and guidance from the following:

*The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties: with Guidelines for Preserving, Rehabilitating, Restoring & Reconstructing Historic Building*. Kay D. Weeks and Anne E. Grimmer, National Park Service, Technical Preservation Services, 1995.

*Easton Design Guide*

South Bethlehem Historic Conservation Commission *Design Guidelines*  
David Shafferman, AIA, Bonsall Shafferman Architects

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