

CHAPTER 3 – PLANNING A PROJECT IN THE HISTORIC DISTRICT

A. General

Rehabilitation and alteration projects affecting the exterior of historic buildings are often complex undertakings involving activities such as maintenance, improvements, additions, renovation and restoration. Any of these activities may affect the fragile historic elements that are important in defining the historic character of the Historic Conservation Overlay District. The objective of the design review process is to ensure that through research, careful design, and advance planning rehabilitation and restoration can be accomplished which will be compatible with the Historic Conservation Overlay District.

B. Is the Property Within the National Register District?

One of the first things to determine is whether or not the property is located within the Suffolk National Register Historic District, which is also a Virginia Landmarks Register Historic District. See Chapter 9 for a discussion of how rehabilitation work on residential and commercial properties within the National Register and Landmarks Register District may qualify for federal and state tax credit programs.

C. The Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation

The Guidelines for the rehabilitation of existing buildings in the Suffolk Historic Conservation Overlay District are based upon The Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation and Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings.

First developed in 1979, these guidelines have been expanded and refined and are used by the National Park Service to ensure that the rehabilitation of an historic building is undertaken in a manner that is sensitive to its historic integrity. The guidelines are very broad by nature since they apply to the rehabilitation of any contributing building in any historic district throughout the United States. See Appendix A for a complete listing of the guidelines.

D. Check the Underlying Zoning District Requirements

Before beginning to design a project, check with the Zoning Administrator and the Planning Division to determine if the project is consistent with the zoning district or if other requirements of the Unified Development Ordinance need to be considered. The types of requirements to be considered are dependent on the use of the property, where it is located, and other factors governed by the UDO.

E. Is the Building Residential or Commercial?

It is also important to determine if the building is a residential or commercial building since there are different guidelines and requirements for each building. Refer to Chapters 5 or 6 respectively for information and guidance for projects pertaining to residential or commercial buildings.

Identifying the type of building is particularly important within the Central Business District where both residential and commercial uses are permitted. In the Central Business District it is not uncommon for a formerly residential building to be now used for commercial purposes. Should this be the case, the guidance provided in Chapters 5 and 6 would be applicable.

F. What Style is Your Building?

The Historic District has a wide variety of residential and commercial building styles. The particular historic

style of the building influences what is appropriate for the design of exterior changes and improvements. Understanding the style of the building is the first step to planning a good project. A description and illustrations of some of the styles found in the Historic Conservation Overlay District follow.

- Federal (1780-1830)

These residences are two stories, usually with a gable roof. Cladding materials are often beaded weatherboards. Exterior end chimneys are generally shouldered and set in pairs. The symmetrical façade may have an entrance or a doorway placed off-center, creating a rowhouse design. The decorative details of the Federal-styled house may include a fanlight over the entrance and often, sidelights flanking the door. Entrances may also include a small classically designed portico supported by columns. The cornice may be decorated with modillion blocks or dentils.



Federal - North Main Street

- Greek Revival (1840 - 1860)

Although similar to the Federal style in overall appearance, Greek Revival-style houses introduced several new changes such as paired windows, often with decorative surrounds. Roofs are hipped or gable and occasionally have a central gable or pediment in the entry bay. Porticos are usually one story and classically designed with pilasters and columns.



Greek Revival—Brewer Avenue

- Italianate (1860-1890)

These dwellings are usually two or three stories with a low-pitched hip roof and widely overhanging, bracketed eaves. Italianate buildings may have tall narrow windows with two-over-two-sash, often with decorative caps. Front porches are common and often contain decorative elements including brackets and sawn millwork.



Italianate—Franklin Street

- Second Empire (1870-1890)

These buildings are identified by a mansard roof with widely overhanging, bracketed eaves. Second Empire buildings are three stories with the third story incorporated within the roof, which is often covered with slate and capped with decorative cresting. The windows are generally tall and narrow with decorative surrounds.

- Vernacular Victorian (1860-1920)

These houses reflect a variety of styles with simple Victorian detail. The I-house is a two-story frame dwelling with three bays, a central entrance, and a one-story front porch that extends across most of the façade. Another example of a vernacular dwelling is a front gable house which is also a two-story frame structure but with more vertical proportions and an asymmetrical facade. Decorative features may include patterned shingles in the gables and a front porch with sawn millwork.

- Queen Anne (1880-1910)

These dwellings are characterized by a complex roof, vertical proportions, and a wraparound porch. In more elaborate examples, rich decoration such as brackets, balusters, window surrounds, bargeboards, and other sawn millwork exist with various surface materials like shingles, wood siding, and brick. In Suffolk, many of the Queen Anne houses have a classically-inspired wraparound porch with columns and a simple balustrade.



Second Empire - Bank Street

- Colonial Revival (1910-1940)

This style is based on the earlier Georgian and Federal periods of American architectural history. It often has a rectangular plan and a symmetrical facade. The roof may be a gable or hipped design. The details are often classical with porticos over entrances common. As in earlier periods, the windows have small panes; their proportions, however, are often more horizontal and the first floor may contain paired or triple windows. Doorways can have various elements including sidelights, fanlights, pediments, and columns or pilasters. Variations of this style are the Dutch Colonial with its distinctive gambrel roof and the Vernacular Colonial Revival with its simpler details and smaller scale.



Vernacular Victorian—Jackson Street

- American Foursquare (1900-1930)

This style is identified by its square shape and hip roof with a wide overhang. It is usually two stories with a full-width, one-story porch. Often, the front of the hip roof has a prominent dormer window. Other openings may or may not be symmetrical between floors. More elaborate examples may have classical details such as columns for porch supports and modillion blocks in the cornice or may feature a Bungalow-style porch.



Queen Anne—Brewer Avenue

- Bungalow (1915-1940)

This 1 1/2-story residential dwelling can be found in several variations in Suffolk's neighborhoods. The most common type is the sweeping side-gable form with a massive roof that contains a large dormer and extends over a front porch. Roof overhangs are usually deep and contain large simple brackets and exposed rafter ends. Windows may be in pairs, and there are frequently side bay windows. Materials are usually combinations of brick, shingles, stucco, and half-timber framing. Front porch supports often have short, squat proportions.



American Foursquare—Oakdale Terrace

- Historic Mercantile

The first floor of these structures served as mercantile display or other commercial uses with high ceilings and large storefront display windows. Typically, the entrances were integrated into recessed portions of the storefront to maximize display area. The upper floor was often residential living space and usually had double hung windows and a brick façade. This is a common historic building style in the commercial areas along North Main Street and East and West Washington Streets.



Colonial Revival—Pinner Street

- Historic Office/High Rise

Several historic high-rise buildings still exist in Suffolk. They feature large windows on each story with very strong façade geometries. The Professional Building and the Suffolk Nansemond Bank Building are both excellent examples of this building form.

Historic Religious

Several early 20th century churches exist within the Historic District. Although these vary in style, they are typically designed in one of several revival styles. These buildings have a strong street presence due to their enhanced architectural elements, which include spires, gabled roofs, stained-glass windows and richly detailed enclosure walls. It is common for these buildings to be set back from the other buildings along the street by a front lawn or landscaped area.



Bungalow—Brewer Avenue

G. What is the Context of the Surrounding Area?

Another important aspect of planning a project in the Historic District is to understand and design for the context of the surrounding buildings in the neighborhood or area. In general, additions, alterations, and new construction should relate to those of the landmark historic buildings in the vicinity. Maintaining the proportions for windows, doors, and other details help to ensure that the character of the historic buildings and facades is continued. As an example, if a new home is proposed on a vacant lot in a neighborhood of Colonial Revival houses, it should relate to the height, width and proportions of the other houses so that it will be compatible.

H. Consult with the City Staff

The Planning Staff and the Zoning Administrator can provide assistance in answering questions and providing guidance prior to preparing applications. They can also assist in identifying in which zoning district the property is located, as well as provide other zoning requirements which may apply to the project.



Historic Mercantile
East Washington Street

I. Preparing an Application Submittal

The amount of preparation and submittal materials will vary depending on the type of action or project planned. If an addition or alteration to the building is proposed which will affect the exterior, drawings which illustrate the proposed design changes will need to be prepared. If repainting the building, color samples and photographs of the building and surrounding area will be needed to assist in reviewing and evaluating the proposed paint scheme. If proposing a new sign, a site plan showing the sign location and a design drawing of the sign, complete with colors, copy text, dimensions, and other details of the sign construction will be needed. See Appendix B, Items Required with Applications, for an illustration of what is required with the submittal of an application.



Historic Office/High Rise
N. Main Street & E. Washington St.



Historic Religious
North Main Street

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