

## Chapter 5.0

# New Construction

New construction within a historic district can have a substantial impact on adjacent historic properties and the district as a whole. While contemporary design is always encouraged in the historic district, it is important that this new development be compatible with the overall character of the district. Design characteristics such as building form (scale, massing, height, and orientation) and architectural elements (materials, architectural detail, windows, doors, and roof forms) must be considered when evaluating any proposed new building within a historic district. New design that mimics historic structures to the point that there is no clear distinction between the two is strongly discouraged in the historic district.

Since the Washington Historic District includes downtown and the waterfront, as well as adjacent residential areas, the guidelines in previous sections have included provisions for different building types together. Considering the differences between commercial and residential building construction and site planning, as it relates to new construction, they are presented separately in this section.

### 5.1 Downtown Commercial Construction

New construction in a historic district has the potential to dramatically affect the quality and feel of a historic district. This is especially the case in a commercial area where the dynamics are constantly changing with new buildings, additions to existing buildings as businesses expand, or other issues such as parking or signage. New construction and contemporary design that is compatible within the context of the historic district is always encouraged and is important to economic development. A regulatory environment that discourages creative or contemporary design to the point that new construction is discouraged threatens the overall economic health of a downtown. Therefore, a design guideline document must provide the most flexibility while fostering new construction that respects the existing district.



*Contemporary infill construction*

The downtown portion of Washington includes primarily the two thoroughfares of: Market Street between Third and Water; and Main Street between Gladden and Bonner. It also includes the waterfront area from the Pamlico River to the rear of buildings on Stewart Parkway. It is imperative that new development recognize and complement both the existing historic environment and the river itself.

New construction applications, due to their potential impact, shall include a site plan, conceptual drawings (measured drawings if possible), material samples, and pictures of the site and surrounding buildings. These items can be completed without significant expense and will most likely be necessary in the early design process prior to submitting to the Commission.



*Contemporary compatible infill construction of appropriate scale.*

Finally, it should be noted that the general guidelines in previous sections (windows and doors, materials, site features, etc) are to be applied to new construction as well.

## Massing, Scale, and Orientation

A new building in the downtown area should be of similar size, scale, and orientation as the existing built environment. For example, the majority of commercial structures in downtown Washington are two or three stories tall while a few are just one level. Also, most buildings within the district tend to be between thirty to fifty feet in width. Within a single block face, the scale of the structures themselves varies slightly. A new structure should never overpower the existing adjacent buildings, thus drawing attention to itself and detracting from the remainder of the historic district.

It is common for institutional buildings, such as a city hall or a church, to be built on a larger scale than other buildings. Often, these structures are not only taller and wider, but are also placed differently on a lot, set back further from the street and from adjacent buildings. The majority of commercial buildings in downtown are built to the lot line directly adjacent to the sidewalk. A civic building, on the other hand, may be set back further leaving room for a landscaped area or perhaps even a public gathering space.



Institutional buildings are often of larger scale and sometimes set back from the street edge.

Typically, these structures are built on a corner rather than the interior of a block face, and are intended to maximize views to and from the structure.

**Commercial: Massing, Scale, and Orientation Guidelines**

**5.1.1** Buildings within Washington’s historic district are of similar heights. Therefore, the height of a new building shall be compatible with other buildings in the district when measured from the current Base Flood Elevation (BFE).



**5.1.2** All new buildings shall be compatible in height with adjacent buildings on the block.

**5.1.3** A new building’s height to width ratio should be consistent with existing historic structures. Floor-to-floor heights of new buildings should be similar to the proportions of the existing



**5.1.4** The overall building massing and placement on the lot should be similar to that of other buildings in the historic district. Commercial buildings within the interior of the block should be built to the front property line resulting in a continuous building line.

**5.1.5** The space between buildings should reflect the existing pattern of property development within the district. Historically, buildings within the interior of a block were built to the side property line, usually sharing a wall with its neighbor.

**5.1.6** Where buildings are set back from the front property line, the parking should be to the side and rear only.

**5.1.7** New buildings shall have their main entrance and primary architectural façade facing the street. New buildings should have a rear entrance to accommodate rear parking and access.



**5.1.8** New construction projects should follow the site features and district setting guidelines found in Chapter 4 of this document.

## Design, Proportion, and Architectural Elements

Buildings within historic downtown Washington exhibit a variety of architectural styles. Therefore, new construction is not required to be built to any particular style, but should include similar design elements, materials, and fenestration as other buildings in the district. Windows and doors, architectural details, and roof form are all very important in defining the overall design and provides compatibility with the historic district.

### Commercial: Design, Proportion, and Architectural Features Guidelines

- 5.1.9** The design of a new building should not attempt to create a false historic appearance, but rather complement buildings in the existing district. New construction should have its own character and style.



*North Carolina Estuarium*

- 5.1.10** Use materials that are common to the district such as brick, stone, terra cotta, wood, and metal. Modern materials are appropriate on a new building, however, masonry should be the predominant material on the façade as most of downtown’s

historic structures are brick or stone. Whenever modern materials are used, they should be similar in their physical qualities to historic materials found in the district.

- 5.1.11** The fenestration of a new building should reflect that of existing historic structures within the district in proportion, shape, location, pattern and size. The ratio of solids to voids on a building’s façade should reflect the buildings within the same block.



*Inappropriate fenestration and orientation*

- 5.1.12** New construction should include storefront elements proportional to that of existing historic structures.
- 5.1.13** Aluminum and vinyl siding are prohibited on new construction.
- 5.1.14** Architectural details such as cornices, arches, and parapet walls give a building texture and define its scale. New construction should reflect that of existing structures. The orientation and pattern of windows, doors, and architectural details can help

reduce the impact to new construction.



*Compatible new construction*

**5.1.15** Architectural style along and on the waterfront was historically different than that of the downtown proper and should reflect that difference. Contemporary design along the waterfront should have its own character and design and reflect its relationship to the river as well as its historic functional relationship to downtown.

**5.1.16** The design of deck parking should be compatible to the district in size, scale, proportion and materials.

## 5.2 Residential Construction

New construction within the residential areas of the historic district, while less prevalent than downtown, can have equally as significant an impact. While there are fewer infill projects in the residential areas, there is still the potential for new construction, especially in areas along the waterfront and around the fringes of the district. As in commercial construction, architectural expression that complements the district is encouraged within the residential portions of the historic district. New construction that respects the quality and design of the historic district is important in preserving the overall character of the district. New residential construction is evaluated based on its size and scale, orientation on the lot, materials, architectural details, and site features.

The general guidelines in previous sections (windows and doors, materials, site features, etc) are to be applied to new construction as well, i.e, vinyl clad windows with fixed muntins are acceptable, vinyl and aluminum siding is not.



*Residential Infill construction in Greenville, SC*

## Massing, Scale, and Orientation

As with commercial construction, size and scale of a residential structure as well as its orientation is of primary importance. Residential buildings within the historic district display a variety of heights and scale with most buildings being two stories. Examples of one and three story buildings are also seen. Homes in the district are also typically built close to the street, but the set backs vary from block to block. Some blocks with architecture more significant in scale have the buildings being set back further from the street than others. Finally, the majority of residential buildings in the district are oriented facing the street with a front porch, portico, or stoop.

### Residential: Massing, Scale, and Orientation Guidelines

- 5.2.1** The height of new construction shall be compatible with other residential buildings in the district when measured from the current Base Flood Elevation (BFE).
- 5.2.2** Oversized or monumental residential construction is not prevalent in the district and should be avoided. Only in special cases and in strategic locations should this type of architecture be permitted.
- 5.2.3** In order to retain a continuous block face, new homes should not be built farther back than an average of its neighbors along the same side of the street within the same block face,

even if permitted by zoning code.

- 5.2.4** Main entrances should be clearly evident and should be oriented toward the sidewalk and street. If possible, new buildings should include a front porch or portico.



- 5.2.5** New construction projects should follow the site features and district setting guidelines found in Chapter 4 of this document.

## Design, Proportion, and Architectural Elements

Residential structures in Washington’s historic district come in an array of styles, building form and detail. The different time periods of these buildings define the overall design elements of these buildings including roof form, material, architectural detail, and window and door placement. More often than not, these different styles and building types sit adjacent to each other within the same block. It is important, therefore, that contemporary construction complement the existing architecture rather than replicating it.



**Residential: Design, Proportion, and Architectural Features Guidelines**

**5.2.6** The design of a new building should not attempt to create a false historic appearance, but rather complement the existing district. New construction should have its own character and style.



**5.2.7** The fenestration of a new building should reflect that of existing historic structures within a district and be compatible in proportion, shape, location, pattern and size.

**5.2.8** Architectural details such as cornices, trim, windows and doors should reflect the scale

of buildings in the existing historic district.

**5.2.9** New homes within the district should be built with approved materials. Modern materials, if used, should be similar in appearance and texture traditional materials.

**5.2.10** If vinyl-clad windows are used, they must have permanent exterior muntins to match the existing windows.

**5.2.11** Aluminum and vinyl siding are prohibited on new construction.

**5.2.12** There are a variety of roof forms in the district including gable, hip, and gambrel. The roof forms used on new construction should relate to neighboring buildings in form and material.

**5.2.13** The historic landscape of the district including green space and mature trees is one of the character-defining elements of the district. When undertaking new construction, significant trees or vegetation shall be preserved

## 5.3 Additions

Historic districts change over time with new construction, demolition, and sometimes redevelopment. A quick look at Washington's historic district shows historic buildings from different eras that were built as the district evolved, each with different qualities and character. This is also the case with additions to historic structures. Historic Buildings may have additions from different eras that often are historic themselves. Therefore, it is important that new additions be compatible in size and scale, setback, materials, and design as the main structure.

Poorly designed additions can dramatically change, and often destroy, the historic qualities of a structure.



Inappropriate arcade addition added to front of buildings in an historic streetscape.

Additions, whether on commercial or residential structures, should be done in a manner that does not diminish the historic character of the building and district. Like new construction, additions can be contemporary, but also should be compatible with its surroundings.

### Additions Guidelines

- 5.3.1** Additions should be located to the rear or non-character defining elevation. With historic residential structures, additions should be placed in a manner that they are not clearly seen from the public right-of-way. Landscaping can often be used to minimize the visual impact that additions may have to the historic structure.
- 5.3.2** New additions should not remove, damage, or obscure character-defining architectural feature.
- 5.3.3** Additions should be compatible in materials, design, roof form, and proportion to the main structure. However, new additions should be constructed at a scale smaller than the historic structure so as not to overpower the existing historic building.



- 5.3.4** Additions, like new construction, are representative of the time in which they are built. Therefore, contemporary designs are permitted, but should always be compatible with the existing historic structure.

- 5.3.5** An addition should never mimic or recreate the architecture of the primary historic structure.
- 5.3.6** Additions to historic structures should be clearly identifiable as such. Additions should be set back and constructed at a smaller scale than the original building. Architectural details should complement the main structure but should be clearly differentiated.
- 5.3.7** Large additions to commercial structures can be designed to appear as a separate building, but with a connection joint setback from the two structures
- 5.3.8** Service additions to commercial buildings should always be to the rear of the main structure
- 5.3.9** Significant trees or other landscape should not be removed or damaged when constructing an addition.



## 5.4 Decks

The outdoor deck is a contemporary exterior feature frequently introduced in the residential historic districts. A deck is an uncovered wooden structure, similar to a back porch that is located above grade at the rear of the structure. Decks shall conform to local building codes.

### Decks Guidelines

- 5.4.1** A deck shall be designed and constructed so that the historic structure and its character-defining features and details are not damaged or obscured. Install decks so they can be removed in the future without damage to the structure.
- 5.4.2** Decks shall not, when feasible, be visible from the public right-of-way. New decks should be constructed in inconspicuous locations, usually on the building's rear elevation.
- 5.4.3** Design and detail decks and associated railings and steps to reflect materials, scale, and proportions of the building.
- 5.4.4** New decks should be painted or stained in a color that is compatible with the historic structure and district.