



***HISTORIC REVIEW COMMISSION OF PITTSBURGH***

**DESIGN GUIDELINES:**  
**OAKLAND CIVIC CENTER**  
**HISTORIC DISTRICT**

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## **DESIGN GUIDELINES: OAKLAND CIVIC CENTER HISTORIC DISTRICT**

### **A. Introduction**

1. The following guidelines were adopted by the Historic Review Commission after they were submitted in draft form to property owners in the proposed Oakland Civic Center Historic District (and to other interested parties), revised in accordance with some of their comments, and discussed at a public hearing. They were submitted to City Council (and to all interested parties) before Council held its public hearing on the proposed designation.
2. The Historic Review Commission uses this set of guidelines when it reviews the appropriateness of proposed exterior alterations in the historic district, if it is designated. The guidelines can also assist property owners in the formulation of plans for the preservation, rehabilitation, and continued use of historic buildings in the district. They apply to all construction and demolition on the exterior of all buildings in the district, as well as to all proposed exterior new construction in the district.

### **B. Basic Principles**

1. The removal or alteration of original building materials or distinctive architectural features should be avoided when possible, especially if they are important in defining the overall historic or visual character of a building. If the materials and features are original and in serviceable repair, they should be kept as is.
2. Deteriorated materials and architectural features should be repaired, rather than replaced, whenever possible.
3. Materials and architectural features that are too deteriorated to repair should be replaced in kind or with a visually-compatible substitute material (if replacement in kind is not technically or economically feasible). The appearance of the replacement should match the appearance of the original material or feature.
4. New features that are designed and installed to replace original features that are completely missing should either be an accurate restoration of the original features (based on photographs, drawings, or physical evidence), or new designs that may be contemporary in character and detailing while they are compatible with the scale, material, and color of the historic building.

### C. General Guidelines

1. The Historic Review Commission does not require, initiate, or propose any work on a building. The review process begins only after the owner proposes exterior (not interior) work that is visible from a public street or way.
2. All buildings and structures are products of their own time. Alterations that attempt to make a building look older than it is, or that try to change the architectural style of the building, should be avoided.
3. Later additions to an old building, or non-original facades or storefronts, may have gained significance in their own right as examples of an architectural style or evidence of historical changes to the building. If so, these additions or alterations to the original building should be recognized and respected.
4. The surface cleaning of structures should be undertaken with the gentlest means possible. Sandblasting and other abrasive techniques shall not be used to clean the exterior of a building, because they will damage the original building materials.
5. Original openings should not be altered on the principal facade(s) of a building, because enlarging, reducing the size, or eliminating openings can dramatically alter the appearance and character of a building.
6. Original building materials and architectural features should not be covered by other materials.
7. Any non-original material or feature on a building that was in existence at the time of the designation of the historic district may be retained as is, repaired, or replaced to match. The Historic Review Commission shall not require the removal or alteration of any material or features that existed at the time of designation.
8. Concurrent Reviews: When an owner intends to make use of Federal or State funds for the construction of a new building or the rehabilitation or alteration of an existing one in a National Register-listed historic district, he or she is required to submit the proposal to the Pennsylvania Bureau for Historic Preservation for review, in accordance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. The Commission shall work with the owner and the Bureau to ensure that the reviews are concurrent and that the Commission and the Bureau concur in their approvals.

## D. Building Rehabilitation and Alteration

1. Materials: The exterior surfaces of the contributing buildings in the district are predominantly masonry (brick and stone), with stone or terra cotta details. If replacement of deteriorated or missing materials is necessary, the replacements should be new or recycled materials that match the appearance of the original as closely as possible (including these characteristics: color, texture, shape, size, placement, detailing, and type of joint). Masonry surfaces should be cleaned, if necessary, by the gentlest means possible; sandblasting and other abrasive cleaning methods shall not be used (except in extraordinary circumstances). Repointing of masonry should be done with a mortar that matches the original as closely as possible in terms of lime and cement content (to avoid damaging the masonry), color, and type of joint (to match the appearance). Waterproof and water-repellant coatings should not be used on masonry unless there is actual water penetration through the masonry. Unpainted masonry and architectural metals should not be painted.

2. Doors and Windows: The doors and windows of a building are essential elements of the overall design and architectural style of the building. Original door and window openings should not be altered or filled in, particularly on the principal facade(s) of the building. Original doors and windows should be retained and repaired, wherever possible. If they must be replaced, the new ones should match the originals in size, style, and appearance as closely as possible. Storm windows should be installed so as to be inconspicuous: colored to match the window frames, sized to fit the openings, and divided like the windows that are being covered. New door and window openings may be installed only on building elevations of limited historic or visual significance.

3. Roofs: The existing roofline and architectural features that give a building its character, such as roof shapes, towers, dormers, cornices, brackets, and chimneys, should be retained. New features, such as vents, skylights, and rooftop utilities, should be placed out of view from the street. Slate and tile roofs are common in the district, and should be retained and maintained wherever possible. Replacement roofing materials should maintain the visual character of the original materials. Flat or low-pitched roofs, if they are not visible from the street, shall not be reviewed by the Historic Review Commission.

4. Ornamentation: Significant architectural and ornamental features should be retained and maintained.

5. Mechanical Systems: Utility and mechanical systems should be placed inconspicuously, and screened if necessary, so that they are not visible on the principal facade(s) of the building as seen from public streets; they should also be screened from residential uses. Features that must be added to meet safety and code requirements, such as stairs and elevators, should be designed to be as inconspicuous as possible, and should not alter significant architectural features of the building. Features that must be added to make a

building accessible to the handicapped should be designed and installed without damaging the historic character of the building. The Commission encourages placement of features on secondary facades if placement on primary facades cannot be done without damage to historic fabric.

6. Painting: The Historic Review Commission urges the use of original color schemes in the painting of wood and metal elements, but will not ordinarily prescribe paint colors. Unpainted masonry and architectural metals should not be painted.

7. Accessories: The Historic Review Commission will usually approve all signs that conform in size and material to the sign regulations of the Zoning Ordinance. Signs should not be installed in such a way as to obscure architectural features of the building; they should not be installed on the roof of a building; and they should not be internally-illuminated box signs (channel-letter signs may be approved by the Commission on a case-by-case basis). Awnings should be sloping and triangular in section, in most cases; they should be made of canvas or canvas-like materials; and they should not be internally-illuminated. Exterior lighting should be mounted in an inconspicuous and non-destructive manner, and screened from adjoining residential uses.

#### E. New Construction

1. The general aim of the guidelines for new construction is to encourage the visual compatibility of new construction with the character and quality of the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century buildings that give the district and the adjoining Schenley Farms Historic District their historic architectural significance and visual character. This does not require, although it also does not forbid, replication of the styles of the existing buildings in the district. The review of the design of a new structure will take into account the immediate context of the buildings that surround it, as well as the historic and architectural character of the district as a whole.

2. Materials: Materials should be of a similar color, texture, and scale to building materials in the district's contributing buildings.

3. Scale, Massing, Rhythm, and Siting: The scale, massing, and rhythm of a new building and its individual elements (e.g., windows, doors, roof, and ornamentation) should be compatible with the forms found among the contributing buildings in the district. In addition, the Commission will review the spatial relationship of a new building to the open spaces and buildings around it. The ratio of wall surface to openings, and the proportions and direction of the door and window openings, should be consistent with those of the contributing buildings. Glass curtain walls and horizontal strip windows along the principal facades should be avoided, as well as large, flat wall surfaces unbroken by openings, setbacks, or moldings.

4. Detailing: The detailing of new buildings should correspond to the kinds of detailing found on contributing buildings in the district. This does not require replication of the degree of ornamentation found in those buildings but should generally include the following: a cornice or other definition of the roofline; a distinctive main door surround; window sills and lintels, or other distinctive detailing at the openings; and ornamental features such as moldings.

5. Accessories: The Historic Review Commission will usually approve all signs for new buildings that conform in size and material to the sign regulations of the Zoning Ordinance. Signs should not be installed in such a way as to obscure architectural features of the building; they should not be installed on the roof of the building; and they should not be internally-illuminated box signs (channel-letter signs may be approved by the Commission on a case-by-case basis). Awnings on new buildings should be sloping and triangular in section, in most cases (although arched windows should have rounded awnings); they should be made of canvas or canvas-like materials; and they should not be internally-illuminated. Exterior lighting should be mounted in an inconspicuous and non-destructive manner, and screened from adjoining residential uses.

6. Rooftop Elements: Structures on the roofs of new buildings, such as elevator or other mechanical housings or devices, vents, utilities, and skylights, should be designed so that they are inconspicuous from the public streets.

## F. Additions

1. In general, additions should follow the guidelines for compatibility of new construction.

2. The design of an addition should respond specifically to the architecture of the building to which it is being added. It should be sympathetic to and compatible with the appearance of the original building, but this does not mean that the addition needs to replicate the design of the existing building.

3. An addition should be designed so that it is secondary to the existing building, and does not "overpower" it visually. It should not be located on the principal facade(s) of the building.

4. The connection of the addition to the original building should be designed so that it does not detract from either structure. Significant architectural features of the original building should not be destroyed, removed, or obscured by the addition.

5. Additions to the roof of a building (such as additional floors, elevator housings, decks, terraces, dormers, and skylights) should be designed so that they are inconspicuous from the public streets and do not damage or obscure character-defining elements of the building.

## G. Demolitions

1. The Historic Review Commission shall take all of the following factors into consideration when it considers a proposal for the demolition of a structure in the historic district:

- a. the historic or architectural significance of the structure;
- b. the contribution of the structure to the character of the district;
- c. the structural condition of the building;
- d. the feasibility of renovation and continued use of the building;
- e. the character of the new construction proposed to replace the demolished structure;
- f. the ability of the owner to obtain a reasonable economic return from the use of all or part of the building (if a profit-making venture) or the marketability of the building to another individual or organization;
- g. the ability of the owner to use the structure in a manner compatible with its organizational purposes (if a non-profit organization or corporation) or the marketability of the building to another individual or organization.
- h. With regard to a proposal for demolition by the Western Pennsylvania School for Blind Children, if, after a good faith effort, which would include the retention of an architect, or architects, experienced in historic renovations, or as a consultant to the School's architect, the School can demonstrate that the building can no longer be economically or effectively used for educational programs, the Historic Review Commission will allow for the issuance of a demolition permit for replacement of the main building provided that the green space is not diminished. (This section added by City Council 3/24/92)

2. The Commission shall allow the demolition of an inappropriate addition to a contributing structure in the district.

3. The Commission shall allow the demolition of a non-significant portion of a contributing building, as long as the demolition does not adversely affect significant elements of the building.

4. The Commission shall allow the demolition of a non-contributing structure in the district, as long as the demolition does not adversely affect the character of the district as a whole.

## H. Site Improvements and Alterations

1. The Historic Review Commission will review all construction on building lots within the historic district that are visible from a public street or way. This shall include paving, light standards, walls, fences, and landscaping.
2. Parking lots should be sufficiently screened by structures, screening, or landscaping to minimize the view of the lots and the cars stored there.
3. Significant existing site features, such as steps, retaining walls, walks, and fences, which contribute to the character of the property, should be retained and maintained.
4. New site features should either replicate the original features or be compatible in design.
5. New chain-link fences may only be installed when they will be minimally visible along secondary views or facades. They should not be installed along principal facades or views.

#### I. Non-Contributing Buildings

1. Additions and alterations to, and rehabilitation of, non-contributing buildings in the district should either be compatible with the style and character of each building, or cause the building to become more compatible with the district.
2. The Historic Review commission shall not require that alterations to non-contributing buildings be made so as to make the buildings appear to be older than they are, or designed in a different style.
3. The Historic Review Commission shall allow the demolition of non-contributing buildings in the district if the demolition will not adversely affect the character of the district.

#### J. Review Procedures

1. The Historic Review Commission shall authorize its staff to review and approve all applications to repair or replace exterior building elements to match existing elements and designs, all applications that meet the guidelines for exterior rehabilitations and alterations as described above, and all applications to restore the exterior of a building to a documented original condition. The staff shall conduct its review and issue its approval or rejection of the application within ten (10) days of receipt of the completed application.
2. The Historic Review Commission shall review all applications for new construction and additions, for demolitions, for major alterations to existing buildings, and for changes in materials. The Commission shall review each application and vote to approve or deny the application within sixty (60) days following receipt of the application. In the case of major new construction projects, the Commission shall review the conceptual or schematic design



of the project and vote to approve or deny the design within sixty (60) days following receipt of the application, but it shall also review the details of the project and vote to approve or deny the details of the design at a later date, according to the schedule of the applicant. The applicant may choose to present such a proposal for a single review by the Commission.

3. The time limit for consideration of an application may be extended with the consent of the applicant.

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