



## *HISTORIC REVIEW COMMISSION OF PITTSBURGH*

# DESIGN GUIDELINES: MURRAY HILL AVENUE HISTORIC DISTRICT

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## **DESIGN GUIDELINES: MURRAY HILL AVENUE HISTORIC DISTRICT**

### **A. Introduction**

The Historic Review Commission uses this set of guidelines when it reviews the appropriateness of proposed exterior alterations in the historic district. The guidelines can also assist property owners in the formulation of plans for the preservation, rehabilitation, and continued use of historic buildings. They apply to all repairs, renovations, construction, and demolition on the exteriors of all buildings in historic districts.

### **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 (or younger) than it is, or that change the architectural style of the building, should be avoided.
3. 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.
4. 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.
5. Original building materials and architectural features should not be covered by other materials.
6. 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.
7. The rears of some of the buildings in the district appear to have been altered significantly. If the rear of a building is not basically the original design and materials, then proposals for work on the rear, when visible from the public way, should be reviewed for their compatibility with the altered character of the rear elevation.

#### D. Building Rehabilitation and Alteration

1. Masonry Exteriors: Most of the exterior surfaces of the buildings in the district are masonry (brick and stone). 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 (water with detergent, or a mild acid, with low-pressure water wash not to exceed 600 psi); 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; hard Portland cement mortars may damage older bricks), 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. Artificial sidings and stucco (or synthetic stucco) should not be applied over masonry, except on a case-by-

case basis when the masonry has been damaged. Unpainted masonry and architectural metals should not be painted.

2. Wood or Siding Exteriors: If the facade of a building has wood siding or shingles, the wood siding or shingles should be repaired or replaced to match. All wooden trim, including window casings, cornices, and brackets, should be retained and repaired, or replaced to match, if necessary. No artificial siding (aluminum or vinyl siding, insulbrick, etc.), shingles, or stucco should be installed over existing wood siding on the front facades of buildings in the district. Aluminum or vinyl siding may be used on minimally visible sides and rears of buildings.
3. 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. Wood windows should be used as replacement windows on the front facades of buildings in the district. Aluminum or vinyl replacement windows may be used in the sides and rears of buildings (except in the sides of a corner building); all metal windows should be anodized or painted, and should avoid a metallic "mill" finish. Window glass may be double-glazed, but reflective and opaque glass, and artificial muntin grids, should be avoided. 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 side and rear building elevations.
4. Roofs: The existing roofline and architectural features that help to 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 main street. Slate mansard roofs should be retained and maintained wherever possible, and since they are such prominent features, should be repaired or replaced with new slate or artificial slate. Replacement roofing materials should maintain the visual character of the original materials, and should be black or dark gray in most cases. Flat or low-pitched roofs, if they are not visible from the street, shall not be reviewed by the Historic Review Commission.
5. Porches: Front porches are important elements in the design of houses that have them. Front porches and their architectural elements should be retained and repaired, or replaced if necessary. The architectural elements of the porches should be retained and maintained wherever possible. If it is impossible, then judicious substitutions of materials may be made, as long as (in the judgment of the Commission) the overall character of the porch is retained. The use of brick piers and screens, ornamental metal

railings, and treated lumber in stock forms (such as 2-by-4s), shall not be approved for use on front porches.

6. Ornamentation: Significant architectural and ornamental features should be retained and maintained.
7. 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 adjoining houses. 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 persons with disabilities 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.
8. 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.
9. 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. Awnings should be sloping and triangular in section, in most cases (arched awnings should be used only over arched openings); they should be made of canvas or canvas-like materials; and they should not be internally-illuminated. Simple burglar bars may be installed over windows. Exterior lighting fixtures should be simple in design and mounted in an inconspicuous and non-destructive manner, and screened from adjoining houses.

#### E. Additions

1. In general, additions should follow the following guidelines for compatibility of new construction:
  - a. 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-century buildings that give the district its 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.

- b. Materials: Materials should be of a similar color, texture, and scale to building materials in the district.
  - c. Scale, Massing, and Rhythm: The scale, massing, and rhythm of an addition and its individual elements (e.g., windows, doors, roof, and ornamentation) should be compatible with the forms found among the buildings in the district. The ratio of wall surface to openings, and the proportions and directionality of the door and window openings, should be consistent with those of neighboring buildings.
  - d. Detailing: The detailing of additions should correspond to the kinds of detailing found on neighboring 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.
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.

#### F. New Garages

1. Zoning variances: Because of the sizes of the lots in Pittsburgh's historic districts, it may be necessary to obtain a zoning variance from the Zoning Board of Adjustment before a new garage may be constructed. This variance, if needed, should be obtained prior to filing an application for the review and approval of the Historic Review Commission. To determine if you must seek such a variance, please call the Zoning Office at 412-255-

2181. If a variance is needed, you may call the Zoning Board of Adjustment application counter at 412-255-2659 for information.

2. Location: Garages should be located at the rear of a building lot.
3. Form: Free-standing garages should be simple rectangular boxes. If a garage has a flat roof, then the exterior walls should rise above the roofline to form a parapet. If the roof is pitched (with the ridge of the roof running either from front to back, or from side to side) or hipped, then the roof should end in projecting eaves. The eaves can be open, with exposed rafter ends, or closed, with a soffit and fascia; both should be equipped with gutters and downspouts.
4. Size: Early garages were 10 to 12 feet wide by 18 to 24 feet deep, with an eight-by-eight-foot doorway. Wider garages were built in multiples of the 10-to-12-foot bay widths, with separate garage doors for each bay.
5. Materials:
  - a. For the **body** of the garage: The walls facing a street or alley should be faced with brick, stucco, horizontal wood siding, smooth (not wood-grained) horizontal aluminum, vinyl, or cement board siding (with four- or five-inch exposures), vertical tongue-and-groove wood board siding (not grooved plywood or T-1-11), or vertical board-and-batten siding. On the sides that are less visible, the garage walls may be built with concrete block, as long as the block is painted.
  - b. For the **gables**: The walls in the gables should be faced with horizontal siding, if they are not masonry.
  - c. For the **soffit and fascia** of the eaves: The soffit and fascia should be constructed with wood boards. The gutters should be half-round in profile, although K-style gutters are often acceptable. The downspouts should be round.
  - d. For the **roof**: If the roof is flat, then it is not visible from the public way and is therefore not under the jurisdiction of the Historic Review Commission. If it is sloped, then the roof should be covered with black or dark gray asphalt shingles or, better, clay tiles, slates, or standing-seam metal.
  - e. For the **windows**: Simple one-over-one-light double-hung windows are appropriate for use in the side walls of garages.
  - f. For the **doors**: Paneled metal or wood doors are preferred (and required if replacements in a historic garage), although flush doors are acceptable. All

garage doors should be painted. Pedestrian doors should be paneled only. Doors with glass panels or sections are preferable to doors without glass.

6. Painting: Unpainted brick should not be painted, but most other materials should be painted. Raw, unpainted concrete block and wood should never be left unpainted. Paint colors should be subdued, and blend in with the colors in the general vicinity.
7. Carports: Carports (open-sided shelters for automobiles) are acceptable as long as they are hidden behind a fence or gate, so that the visible segments appear like a full garage, or a pergola or other traditional yard structure. The corners should be sturdy-looking built-up supports (box columns or wall segments), and not single wood posts. The roof should conform to the garage roof guidelines, with siding in the gables, and siding extending down the sides of the carport as far as they are visible.

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



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

#### 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. Significant existing site features, such as steps, walks, and fences, which contribute to the character of the property, should be retained and maintained. When that is not possible, judicious substitution of materials may be allowed.
3. New site features should either replicate the original features or be compatible in design.
4. New chain-link fences may only be installed when they will be minimally visible (at the rear). They should not be installed along principal facades or views.

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

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