

CITY OF PITTSBURGH HISTORIC DISTRICTS

GENERAL DESIGN GUIDELINES

Adopted November 2025



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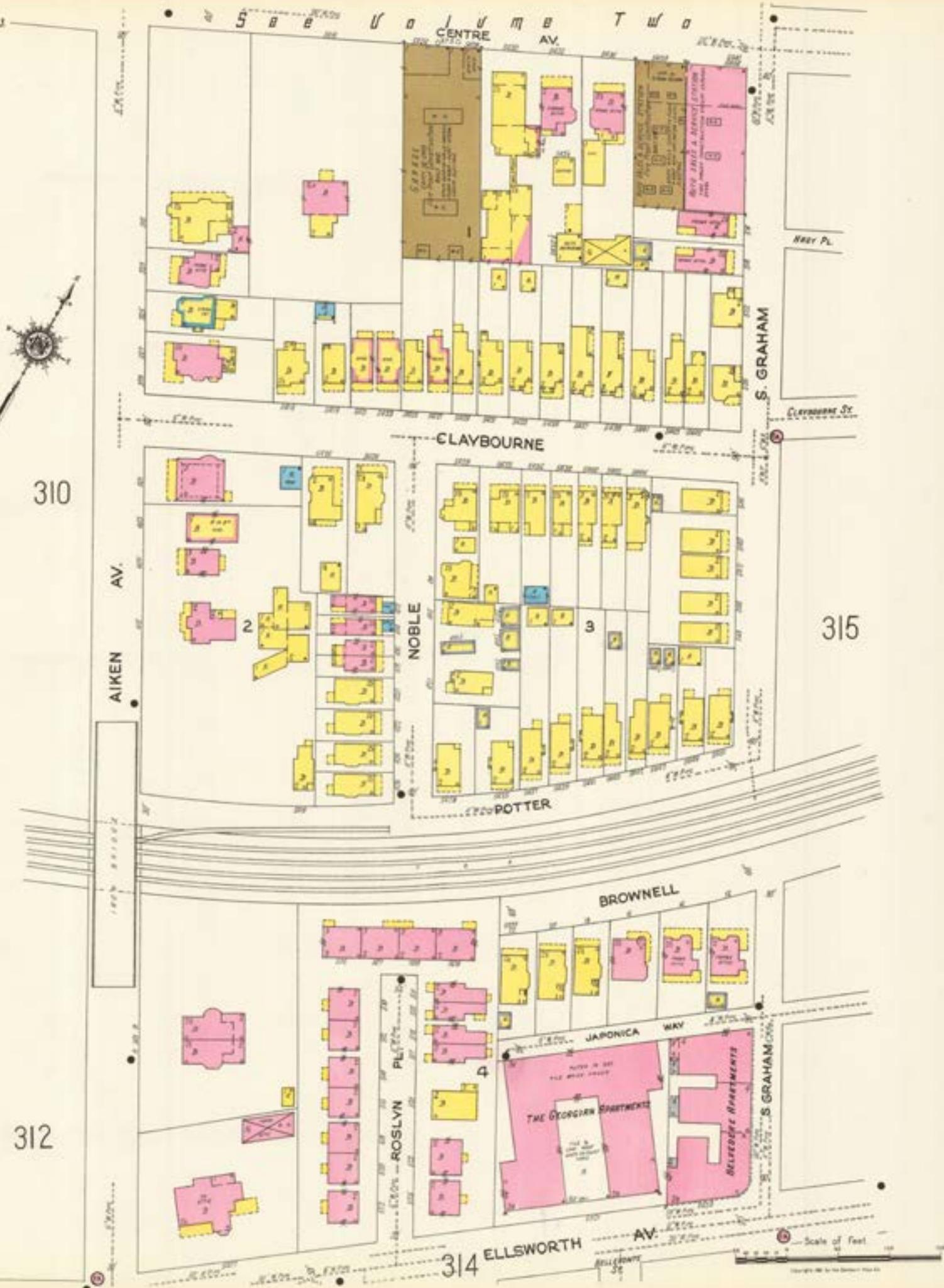
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CHAPTER A

INTRODUCTION

A.1 ABOUT THE HISTORIC DISTRICT GUIDELINES

ABOUT AND PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT

The Historic District Design Guidelines provide visual and written guidance related to repairs, alterations, additions, new construction and other changes within Historic Districts. All exterior work in the Historic District that is visible from the public right-of-way must be reviewed. Proposals for work on buildings in historic districts are reviewed by a Mayor-appointed seven-member Historic Review Commission (HRC). If proposals are approved, they receive a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) allowing the work to be undertaken.

The purpose of the design guidelines is to preserve the integrity of the historic districts. Buildings that maintain the character of the Historic District will help to ensure the district's overall quality of life, economy, property values, and attractiveness to residents and tourists.

PRINCIPLES AND STANDARDS FOR THE DESIGN GUIDELINES

Through the Pennsylvania Historic District Act of 1961 (PA Act 167), municipalities are authorized to create, protect, and regulate historic districts. Districts are designated by local ordinance and are overseen by the HRC. The City of Pittsburgh's HRC was established in 1979.

The City of Pittsburgh has been a Certified Local Government (CLG) since 1990. CLG programs are municipalities that have demonstrated, through certification, a commitment to local preservation. They are eligible for grants, technical assistance, and other benefits. The CLG program is overseen by the National Park Service (NPS) and administered in Pennsylvania by the Pennsylvania State Historic Preservation Office (PA SHPO).

Municipalities that participate in the CLG program are required to adopt and apply illustrated design guidelines when reviewing applications for designated properties.

PRINCIPLES FOR DESIGN GUIDELINES

1. Reflect a community's shared design ethic, management philosophy, and desired future conditions.
2. Are developed through a public process that involves residents, property owners, community stakeholders, and other interested parties.
3. Are educational in nature and help stakeholders understand their community's history and built environment.
4. Encourage stewardship and sensitive treatment of a community's identity and character.
5. Help decision-makers reach consistent and defensible decisions about design issues and proposed changes to individual properties and the broader community.
6. Are reviewed and updated as necessary.

STANDARDS FOR DESIGN GUIDELINES

1. Are specific to the type of community and built environment they are intended to address.
2. Address the full scope of activities, projects, and issues that may be relevant to properties in the community.
3. Are clear and concise.
4. Use specific, nontechnical language, and be organized in a logical manner that is user-friendly and easy to reference.
5. Avoid language that is rigid or prescriptive and allow for adaptation and design solutions that are responsive to and consistent with the community's design ethic.
6. Use a combination of text, photographs, and illustrations to effectively convey information.
7. Help property owners understand what actions, activities, and choices are consistent with the community's design ethic.
8. Are attentive and responsive to building and zoning codes and other relevant policies.
9. Are based upon commonly accepted preservation best practices, including the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties.

A.2 SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR'S STANDARDS FOR REHABILITATION

The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Rehabilitation of Historic Properties are ten overarching principles for cultural heritage in the United States. The design guidelines are based on these principles yet tailored to the unique key defining features of an historic district.

The Standards were first published in 1977 after the passage of the Tax Reform Act of 1976.

THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR'S STANDARDS FOR REHABILITATION OF HISTORIC PROPERTIES

1. A property will be used as it was historically or be given a new use that requires minimal change to its distinctive materials, features, spaces, and spatial relationships.
2. The historic character of a property will be retained and preserved. The removal of distinctive materials or alteration of features, spaces, and spatial relationships that characterize a property will be avoided.
3. Each property will be recognized as a physical record of its time, place, and use. Changes that create a false sense of historical development, such as adding conjectural features or elements from other historic properties, will not be undertaken.
4. Changes to a property that have acquired historic significance in their own right will be retained and preserved.
5. Distinctive materials, features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a property will be preserved.
6. Deteriorated historic features will be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature will match the old in design, color, texture, and, where possible, materials. Replacement of missing features will be substantiated by documentary and physical evidence.
7. Chemical or physical treatments, if appropriate, will be undertaken using the gentlest means possible. Treatments that cause damage to historic materials will not be used.
8. Archaeological resources will be protected and preserved in place. If such resources must be disturbed, mitigation measures will be undertaken.
9. New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction will not destroy historic materials, features, and spatial relationships that characterize the property. The new work should be differentiated from the old and will be compatible with the historic materials, features, size, scale and proportion, and massing to protect the integrity of the property and its environment.
10. New additions and adjacent or related new construction will be undertaken in such a manner that, if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment would be unimpaired.

For more information on the Secretary of the Interior's Standards, please visit <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/taxincentives/secretarys-standards-rehabilitation.htm>.

A.3 BENEFITS OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ECONOMIC BENEFITS

A well-administered historic preservation program creates an economically viable and vibrant place to live and work, adding to a community's quality of life. Historic preservation enhances community character and fosters a sense of pride in residents and business owners. It also promotes sustainability, a concept that embodies economic, environmental, and cultural/social benefits. Below are just a few ways in which historic preservation benefits the Pittsburgh community, viewed through the lens of sustainability:

- **Increased property values:** An analysis by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC) and Preservation Pennsylvania as well as studies from around the country have shown increases in property values in the historic districts relative to properties outside of the historic districts. Stabilization and enhancement of property values through historic preservation can help communities, particularly those that have experienced blight and disinvestment, generate household wealth and increase property tax revenues.

- **Revitalization of downtowns and neighborhoods:** Historic preservation helps to preserve a community's unique identity and sense of place, enhancing its image and quality of life. Preservation can also improve a community's housing stock and stabilize business districts and neighborhoods that would otherwise decline or continue to decline.

- **Tourism activity:** Tourism in which visitors travel to a community to see its cultural heritage sites and historic places is called heritage tourism. These visitors spend money on recreation, accommodations, food, and travel, which supports the local economy.

- **Job creation:** Historic preservation generates jobs, both in the businesses that serve residents and visitors and in local construction jobs. Rehabilitation projects require labor and the purchase of building materials, which provide a boost to the local economy.

- **Tax revenue generation:** Historic rehabilitation projects for income-generating buildings are eligible for the Federal Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit, which has been leveraged over many decades to stimulate private investment. A report from the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC) and Preservation Pennsylvania calculated that the work that went into Federal Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit projects between 1978 and 2010 generated \$7 billion in project expenditures, \$17 billion in total economic impact, \$380 million in state tax revenues, and 148,000 jobs. This benefited multiple sectors of the economy, particularly construction.

ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS

Carl Elefante, former president of the American Institute of Architects, famously stated in 2007: "The greenest building is the one that is already built."

- **Conserving embodied energy:** Embodied energy is the energy expended to create an original building and its components. Historic preservation conserves embodied energy in that the energy that went into a building's construction and the fabrication of its materials has already been expended.
- **Reducing construction waste:** Construction waste from demolition of buildings and the fabrication of new building materials accounts for about one-third of waste sent to landfills.
- **Reducing need for new building materials:** Unlike traditional building materials such as wood, brick, and stone, newer building materials are often made of cement or petroleum-based products, which contribute to a significant share of global CO₂ emissions and generally do not last as long as traditional building materials.
- **Reducing energy use:** Original building materials and features such as windows and walls can often be repaired, insulated, or weather-stripped in an historically appropriate manner so that they are just as efficient as their new counterparts.

CULTURAL AND SOCIAL BENEFITS

Historic preservation benefits residents by connecting them with the cultural heritage of their community. This promotes civic engagement, a sense of pride, and an appreciation of the physical environment. The historic building stock of Pittsburgh is an essential part of the community's identity. Unlike most modern buildings, historic buildings were built at a pedestrian scale, intended for people to walk in and out of multiple businesses without the need to drive.

A.4 GENERAL BEST PRACTICES

The following steps are recommended to be taken **prior** to starting a project involving the rehabilitation of an historic building or structure:

- **Engage an architect or preservation consultant** for your project to look at solutions and to provide expertise on the appropriate use of building materials and features.
- **Identify predominant materials and features which contribute to the historic character of your building.** These may include the design of primary entrances and porches, patterns within materials such as brick, stone, and wood, profiles of trim work and cornices, and decorative elements such as shutters and hardware.
- **Stabilization of damaged or deteriorated building features** should always be the first step prior to undertaking work on the building. Cleaning of exterior surfaces and elements should be done using the gentlest means possible.
- **Life safety, accessibility, and code requirements must take precedence over historic preservation.** Identify any character-defining exterior features, materials, and finishes that may be affected by code or accessibility-required work. Care should be taken not to obscure, damage, or destroy character-defining materials or features where possible.
- **Consult with the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC) and City of Pittsburgh Department of City Planning staff to help determine the most sensitive solutions** to comply with access, life safety, and code requirements related to your historic building. This could mean finding alternative means of compliance that will meet requirements while not negatively impacting the historic character of the building and district.
- **Consult with the City of Pittsburgh Archivist** (or other historic organizations/databases) **for any available information and historic imagery showing what your building may have looked like in the past.** This can serve as a baseline for completing a rehabilitation that is sensitive to your building's historic character. Other resources include:
 - Local libraries
 - Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps
 - Archives of local or state higher education institutions such as the Carnegie Mellon University Archives, University of Pittsburgh Archives, and Penn State University Archives
 - Google Street View imagery from past dates



A.5 CHARACTER-DEFINING FEATURES

WHAT ARE CHARACTER-DEFINING FEATURES?

Character-defining features are the aspects that help your property convey its sense of history. Each style has its own character-defining features, so further information will be available in the district-specific guidelines.

IDENTIFICATION CHECKLIST

The following questions from the National Park Service may help property owners in the identification process of character-defining features:

Shape:

- What is there about the form or shape of the building that gives the building its identity?
- Is the shape distinctive from or the same as the neighboring buildings?

Roof and Roof Features:

- Does the roof shape or its steep (or shallow) slope contribute to the building's character?
- Are certain roof features important to the profile of the building against the sky or its background, such as cupolas, multiple chimneys, dormers, cresting, or weather vanes?
- Are the roofing materials or their colors or patterns (such as patterned slates) distinctive?

Openings:

- Is there a rhythm or pattern to the arrangement of windows or other openings in the walls?
- Are there distinctive openings or unusually or patterned windows that are important to the character?

Projections:

- Are there parts of the building that are character-defining because they project from the walls of the building like porches, chimneys, bay windows, or balconies?

EXAMPLES OF TYPICAL ARCHITECTURAL STYLES



Colonial



Queen Anne



Georgian



Second Empire



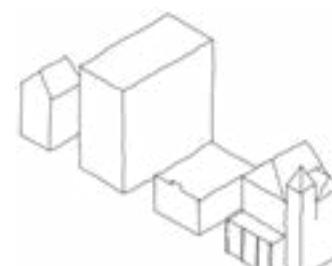
Gothic



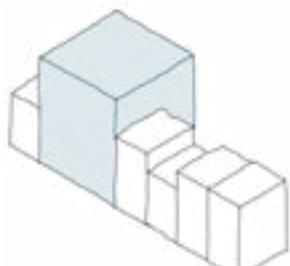
Shingle



Italianate



Consider the shape of the building and special features.



Is the massing consistent with nearby buildings?

Trim and Secondary Features:

- Does the trim around the windows or doors contribute to the character of the building? Is there other trim on the walls or around the projections that contribute to the character of the building?
- Are there secondary features such as shutters, decorative gables, railings, or exterior wall panels?

Materials:

- Do the materials or combination of materials contribute to the overall character of the building as seen from a distance because of their color or patterning?

Materials at Close Range:

- Does the choice of materials or the combinations of materials contribute to the character?

Craft Details:

- Is there high-quality brickwork?
- Is there hand-tooled or patterned stonework?
- Is the wall shingle work laid up in a pattern?

Setting:

- What are the aspects of the setting that are important to the visual character?
- Is there a special relationship to the adjoining streets and other buildings?
- Are there fencing, planting, terracing, walkways, or any other landscape aspects that contribute to the setting?



Notice the rhythm and regularity of these three story attached buildings: each is three bays wide with window openings and storefronts below.



Secondary features such as door and window trim, dormers, entry hoods, and projections contribute to the character of the building and district.



Materials provide inherent color and texture that contribute to the character of the streetscape up close and from far away.

A.6 HIERARCHY OF FACADES

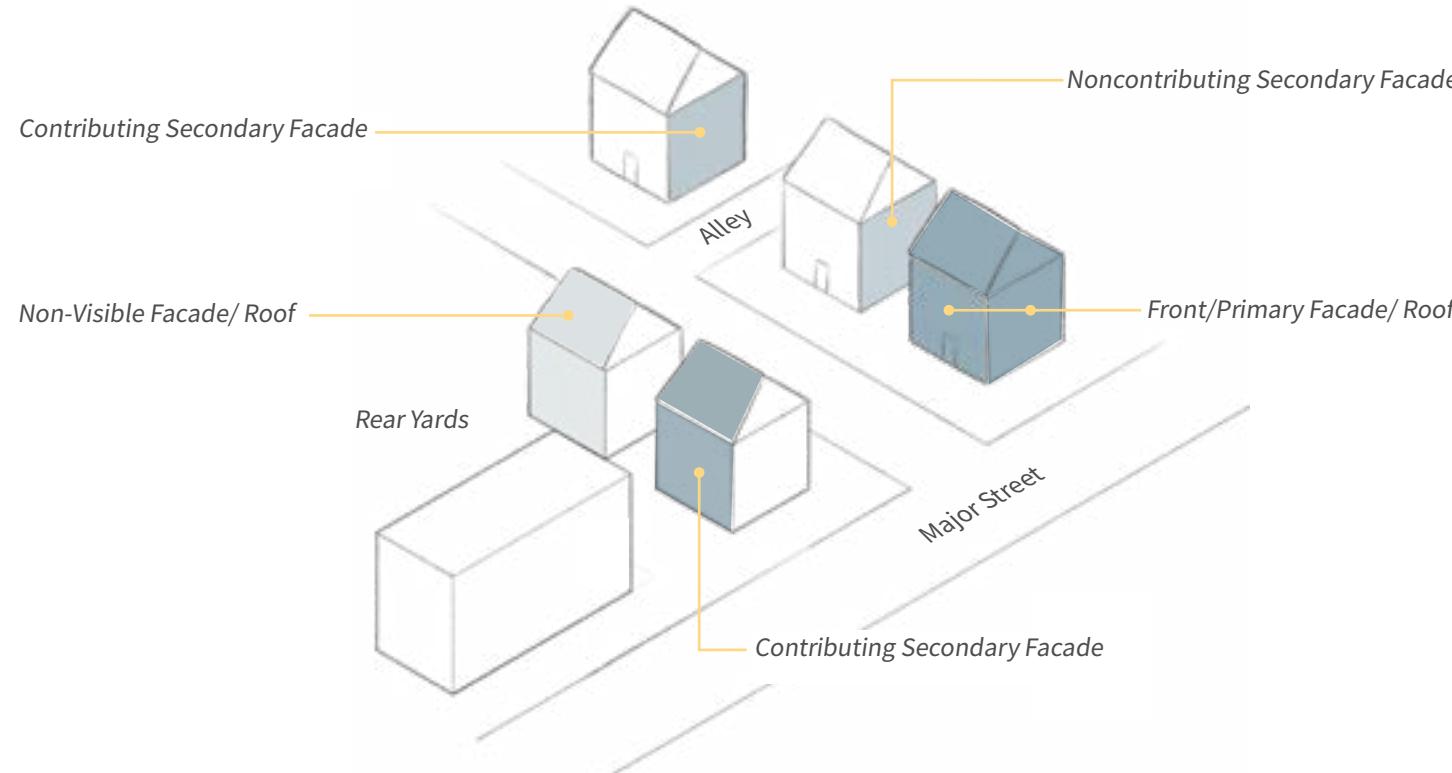
Buildings have multiple faces, some of which are visible from the public street and some of which are not. These Design Guidelines primarily focus on alterations, additions, and new construction that can be seen from the street or sidewalk, as those changes to the Historic District have the most impact on the Historic District's character.

In order of importance, the following definitions describe the various façades that are found on a building:

- A **front/primary façade** is the building face most visible from and facing a public street, and includes visible roof surfaces. It contains the main entrance to the building and typically has the most character-defining architectural features. Almost all work done to a primary façade will be reviewed closely by the HRC. Primary facades include sides of corner buildings that do not contain the main entrance but are visible from a major public street.
- **Contributing secondary façades** are those that are visible from the public street but are not on the front of the building, and includes visible roof surfaces. This can include the sides of detached buildings, provided that those side walls are visible from the public street and the street-facing facade of contributing accessory structures such as historic garages. As with front façades, contributing secondary façades often contain character-defining architectural features.
- **Noncontributing secondary façades** are those that are in the rear of a building, visible only from an alley, or on the side of the building, only partially visible from a public right-of-way.
- A **non-visible façade** is one that cannot be seen from the public right-of-way and is not reviewed by the HRC.

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HIERARCHY OF FACADES ILLUSTRATION





CHAPTER B

PLANNING YOUR PROJECT

B.1 HOW TO USE THIS DOCUMENT

If you are looking to renovate or alter a property in the Historic District, and the changes to your building are visible from the street, then these Guidelines apply to you. Buildings with local historic designation located outside of the Historic District are not subject to the Design Guidelines, although it may be helpful to review and follow the preservation principles in this document.

The design guidelines for each historic district are found in the appendices of this document, and each are divided into five parts, corresponding to five categories of projects undertaken on a building in the Historic District: Common Elements, Existing Buildings, Additions to Historic Structures, New Construction, and Demolition. It is recommended that whichever category of project applies to you, that you first review the City of Pittsburgh's requirements and process for performing work in the Historic District.

After reviewing those sections, pick the chapter that most accurately describes the project that you are looking to undertake. Refer to the Table of Contents for more specific information included in each chapter.

- Chapter 1: Characteristics of the Historic District
- Chapter 2: Guidelines for Existing Buildings
- Chapter 3: Guidelines for Supporting Elements
- Chapter 4: Guidelines for Additions
- Chapter 5: Guidelines for New Construction
- Chapter 6: Guidelines for Demolition

THE MOST COMMON USERS OF THE DESIGN GUIDELINES

- **Property Owners** – Property owners should use the Design Guidelines to help them understand their building and its history, select appropriate materials, or make design decisions. Owners may seek information for their own education, because they need approvals or permits, or as a condition of seeking state or federal tax credits (in the case of income-generating commercial properties).
- **Historic Review Commission (HRC)** – The HRC, which reviews projects under the City's historic preservation ordinance, will use the Design Guidelines to determine whether a project should be recommended for approval.
- **Design Professionals** – Architects, engineers, and other design professionals may use the Design Guidelines to help their clients comply with approvals or permits, secure funding or to conform to the community's design philosophy.
- **Contractors** – Trades contractors and other skilled professionals may use the Design Guidelines to prepare estimates, scopes of work, or bid documents for clients, to increase their knowledge about historic buildings, to prepare for the design review process, or to comply with approval or permit requirements.
- **Real Estate Agents** – Real estate professionals may use the Design Guidelines to help their clients understand the programs, expectations, and requirements of owning an older or historic property.
- **City Staff** – City Staff who are responsible for reviewing projects and applying building and zoning codes may use these Design Guidelines to evaluate work done to buildings in the Historic District. City Staff issue building and zoning permits only after Certificates of Appropriateness (COAs) are approved.
- **Planning Commission** – The Planning Commission may use the Design Guidelines to implement design-oriented aspects of zoning, subdivision, or other land use codes.

B.2 BEFORE YOU SUBMIT FOR A PERMIT

Before submitting applications or reaching out to City Staff with any initial questions, it may be helpful to review and answer the following questions, which can assist property owners in planning their projects.

- Is the building located in the Historic District?
- How old is the building?
- What are the building's character-defining features? What physical features on the exterior of the building convey its significance to the Historic District?
- Does the building retain its integrity? Has the building changed over time? Have there been additions, changes in scale, materials, and key defining features?
- Why is the exterior work being proposed? What is the desired outcome? What elements are required, and which of these are flexible?
- What are the expected lifespans of the proposed materials?
- If demolition is proposed, what assessments or due diligence have been conducted that show rehabilitation is not feasible. What alternatives have been explored?



A building's setting includes its relationship to other elements, such as any front yards, sidewalks, streets, and geography.



Craft details contribute to the overall look of a building.

B.3 HISTORIC REVIEW COMMISSION (HRC) PROCEDURES

ABOUT THE HISTORIC REVIEW COMMISSION

In 1971, the City adopted a formal Historic Preservation Ordinance, which gives authority to the city's Historic Review Commission (HRC) and outlines a process to identify and protect historic properties.

After a resource is locally designated as historic, exterior alterations are subject to a City review process. Before the proposed change can be undertaken, the applicant is required to obtain a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) from the City. For minor changes, the application can be reviewed and approved administratively by City Planning staff, and for major changes, the application is considered by the HRC.

The Historic Review Commission and City staff shall take these factors into consideration when reviewing proposed work:

- The significance of the property
- The context, with respect to other historic properties
- The location of any key, character-defining features
- The condition of those features

In general, key features should be repaired or replaced using the same design and materials, but in some cases alternative approaches may be considered if the preferred approach is not feasible. In determining such feasibility, the City will also consider:

- The reasonable availability of the preferred material
- The skill required to execute the preferred approach
- The quality, appearance, and character of alternative solutions, such as new materials

HRC REVIEW PROCEDURE & CERTIFICATES OF APPROPRIATENESS

City Planning staff and the HRC review applications for COAs, and review applies to any project that has exterior elements that can be seen from a City right-of-way, which includes alleys, lanes, and adjacent streets. All work is also subject to City of Pittsburgh adopted building codes, the Department of Mobility and Infrastructure (DOMI), the Zoning Code, and all other applicable laws and regulations.

ADMINISTRATIVE APPROVAL

- Any project that calls for in-kind repair or replacement of building elements
- Any project that involves routine maintenance that does not require a change in materials or appearance
- Any project that involves work on a building in a row of identical buildings, when the Historic Review Commission has already approved an identical application in that same row
- Applications for signage that meet the established Design Guidelines
- Proposals to restore the building exterior to a documented original condition

IN-KIND REPAIRS

“In-Kind” refers to the repair or replacement of a historic building material or feature, using the same materials, design, dimensions, texture, and detailing as existing to replicate the original appearance.

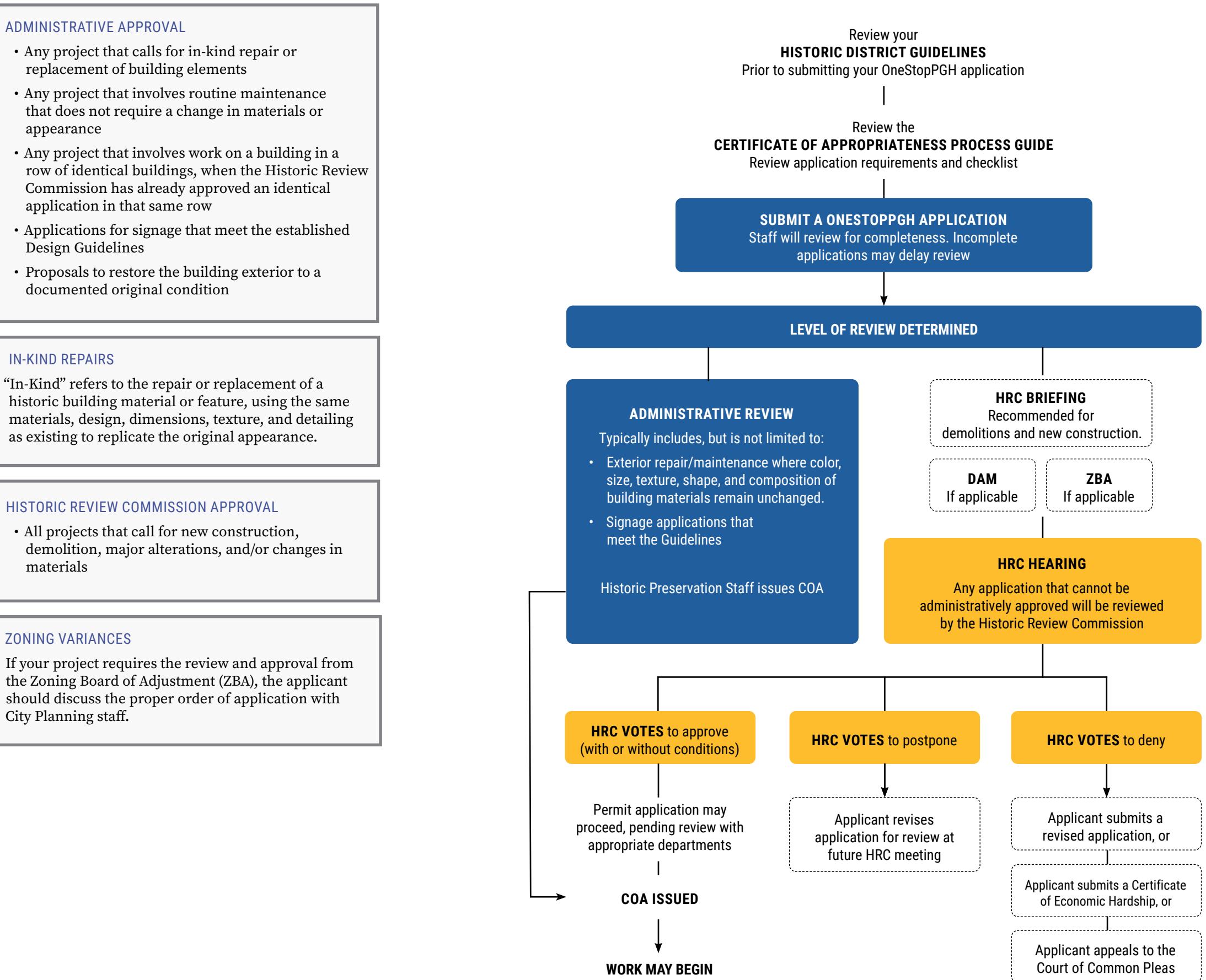
HISTORIC REVIEW COMMISSION APPROVAL

- All projects that call for new construction, demolition, major alterations, and/or changes in materials

ZONING VARIANCES

If your project requires the review and approval from the Zoning Board of Adjustment (ZBA), the applicant should discuss the proper order of application with City Planning staff.

B.4 HISTORIC REVIEW FLOW CHART





CHAPTER C

RESOURCES

C.1 GLOSSARY OF BUILDING FEATURES

Adaptive Reuse - refers to adapting an existing structure for a purpose other than its original use and/or in its original design.

Addition - new built rooms, spaces, and/or stories that are constructed as an attachment to an existing building.

Accessory Building/Structure - a structure that is subordinate to and serves a primary structure; is subordinate in area, extent, and purpose to the primary structure served.

Alley - a narrow right-of-way that typically runs behind or between buildings in towns, serving as rear access or service roads or walks.

Awning - an architectural projection that provides weather protection, identity, or decoration and is wholly supported by the building to which it is attached. An awning is comprised of a lightweight frame structure over which a covering is attached.

Bay - the space between columns or other structural elements. In buildings where there may not be intermediate structural elements, a bay refers to each window in a wall's span.

Bay Window - minor projection containing a window that extends outward from the wall.

Bulkhead - the area between the sidewalk and the display windows: can be of wood, tile, or metal, or can be glazed; also known as a window base or kickplate.

Canopy - a permanent structure or architectural projection of rigid construction over which a covering is attached that provides weather protection, identity, or decoration. A canopy is permitted to be structurally independent or supported by attachment to a building on one or more sides.

Cast iron - iron produced by casting molten ore into molds of a wide variety of shapes and sizes; used for structural members, freestanding ornament, and components of building facades.

Character-Defining Feature - the unique qualities of a building, property, or neighborhood conveyed by setting, streetscape, and rhythm, and elements including materials, craftsmanship, doors, windows, composition, roofline, and finishes.

Clapboard - a siding material consisting of narrow wood boards installed horizontally with the bottom edge overlapping the board below.

Column - a vertical support; in classical architecture, a usually cylindrical support, consisting of a base, shaft, and capital.

Compatible - alterations and new construction in historic districts without adverse effect on the historic character. Elements to consider are massing, size, scale, design, materials, and details.

Composition - in design, the arrangement of elements in relation to one another, generally according to a predetermined set of standards or conventions.

Cornice - a decorated, projecting linear element placed along the top of a building's facade or atop a section of the facade to divide it visually from other sections.

Demolition by Neglect - the willful or negligent failure to provide ordinary and necessary maintenance and/or repair a building or structure, which leads to severe disrepair, resulting in stability and structure removal.

Display window - the main areas of clear glass on a storefront behind which goods are arranged; usually of polished plate glass.

Dormer - a minor projection on a pitched roof, usually containing a window on its front face.

Eave - the lower edge of a roof slope that intersects and/or overhangs the exterior wall.

Facade - the front, or principal, exterior face of a building; may refer to other prominent exterior faces as well.

Feasible / Feasibility - the possibility for a solution or approach to be done in an attainable way, which may be influenced by the reasonable availability of the preferred material, the skill required to execute the preferred approach, and the quality, appearance, and character of alternative solutions.

Flashing - sheet metal used to prevent water infiltration at roof slope intersections or where roofs intersect vertical surfaces (valleys, hips, chimneys, eaves)

Frieze - a decorative, horizontal band set just below the cornice.

Gable - the upper area of the end wall of a building that is located between the roof slopes (from cornice/eave to ridge), typically triangular in shape.

Glazing - windows set in frames as part of a building.

Grandfathered - refers to an existing and nonconforming alteration that existed prior to the designation of the historic district.

Hip Roof - a roof where all sides slope between the ridge and eaves (includes no gable ends).

Historic - refers to elements, features, or structures that have been in place for a significant period of time and are original or compatible with the building style.

Historic District Ordinance - local laws that regulate the alteration, demolition, or construction of buildings within designated historic districts. These ordinances aim to maintain the historic character and integrity of a district by ensuring that any changes or new developments are sensitive to the existing architectural and cultural significance.

Hyphen - a minor volume that connects two larger volumes, sometimes recommended for connecting historic buildings with additions to provide physical and visual separation.

Infill - new construction located within an existing, historic context.

In-Kind - the replacement of an element with a new element of the same material, color, texture, shape, and form as the original.

Integrity - the ability of a property to convey its significance through its physical features or characteristics.

Lintel - a structural member above a storefront that supports the upper wall.

Lite - a piece of glass located within a window separated by mullions.

Marquee - a sheltering roof over an entry supported by the wall from which it projects rather than by piers or columns.

Masonry - materials such as stone, brick, and adobe used for facing or structural support.

Massing - the distribution of a building's volume through three-dimensional forms to create its overall shape, size, and height.

Mortar joint - the space between bricks, concrete blocks, or glass blocks, that are filled with mortar or grout.

Muntin - a narrow strip that separates the lites within a window sash.

New Construction - an independent structure that is built on a parcel and is not connected or attached to an existing structure.

Original - refers to elements or features that date to the period of initial construction of a structure.

Parapet - a low, solid, protective wall or railing along the edge of a roof or balcony, often used to obscure a low-pitched roof.

Pier - a vertical structural support of a building, usually rectangular.

Pilaster - a narrowly protruding column attached to a wall, giving the illusion of a real free standing support column.

Proportion - the relationships of the size, shape, and location of one building element to the other elements or the whole building.

Public Way - the surface, the air above the surface, and the area below the surface within any public right-of-way and any street, highway, lane, path, alley, sidewalk, boulevard, drive, bridge, tunnel, park, parkway, lane, square, viaduct, waterway, or other public right-of-way including public utility easements or rights-of-way in which the City has jurisdiction.

Recessed entry - an entrance door which is set back from the main facade of the building.

Rehabilitation - refers to the process of returning a building(s) to a state of utility, through repair or alteration, which makes a use possible while preserving those portions and features of the building and its site and environment which are significant to its historic, architectural, and cultural values.

Repointing - the process of renewing the pointing, which is the external part of mortar joints, in masonry construction.

Ridge - the location where two roof slopes meet to form a peak, generally the highest point of a roof.

Right(s)-of-way - a strip of land acquired by reservation, dedication, prescription, or condemnation and intended to be occupied by a road, crosswalk, railroad, utility service; and/or the surface and space above and below any real property in which the City has an interest in law or equity, including, but not limited to any public street, boulevard, road, highway, freeway, lane, alley, court, sidewalk, parkway, swale, river, tunnel, viaduct, bridge, park, or any other place, area, or real property, other than real property owned in fee by the City.

C.2 FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Setback - the dimension from a property line to a building edge or location of an accessory structure. Setbacks are regulated by zoning ordinances.

Architectural setback - an architectural device in which the upper stories of a tall building are stepped back from the lower stories.

Building setback - the distance that a house or structure must be from the front, side, and rear property lines.

Storefront - the front exterior wall of a commercial space, typically with large area of glass.

Surround/casing - an ornamental device used to enframe all or part of a window or other opening in a wall.

Terra cotta - enriched clay, cast into blocks of almost any form and usually glazed; used extensively in the late 19th and early 20th centuries for wall cladding and decorative elements.

Transom - a window element, usually horizontal, above an entrance door or a larger window.

Vernacular - a design that is native to a region rather than a specific architectural style. These designs typically have more simplistic details and utilize local materials and forms that respond to local climate.

What do the Design Guidelines provide standards for?

The Design Guidelines cover multiple building features, with guidelines for roofs, windows, doors, masonry, utility and communication equipment, signs, and site features (such as fences).

Are the Design Guidelines voluntary or mandatory?

While the Design Guidelines are not an ordinance or law, the more that property owners in the Local Historic District follow the guidelines, the greater the chance that the HRC will issue a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA).

In addition, following the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation, upon which these Design Guidelines are based, is necessary to receive federal and state tax credits for improvements to historic buildings.

What does "rehabilitation" mean?

Rehabilitation is the process of making repairs, alterations, or additions to a structure while preserving those portions or features that convey the structure's historical, cultural, or architectural values. This document provides guidelines for rehabilitation of existing buildings and construction of new additions and buildings. In contrast to the concepts of preservation and restoration, rehabilitation allows for alterations and construction of new additions as well as for the replacement of extensively deteriorated, damaged, or missing features using in-kind or otherwise compatible substitute materials.

Do the Design Guidelines apply to non-historic buildings and new construction?

Yes, new construction and alterations to newer buildings that are visible from a public street are required to be reviewed by the HRC. Any relevant sections of the Design Guidelines that apply to such buildings will be referenced during HRC review. While non-historic buildings and new construction will not possess the architectural features that contribute to historic integrity or to the Local Historic District, they still have impacts on their block and on the Local Historic District as a whole. These are considerations that will go into the determination of approval for a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) from HRC. As long as a building is located within the boundaries of the Local Historic District, HRC review is required.

What is the difference between the Design Guidelines and the City's zoning ordinance?

Guidelines are different than regulations, ordinances, or zoning policies, as they do not dictate specific requirements or solutions. Instead, Design Guidelines are intended to provide guidance on how to evaluate options and make informed decisions about a variety of design issues, including materials and construction methods.

Will I be forced to restore my property with the Design Guidelines?

The Design Guidelines do not force property owners to restore their buildings to an historical standard or appearance. Previous alterations that exist may be retained, but if property owners wish to perform exterior repairs, alterations, new construction, or demolition, they must submit a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) application for review and approval. Preservation of the existing historic or original fabric is the preferred course of action. If previous unsympathetic alterations have been made, property owners should consider the quality of design, materials, and workmanship when considering whether to retain these alterations. Property owners will not be required to restore or undo unsympathetic changes made previously, but all new exterior work will be required to be in compliance with the Design Guidelines in order to receive a COA. Only a code violation cited by City of Pittsburgh Department of Permits, Licenses, and Inspections can require work.

If I renovate my historic building, do I need to make it accessible?

Historic buildings are generally not exempt from compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Like all buildings (other than residential dwellings without an elevator and fewer than four dwelling units), historic buildings are required to make reasonable efforts to ensure accessibility to the greatest extent possible. However, if full compliance with the [ADA Standards for Accessible Design](#) is not feasible without comprising or destroying the building's historical significance, the building may be eligible to meet alternative minimum standards.

To determine eligibility for alternative minimum standards, building owners must contact the Pennsylvania State Historic Preservation Office (PA SHPO), who can provide guidance on feasible accessibility solutions. Contact the [PA SHPO's Western Region Community Preservation Coordinator](#).

Note that exemptions from the ADA apply only to alterations of historic buildings. New additions or construction must fully comply with the ADA as well as any other codes and regulations required by relevant jurisdictions and authorities.