Mexican War Streets Historic District Design Guidelines Update

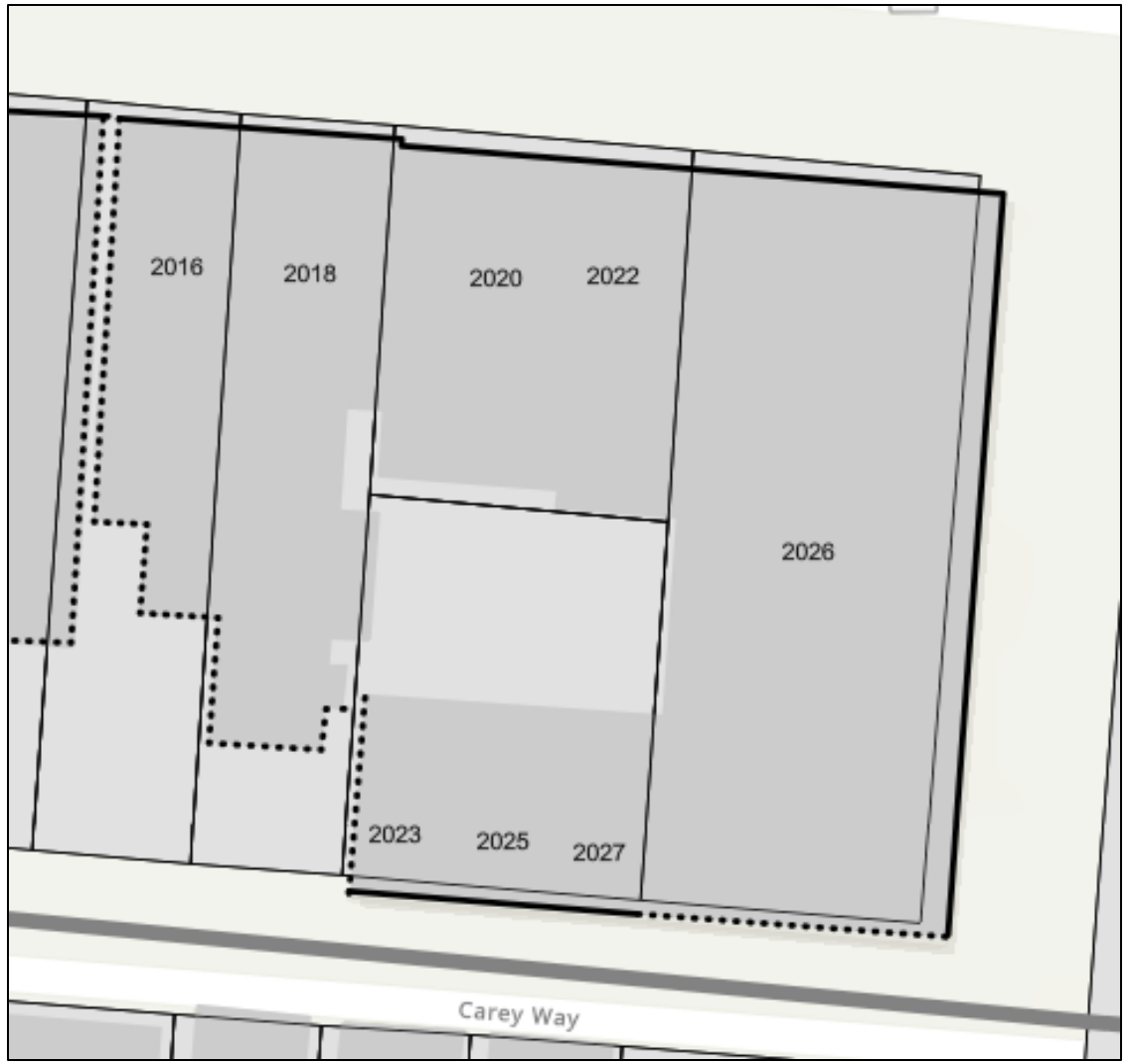
Allegheny City Central Association
Development Activities Meeting
October 2026

What Has Changed?

Current	Proposed
Exact original materials only	Flexible modern materials
Strict rules for all elevations	Focus on most important facades
Lack of clarity on modern systems	Allow compatible modern home upgrades in thoughtful locations
Solar panels highly limited	Solar panels allowed in more situations
Solid wood windows only	Alternate materials permitted
Text-heavy	More graphics and examples
Lack of guidance on new construction	Clear assistance for infill buildings
Focus on equitable and accessible preservation practices and practical solutions.	

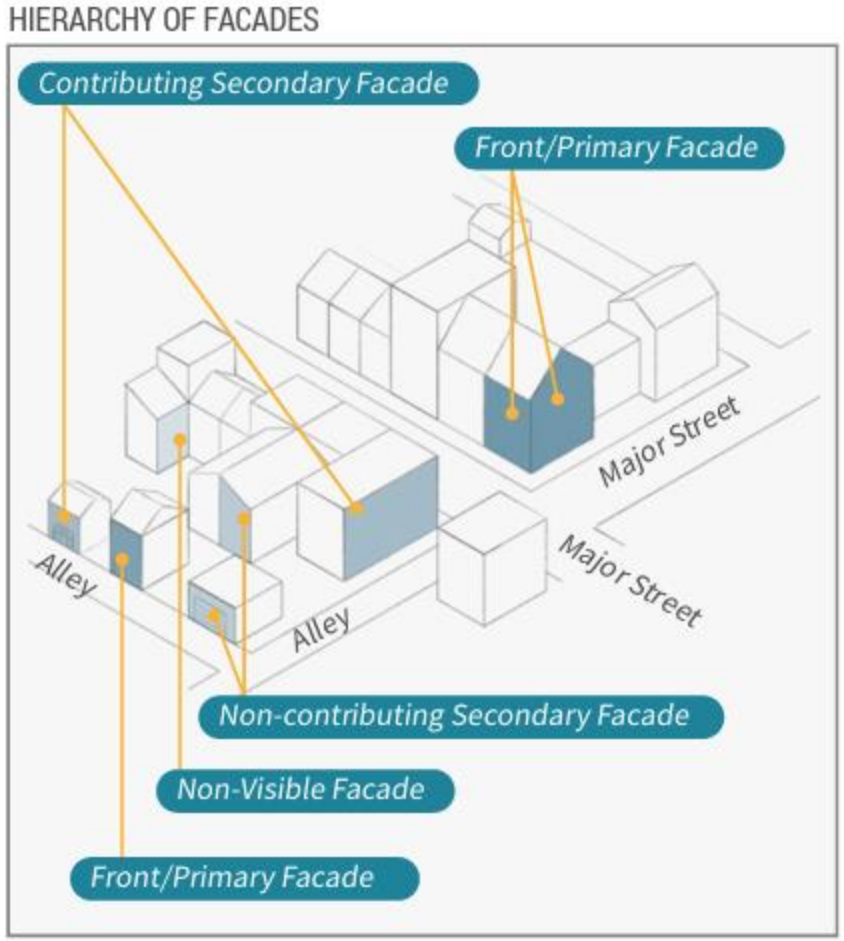
Hierarchy of Facades

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.



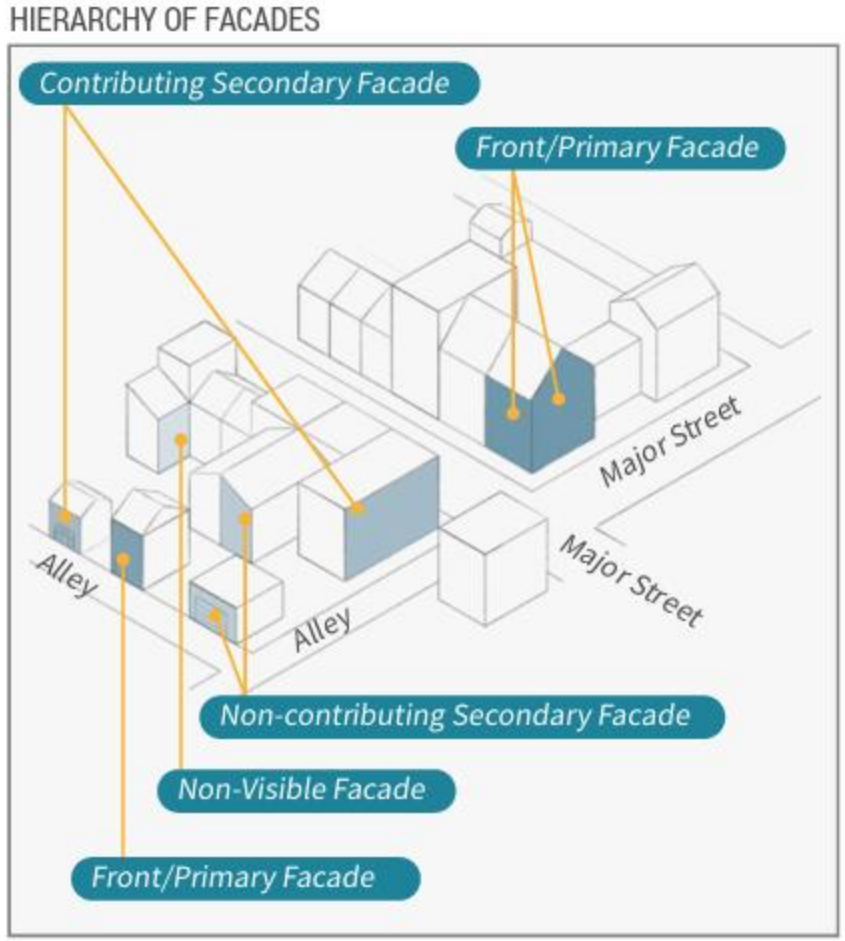
Primary Facades

A front/primary façade is the building face most visible from and facing a public street. It contains the main entrance to the building and typically has the most character-defining architectural features. Primary facades include sides of corner buildings that do not contain the main entrance but are visible from a major public street. The HRC reviews new construction, exterior alterations, and alternative materials on primary facades.



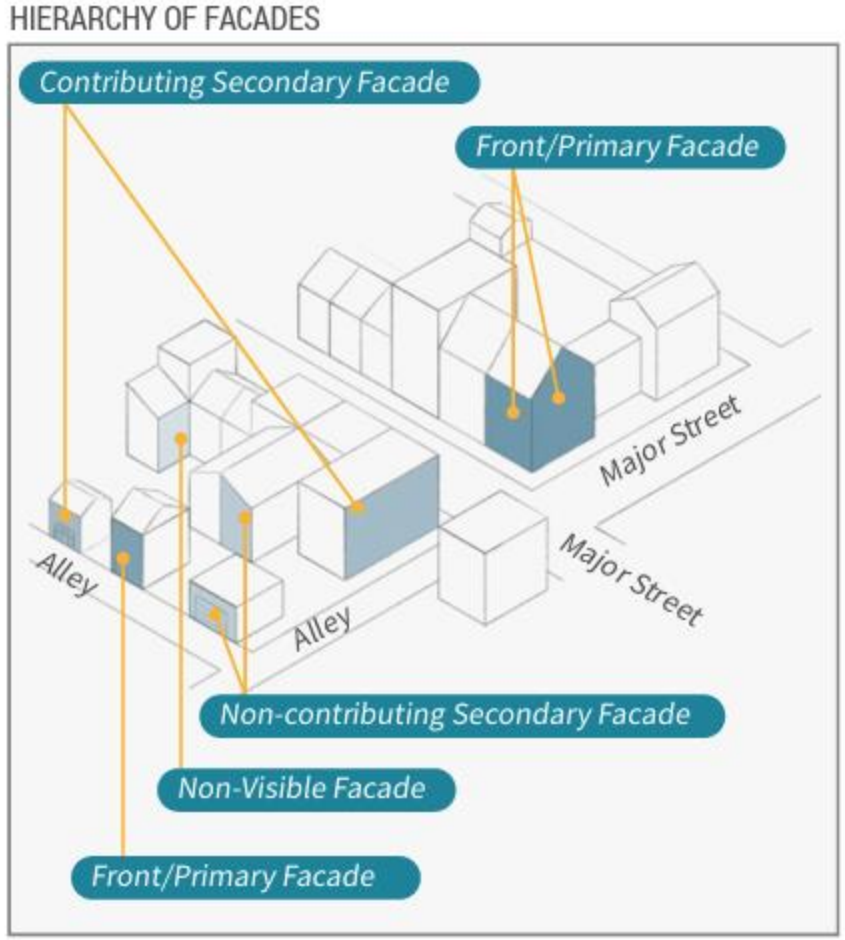
Contributing Secondary Facades

Contributing secondary façades are those that are visible from the public street but are not on the front of the building. 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 carriage houses and historicera garages. Contributing secondary façades often contain characterdefining architectural features. The HRC reviews new construction, exterior alterations, and alternative materials on contributing secondary façades.



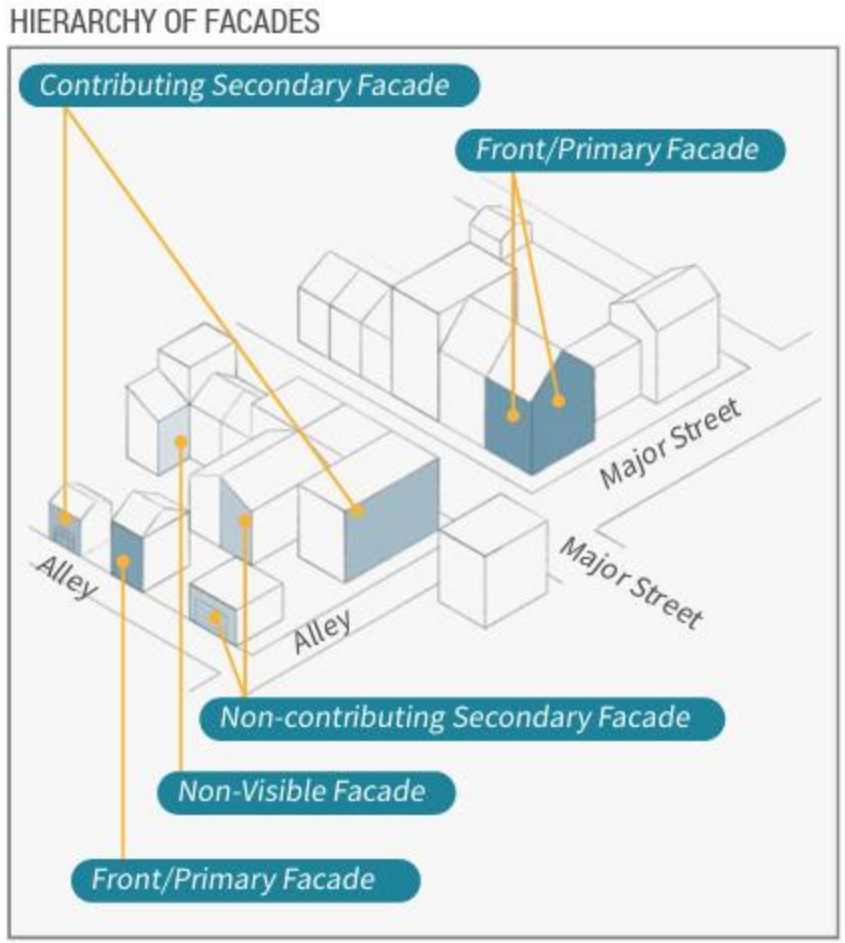
Non-Contributing Secondary Facades

Non-contributing 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. The HRC reviews new construction on noncontributing secondary façades. Exterior alterations and alternative materials are reviewed administratively.



Non-Visible Facades

A non-visible façade is one that cannot be seen from the public right-of-way and is not reviewed by the HRC. New construction, exterior alterations, and alternative materials are reviewed administratively.



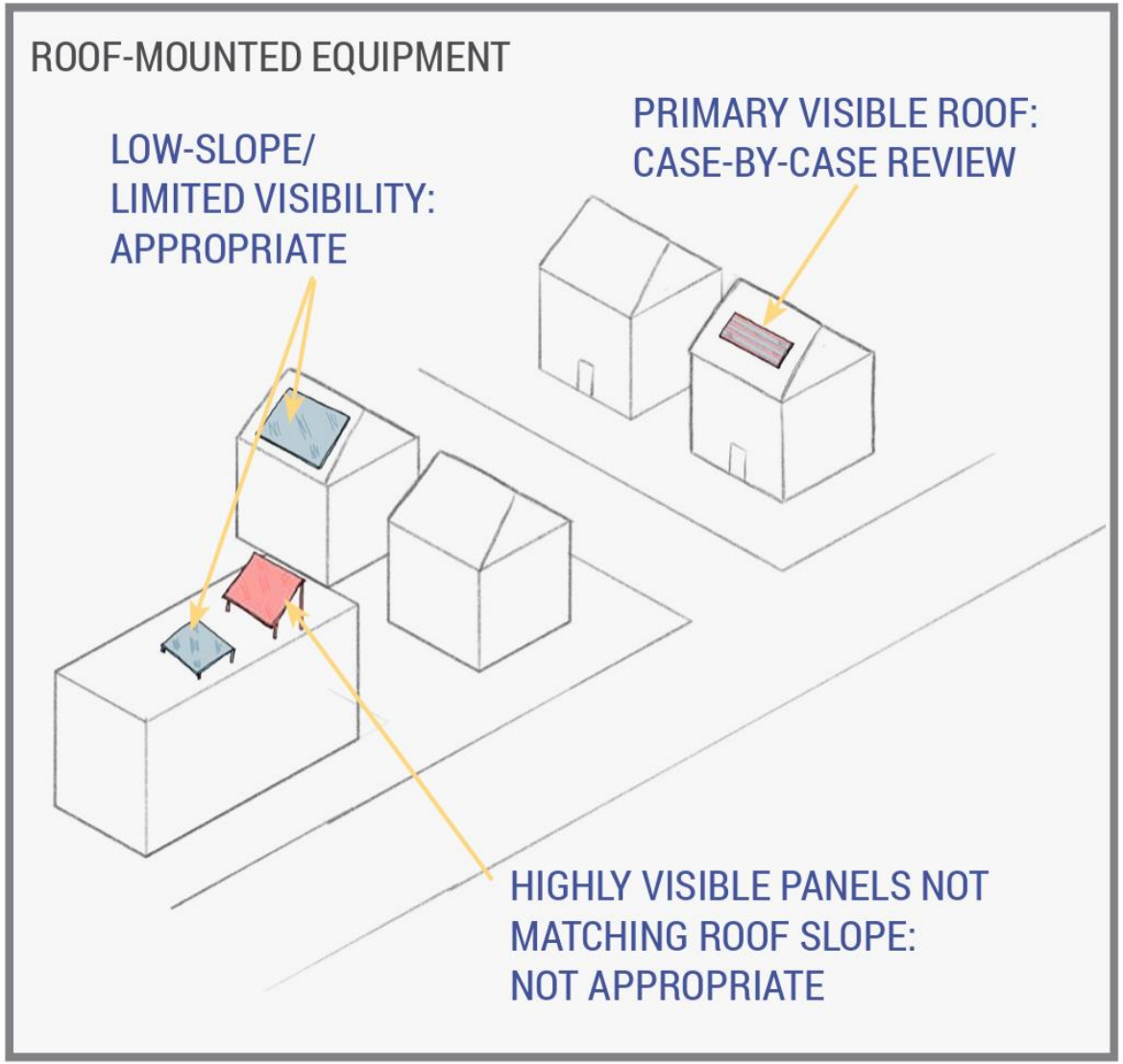
Alternate Materials

Current	Proposed
Degraded details must be replaced with original materials.	Durable modern substitutes that have a similar appearance are permissible. Smooth fiber cement, composite wood, cellular PVC. Focus on the appearance and strength, not on original material.

Solar Panels

- Check the roof material
- Keep them flat
- Make it reversible
- Keep the layout neat
- Hide them when possible

3.6.7 Typically, solar devices are appropriate on **non-visible or non-contributing** roof slopes that are minimally visible from the public right-of-way. The HRC will review all proposals for solar devices on front-facing roof slopes.



Windows

- Repair is still preferred to replacement
- Focus on character-defining windows
- Modern materials with the same window size and profile are allowed
- Vinyl is prohibited on primary facades

New Construction

- "Compatible but distinct"
- New construction should fit the general "mass and scale" of the block. It should be roughly the same height, width, and distance from the sidewalk as the houses next to it.
- Durable contemporary materials are permissible alongside traditional brick.
- Instead of copying ornate trim and details, new homes should use clean, simplified versions of traditional features.

MWS vs. MWS Expansion

- MWS Expansion guidelines were completed with last round of design guidelines
- Will be implemented when MWS is implemented
- Community feedback gathered on differences between the two districts
- Changes that were made in MWS that were not present in MWS Expansion will be added and approved by HRC so that the guidelines are the same

Using the New Guidelines

- Consult the Hierarchy of Facades to determine level of review needed
- Explore the Design Guidelines for the type of work you will be doing
- When possible, consider repairing before replacing
- Talk to City Planning Staff. They are there to help!
- Apply for your Certificate of Appropriateness

Questions and Comments?



Thank You!

WE APPRECIATE YOUR TIME