

**VI. Design Guidelines Part III:  
Specific Elements**

## DESIGN GUIDELINES PART III: SPECIFIC ELEMENTS

### Doors

Doors and door openings are an important character defining feature of any property. The size, scale, placement and architectural detailing of and around a door, or doors, contribute greatly to the pattern and rhythm of a building's façade. Doors also tend to be subjected to a great deal of weathering depending upon the direction the door is facing. The main entry is typically a focal point on a façade and where one looks for clues about a building's architectural style. Paneled wood exterior doors and wood doors with fixed panes are typical throughout the Topsham districts. Entries with paired or double doors are also common in the districts.

1. Every reasonable effort shall be made to repair the original door and door opening. Repairs should be made with as little intervention as possible by patching, piecing-in, splicing, consolidating or otherwise reinforcing the deteriorating material using the same material as the existing door.
2. Entry pediments should be maintained and preserved.
3. Photographically document the door and any other related features prior to any repair or rehabilitation work.
4. If it is necessary to replace any section of a door or a door surround, the replacement shall be made from the same material as the original and should match the original in size, scale, shape, and detail. Any details such as paneling, glazing pattern, and door surround molding shall be duplicated in the replacement. In the event that it is not possible to match the material, a compatible substitute material is acceptable.
5. The design for a new door shall be compatible with other doors on the property and/or with adjacent properties. A new door shall be made from the same material as the original. In the event that it is not possible to match the material, a compatible substitute material is acceptable.

6. Original door openings shall not be altered to accommodate stock doors.
7. If a door has any decorative windows such as sidelights, fanlights or transoms, these shall be maintained and preserved.
8. Storm doors shall be compatible with the existing door in material and color. Storm doors shall be mounted so that they will not permanently damage the original door surround and trim. Storm doors should be designed in such a way that they do not completely obscure the historic door.
9. It is not appropriate to alter the character of an entrance by either removing or adding historic elements that never existed on the property.
10. It is not appropriate to replace paired or double doors with a single door.
11. It is not appropriate to add entrance vestibules or porches on the primary facade where there is no historic precedent for such an architectural feature existing on a building.



This is an appropriate storm door installation because the storm obscures only a small part of the entry door.

There are several houses in the historic districts that have paired or double doors.



## Outbuildings (Garage, Carriage House, Storage Building)

Garages and carriage houses are important structures in Topsham's historic districts. Topsham has a range of building forms including freestanding single and double bay garages, attached carriage houses, freestanding barns and small storage buildings. In many cases, these buildings are visible from the street and echo the details of the main building on the property.

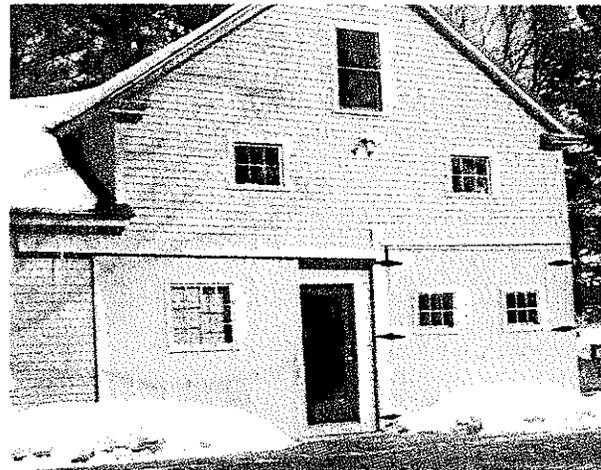


This attached carriage barn is an excellent example of the level of architectural detail that can be found on an outbuilding. Note the use of brackets as a "support" of the bay and the elliptical window.

Doors, roof elements, windows and exterior wall surface are some of the character defining elements on outbuildings. In Topsham, many of the doors are paneled with a single row of glass panes. In some cases these doors function by swinging open or sliding on a track. It is important to maintain the existing functionality of exterior doors. Topsham has many instances where outbuildings have taken on a new use as living quarters. In these cases, the character defining features shall be maintained. Alterations to an outbuilding should be reviewed using the same standards one would apply to a primary structure. (See Design Guidelines Part 1: Standards for Rehabilitation.)

1. Existing outbuildings shall be maintained and preserved.
2. Every effort shall be made to repair the existing outbuilding and any character defining architectural features of the building. Repairs should be made with as little intervention as possible by patching, piecing-in, splicing, consolidating or otherwise reinforcing the deteriorating material using the same material as the existing structure.

3. Photographically document the outbuildings and any other related features prior to any repair or rehabilitation work.
4. If it is necessary to replace any element of an outbuilding, the replacement shall be made from the same material as the original and should match the original in size, scale, shape, and detail. In the event that it is not possible to match the material, a compatible substitute material is acceptable.
5. Double and triple width garage doors are not appropriate. New garage doors should utilize the existing opening(s) and should be not be a smooth surface.
6. Every reasonable effort should be made to preserve the existing functionality of a door on an outbuilding.
7. If constructing a new outbuilding, the structure shall be compatible with the existing primary structure in materials, building and roof form, and detailing. The design for a new outbuilding shall be compatible with the primary structure, but it should be clear that it is not from the same time period as the primary structure.
8. Any new or temporary outbuilding should be located behind the primary structure and shall be compatible with the location of adjacent outbuildings.



This is an excellent example of introducing a new opening and yet maintaining the historic context. The integrity of the historic sliding barn door is maintained even though a new opening has been added.

## Porch

A porch often marks the main entrance to a house and it serves as a transition from the street to the building's interior. There is ample opportunity for architectural expression on porches with details such as columns, pilasters, decorative brackets, railings, and balustrades.

Porches are found in various locations on a building and one building may have several porches. The steps and railings leading up to a porch are an equally important exterior feature. There are several properties in the Topsham historic districts that have porches. There are a mix of porch configurations in Topsham including the following:

- one-story attached entry porch
- one-story attached wrap around porch
- one-story attached porch that span the full width of the front façade
- one-story attached side porch.



Attached side porches like this one are found on several houses in the historic districts.

The majority of Federal and Greek Revival style houses in Topsham do not have entry porches. There are several properties where a small pediment was added to the main entry during the mid-late 1800s.

1. Existing porches and their character defining elements shall be maintained and preserved.
2. Every reasonable effort should be made to repair the existing porch and any character defining architectural features of the porch (brackets, columns, balustrade or railing, flooring, ceiling, roof, and steps). Repairs should be made with as little intervention as possible by patching, piecing-in, splicing, consolidating, or otherwise reinforcing

the deteriorating material using the same material as the existing porch.

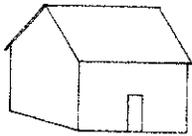
3. Photographically document the porch and any other related features prior to any repair or rehabilitation work.
4. If it is necessary to replace any element of a porch, the replacement shall be made from the same material as the existing porch and should match the historic feature in size, scale, shape, and detail. In the event that it is not possible to match the material, a compatible substitute material is acceptable.
5. It is not appropriate to cover porch elements with vinyl or aluminum siding.
6. It is not appropriate to enclose an existing porch on the primary building façade.
7. It is not appropriate to replace historic stone steps. In many instances, resetting stone steps and repointing can solve many related problems.
8. Screens may be added to a porch if they can be attached in such a manner that will not cause damage to historic fabric and the modification is completely reversible.
9. It is not appropriate to add a porch or deck where there is no evidence to suggest that one ever existed.
10. It is not appropriate to add ornamentation to a porch that is not appropriate to the stylistic period of the house.
11. It is not appropriate to add decks, glass enclosed rooms, or sun porches where they will be visible from the public way.

Here the side porch columns have been replaced with modern metal supports. This change in material and form is not a compatible replacement.

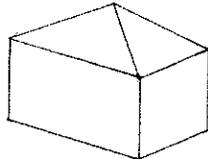


## Roof

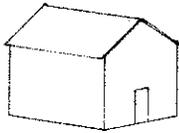
A roof is an extremely important character defining element of a building. There are several different aspects of a roof to consider: 1) overall shape of a roof, such as hipped, gambrel and gable; 2) decorative features, such as cresting, dormers, cupolas, and chimneys; and 3) roofing material such as slate, wood and metal, as well as the material size, color, and patterning.



Side gable roof.



Hipped roof.

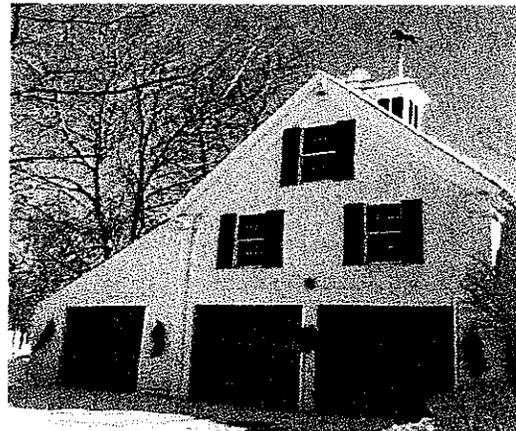


End gable roof.

The predominant roof forms in Topsham are gable and hipped. Metal and asphalt shingles are the predominant roofing materials. Shed roofs on rear facades and flat roofs on porches are also not uncommon.

1. The shape, pitch, overhang and material of a historic roof shall be maintained and preserved.
2. Any character defining elements of the roof (cupolas, vents, and dormers, etc.) shall be maintained and preserved.
3. Every reasonable effort should be made to repair the existing roof. The materials used to repair the roof shall match the existing roof in color, material and configuration. If a substitute material is necessary, it should match the existing roof material in color and configuration.
4. If replacing an entire roof, the replacement material may revert back to an original material if historic documentation is available. For example, if removing an asphalt roof and early photographs clearly show a metal roof, then it would be acceptable to revert to a metal roof.

5. Photographically document the roof and any other related features prior to any repair or rehabilitation work.
6. If replacing a metal roof, the proportion of the seams and trim shall match the original. Generally, it is not appropriate to substitute a commercial-grade architectural metal on a residential structure where there is no evidence that one existed originally.
7. It is not appropriate to destroy historic detail when installing replacement gutters.
8. It is not appropriate to attach elements to the roof such as antennae, skylights, vents, and decks on front elevations or areas that are visible from the public way.



The carriage barn has an end gable roof adorned with a cupola that has a weathervane. Also, note that a shed roof marks a later addition on the left side of the building. All of these elements are important character defining features.



Metal roofs are common on many houses in the historic districts.

## Exterior Walls and Trim

The materials used on the exterior of a building have a dramatic impact on the character of the building. The exterior material contributes to the scale of the building and the rhythm of the facade. Wood clapboard is the predominant exterior material in Topsham. Wood shingles of various configurations are also used in Topsham, particularly on some of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century buildings. Some studies have shown that painting is a better value than applying vinyl siding in both up-front costs and over the life of the product. For more information on painting see the Resources section in the Appendix.

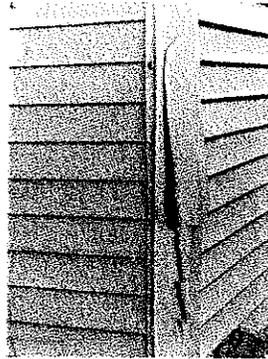
Aluminum or vinyl siding may seem like an acceptable substitute material, but it is not appropriate to use in the historic districts for several reasons. The installation of aluminum or vinyl siding often results in damage to or obstruction of historic detail. The loss of detail can be significant when door and window surrounds, cornices and pilasters are covered. The whole character of a house is altered which diminishes the historic character of a district. In addition, covering up or removing wood clapboards or shingles diminishes the historic integrity of a building.

The application of aluminum or vinyl siding over clapboards can also trap and conceal moisture and insect problems, which may result in extensive damage to a structure. In addition siding can be dented and cracked, which once damaged it loses any semblance to the material it was attempting to simulate. Therefore, aluminum or vinyl siding is not appropriate in the historic district.

1. Historic exterior wall surface and trim should be maintained and preserved.
2. Every effort should be made to repair the original clapboards and trim. The repair shall be made with the same kind of materials as the existing clapboards and trim.
3. It is not appropriate to cover up historic trim.
4. Photographically document the exterior wall surface and any other related features prior to any repair or rehabilitation work.

5. If replacement of historic wall surface and trim is necessary, then the materials used for repair should match the existing in color, material and

configuration. If a substitute material is necessary, it should match the existing wall material in color and configuration



Vinyl or aluminum siding can be damaged. The damage shown in the picture to the left allows moisture into the building thus creating more building problems which will not be immediately visible until extensive damage has been done.

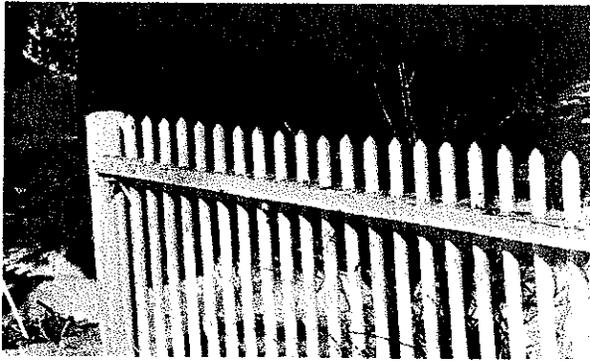


Wood clapboards are the typical exterior wall treatment in Topsham.

## Site

The term "site" includes several different elements. Site features include fences, walls, lighting, driveways, off-street parking, and landscape features. Every reasonable effort should be made to preserve and maintain historic site features. Topsham has several examples of granite retaining walls that mark the grade change between the front yard and the sidewalk.

Wooden front and side yard fences, of which a few exist in the historic districts, are important character defining features. Since fences sustain a great deal of wear and tear, it is unlikely that any original fencing survives. Property owners can look to historic photographs to determine if their property had fencing and, if so, the design and scale of the fence. Front, side, and rear yard fences should be compatible in material, design, detail, and size to other historic fences in the district and to the materials of the primary structure on the property. Wood and granite are the most prominent fence and wall materials in the district.



Wooden fences are an important site defining feature.

Driveways and their entrances establish a rhythm along the street and should be maintained. Topsham has several properties where adjoining lots share a driveway. In almost all cases, the driveway leads to parking along the side of the house or in the rear where there may be a garage or outbuilding.

The location of parking areas is an important issue particularly when considering a new use for a property. For example, if a house is going to be converted for use as an office, the placement of the parking area should be carefully considered. Landscape features such as hedges, terraces, and mature trees are also character defining elements.

1. Any new building shall be setback from the street a minimum of five (5) feet or according to zoning code.
2. A new building should be compatible with the setback of adjacent properties.
3. When considering the siting of an addition, it should be placed where it will have the least impact on the primary façade. The placement of the addition should be compatible with other properties in the district that have historic additions.
4. Distinctive landscape features such as terraces, mature trees, and hedges shall be maintained and preserved.
5. Concrete block is not an appropriate material for retaining walls and steps.
6. Stock precast concrete is not appropriate material for steps.
7. Every reasonable effort should be made to preserve and maintain the historic fences and features such as retaining walls.
8. If replacement of a section of fence is necessary, the replacement section should replicate the existing sections in material, height, and detail. Wood is the predominant fencing material in Topsham.
9. If it necessary to replace a large section of fence or an entire fence, the replacement section should match the historic fence in material, height, and overall design.
10. Chain link is not an appropriate fencing material for any areas that are visible from a public way.
11. It is not appropriate to install fencing in the front-yard where there is no historic precedent.
12. Parking areas should be located to the side or rear of the primary building.
13. Dumpsters or other large trash receptacles should be located to the side or rear of the property and, if necessary, screened using materials that are in keeping with the primary structure. Vegetative screening is not recommended.

## Storefront

The majority of the surviving storefronts in Topsham are located in the Lower Main Street Historic District. Many of these buildings have seen great change through the years. However, the characteristic elements of a storefront are still intact in some cases. Large, clear display windows, recessed entry, sign panel, piers or pilasters, bulkhead, cornice and transom windows are the traditional defining elements of a storefront.

Storefronts are often subject to a lot of cosmetic change over the years. It is important to recognize that a later alteration may be historic in its own right. The majority of the storefronts in Topsham have been carved out of structures that may have originally been used primarily for residential purposes. However, any surviving evidence of the earliest transformations into storefronts is important to preserve.

1. Every reasonable effort shall be made to repair the existing storefront and its character defining elements. Repairs should be made with as little intervention as possible by patching, piecing-in, splicing, consolidating or otherwise reinforcing the deteriorating material using the same material as the existing storefront.
2. Photographically document the storefront and any other related features prior to any repair or rehabilitation work.
3. If it is necessary to replace any section of the storefront, the replacement shall be made from the same material as the original and should match the original in size, scale, shape, and detail. Any details such as display windows, sign band, cornice, piers or pilasters and entry shall match the original element. In the event that it is not possible to match the material, a compatible substitute material is acceptable.
4. Use historical information as a resource when designing a new storefront where one is missing.
5. The design for a new storefront shall be compatible with other historic storefronts in the district.
6. It is not appropriate to alter the character of a storefront by either removing or adding historic elements that never existed on the property.

7. It is not appropriate to reorient or relocate the main entrance to a store.
8. Infill of storefront openings is not appropriate. Large display windows are a defining characteristic of a storefront.



The rhythm of storefront windows and openings contributes to the character of the village streetscape.



Storefronts such as these along lower Main Street have been greatly altered through the years. In some cases, historic details may survive beneath the aluminum or vinyl siding.

## Streetscape

The relationship between buildings, their setting, and landscape features helps to define the character of a historic neighborhood. Sidewalks, street light fixtures, fences, granite walls, pillars, trees, and setback from the street all impact the character of a neighborhood. The sidewalk paving material, the placement of trees, curbing material, and open spaces (parks, cemeteries, and fair grounds) should be taken into account when looking at the context of a historic property.

The street trees along certain roads are very important streetscape features and should be maintained. Trees have a dramatic impact on the scale and character of a town. In Topsham, brick sidewalks survive on a few streets and thus are an appropriate material for the streetscape.

1. The relationship between buildings and streetscape features shall be maintained and preserved.
2. Every reasonable effort shall be made to maintain the relationship between the building and the streetscape elements when making an alteration to an existing building.
3. A new structure shall maintain the relationship between the streetscape and buildings established by adjacent properties. If there is variation in the setback within a district, then the location of previously existing structures on the site should guide the placement of a new building.
4. Street trees should be maintained wherever possible. Review historic photographs to determine type and placement of trees. Consult with an arborist to determine appropriate tree species.
5. Historic paving materials such as granite and brick should be maintained and preserved.
6. If replacement of the paving material is necessary, then every reasonable effort shall be made to use historically appropriate materials and match the historic material.
7. Landscape features such as hedges, terraces, and slopes shall be maintained and preserved.



Topsham's streetscapes are defined by sidewalks, trees, fences, and the various building setbacks from the street.

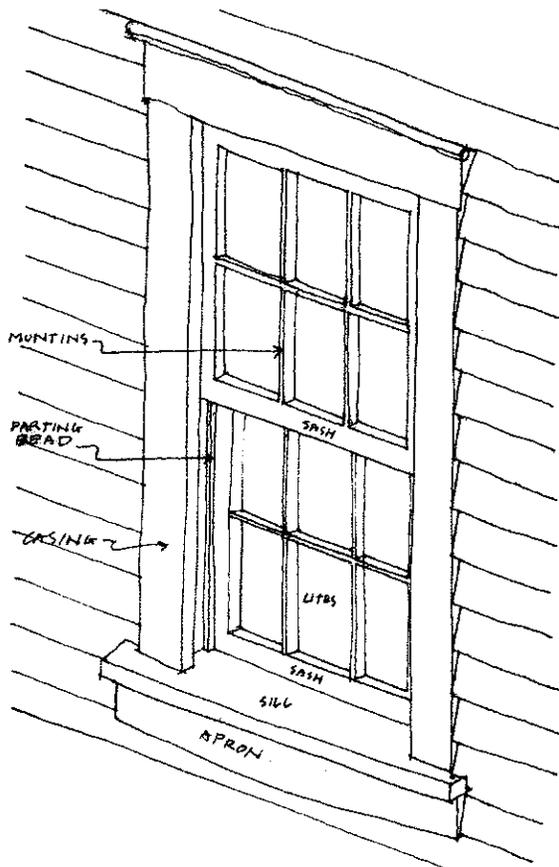


Dramatic landscape features like this alley of trees are vital to defining the relationship of this particular house to the street.

## Windows

Windows are an important character defining feature on any historic property. The size, scale, placement and architectural detailing around windows contribute greatly to the pattern and rhythm of a building's façade. Windows, like doors, tend to be subjected to a great deal of weathering depending upon the orientation of the building. Every reasonable effort should be made to maintain and preserve a property's historic windows.

Original materials are often a better grade than what is available economically today, and they have proven their longevity. The destruction of a perfectly good original window in the name of energy efficiency is a misnomer, as it doesn't consider the larger question of the cost of human and oil energy to manufacture the original and the new replacement. In addition, the mechanisms and hardware in older windows are generally of a better quality than the hardware on new windows.



The parts of a window.

## Repair and Rehabilitation

The standard argument for replacement windows is that "the old windows are drafty," yet the heat loss attributed to old windows occurs more often through parts that have loosened over time rather than through the glass itself. Generally windows can be restored to good working condition with the application of weatherstripping, recaulking the glass, and replacing minor pieces.

Another consideration for air infiltration is the use of storm windows. Storm windows may be used on the exterior or the interior of a property. Although they may compromise the visual appearance of a building's exterior, storm windows are not permanent and may be removed in the future without permanently altering the historic building. Storm windows can also be painted the same color as your sash (originally often flat black) and almost disappear in their unsightliness.



Maintaining or replicating the original exterior wooden storms is an appropriate design solution for older windows. The storms should match the configuration of the windows.

## Window Replacement

When is a window too far gone to consider rehabilitation? If replacement is necessary, some alternatives are superior to others for replacement windows in a historic house.

One rule of thumb for evaluating window conditions is that when a window sash has more than two broken parts, such as a broken tongue and groove corner joint or broken muntins, it is time to consider replacement. Otherwise, any good woodworker can repair a sash with minor breaks. Old counterbalanced sashes are very simple in their design. Window sashes are made to be

taken apart for repair, as well as to glide easily when maintained.

So for replacement windows, the first and best option to maintain historic character is to look for a replacement in kind – a window that matches the size, material, muntin configuration, and detail of the existing window. One option is to look to local salvage yards for old sash that match the existing windows. These often will have the old wavy glass, known as cylinder glass, and will most closely replicate the original window sash in detail and species. They can be rehabilitated to make a fine replacement window. Depending on the age of the window, more likely than not the sash would have been made in New England out of eastern white pine. These windows have milled joinery and are made of solid stock, a far superior product and technique than compared to the finger joints or staples commonly available today in even the best commercial wood windows.

The other option is to work with a millwork shop to create a new in-kind wood window sash. If it is necessary to replace multiple windows the set-up cost for the muntin and sash profile knives is offset in the larger quantities. You can also explore options of double glazing each pane or light of glass. Some glass manufacturers make restoration glass, which is similar to the cylinder glass. In a few cases, contractors will go so far as to stockpile old sash to be able to salvage the old glass for reuse. This could be reused in other old sash or in new sash if the choice is made to stay with single glazing.

In some cases, commercial window manufacturers are able to take almost any of their standard products and customize them as replacement sash. They can route a pocket in the sash edge for the counterbalance sash line to fit. In some cases a double-insulated sash from one of these manufacturers can be installed in the original opening. This is ideal in that it doesn't require a carpenter to tear out the frame or do any special refurbishing of the frame (short of attaching new sash line to old counterbalances and then to the new sash). A successful replacement sash should not diminish the original opening size.

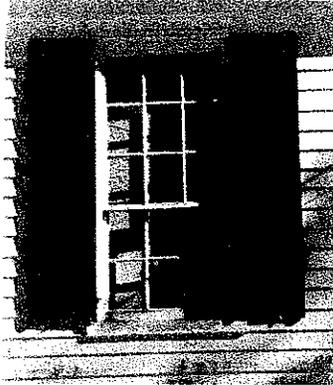
In looking for a replacement windows there are many options. Some windows achieve the objectives of maintaining historic character better than others. The cost of each is dependent on many factors. To get an accurate read on the breadth of a particular situation, it

is best to survey the condition of each window carefully. Some may need minor repair, while others will require replacement. Unless a house was severely neglected it would be unusual to find that all the windows are beyond repair. Sometimes the windows on one exposure have suffered more than others. Attic windows often hold clues as to the historic window configuration, as these windows often survive the changes of previous renovations. Although the attic windows will tell the story, they will probably be the ones requiring the most work. An accurate understanding of the condition of windows and a comprehensive approach to window repair will allow for ease of pricing out different repair options and finding the most cost effective long term solution.

The predominant window form in Topsham is wood, double-hung with multi-lights in both sash. Decorative windows like three-part windows and fanlights are also prevalent.

1. Original windows shall be maintained and preserved.
2. Every reasonable effort shall be made to repair the existing windows. Repairs should be made with as little intervention as possible by patching, piecing-in, splicing, consolidating or otherwise reinforcing the deteriorating material using the same material as the existing window.
3. If it is necessary to replace any section of a window or an entire window, the replacement should be made from the same material as the original and should match the original in size, scale, shape, and detail. Any details such as glazing pattern, and window surround molding should be duplicated in the replacement.
4. Original window openings shall not be altered to accommodate stock sizes. Snap-in muntins are not an appropriate substitute for true divided light windows.
5. Storm windows shall be attached so that existing windows and frames are not damaged. If possible, exterior storms should be painted to match the color of the existing windows. Interior storms are another option.
6. Original shutters shall be repaired and maintained.

7. If it is necessary to replace any section of a shutter, the replacement should be made from the same material as the original and should match the original in size, scale, shape and detail.
8. It is not appropriate to introduce shutters where there is no evidence that they ever existed.
9. Vinyl windows are not appropriate replacement windows.



Wood double-hung windows are typical of houses throughout the district.