

DESIGN GUIDELINES PART II – TOPSHAM STANDARDS OF EVALUATION

The numbered items in bold are drawn directly from the Historic District overlay regulations in Topsham's code. These standards apply primarily to new construction in the historic districts. For guidance about alterations to existing structures, see Part I which discusses the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation.

1. Height: The height of proposed buildings shall be compatible with adjacent buildings.

- a) Generally, the height of new construction, an addition or alteration should be at or under thirty-five (35) feet. This is consistent with the Town's zoning ordinance.
- b) There is some variation in building height within the districts. Therefore, the height of new construction, an addition or alteration shall be compatible with the height of adjacent structures.
- c) The height of a proposed addition shall be compatible with the primary structure to which it is going to be added. If adding on top of an existing building, the height of the addition shall be compatible with the adjacent structures.

2. Width: The width of proposed buildings shall be compatible with adjacent buildings and reflect the characteristic rhythm of façades along the street.

- a) The proportion (the ratio of height to width) of a new structure's facades should be compatible with the proportion of neighboring facades. The length of a building shall be compatible with adjacent buildings in the district.
- b) As with building height, there is variation in building setback within the districts. Therefore, the setback for new construction shall be consistent with adjacent properties. In some cases, it

may be necessary to take into account the setbacks of structures along both sides of an entire section of the street in order to determine an appropriate setback distance.

- c) Windows and doors, cornice lines, setbacks, porches, and bays are key building elements that establish the rhythm of the streetscape facades. Any new openings shall maintain the rhythm of existing openings and architectural features and shall be compatible in form, material, scale and detail without making the openings seem historic.
- d) The width of the existing structure shall be the guiding factor in determining the appropriate width for an addition. If adjacent structures have historic additions, then it is appropriate to look to these structures for ideas about appropriately designed additions.

3. Window proportions: The window proportions (height versus width) shall be visually compatible with those of other windows in the same building and in other adjacent historic buildings of the same period. In the case of large plate-glass display windows on the ground floor, the large surface of a glass can be divided into a number of smaller panes, consistent with storefront windows of the historical period which the building represents.

- a) Historic windows of all types including store front display windows and transoms shall be maintained and preserved.
- b) Windows in new additions, exterior alterations, or new construction shall be compatible with other openings in the same building and adjacent buildings in the district. Windows shall be compatible in form, material, scale and detail yet it should be evident that these are not original windows. Wood double-hung windows are the predominant window form in the districts.

4. Roof forms: The roof pitch, materials and colors employed on new buildings should be similar to those found on adjacent buildings.

- a) The roof shape on new additions, exterior alterations, or new construction shall be consistent with the roof form of adjacent buildings. The predominant roof forms in Topsham's historic district are side or end-gable and hipped. Additional roof elements typically found in Topsham include cupolas with windows and/or louvers, vents, dormers (shed, gable, and hipped) and roof balustrades.
- b) New buildings shall use roof materials that are compatible with materials on adjacent buildings. The predominant roof materials in Topsham's historic districts include metal and asphalt shingle.
- c) If replacement of an existing roof is necessary, reverting to original materials, if documented in historic photographs or data, is more appropriate than repairing to match existing materials and should be encouraged. Also, if a specific roofing material is associated with an architectural style, then it is appropriate to replace a roof using that material, if the existing roof requires replacement. Originally, many of the buildings in the historic districts would have had wood shingle or slate roofs.

5. Directional Expression or Mood: Alterations shall respect the directional expression of the original building and new construction shall be related harmoniously to its immediate neighbors.

- a) Any new construction shall be compatible with adjacent buildings in terms of the building's orientation or expression. This refers to whether the building's characteristic elements emphasize a vertical or horizontal direction. The overall shape of a building and the use of architectural details and openings all impact a building's directional character.

For example, a series of full height pilasters along the primary façade of a Greek Revival building would emphasize the vertical rather than the horizontal. However, a series of shop front windows in a commercial storefront would have more of a horizontal emphasis.

6. Materials and Textures: New construction should utilize materials and textures which are visually compatible with adjacent facades. If there is predominant material in the immediate area, it should be used. Alterations to an existing building should simulate as closely as possible the color and texture of that building. Mortar color and thickness of joints shall match those of the original building as much as possible.

- a) The materials used in exterior alterations should be compatible with the primary historic structure.
- b) Alterations to an existing building should use materials that are compatible with that of the existing historic building and match in color and texture. For example, if using brick or stone, the color and texture of the new brick or stone should match as closely as possible that of the original structure.
- c) Any new additions, or exterior alterations shall match the mortar in the original building in aesthetic appearance but not physical content.
- d) New construction materials should be compatible with other building materials used in the historic districts. The predominant building material in Topsham's historic districts is wood clapboards or wood shingles. The predominant foundation materials are granite and brick.

7. Details: All existing architectural details should be maintained to the fullest extent which is practicable. When removal is unavoidable, replacement with similar features shall be encouraged. Details may include cornices, frames and moldings around windows, doors and building corners, lintels, arches, wrought iron work, chimneys, etc.

- a) Every reasonable effort shall be made to maintain and preserve original architectural features by appropriate methods of caulking, cleaning, and re-coating (paint, stain etc.). See also Rehabilitation Standard No. 7.
- b) Architectural details shall be repaired whenever possible. Repairs should involve as little intervention as possible. This can be done by patching, piecing-in, splicing, consolidating, or otherwise reinforcing the existing architectural detail using the same kind of material.
- c) If it is necessary to replace an architectural feature, the replacement piece shall replicate the original in form, material, scale, and detail. A substitute material may be acceptable if the form and design and the material itself conveys the visual appearance of the remaining parts. Existing physical evidence and historic documents shall be used to replicate the missing detail.
- d) It is not appropriate to replace any architectural element that can be reasonably repaired and thus preserved.

8. Signs: In addition to the dimensional requirements for signs contained in this chapter, all new or replacement signs located within the Historic District shall be made from wood or metal and all new sign illumination shall be from shielded external sources directed onto the sign to avoid glare.

- a) It is not appropriate to introduce internally illuminated, plastic, neon or flashing signs in the districts.
- b) Sign posts on or in the ground shall utilize materials that are compatible with those materials found in the district (wood, granite and brick) and with the property where the sign is to be placed. This approach is particularly appropriate for residential scale buildings.
- c) In general, it is not appropriate to attach a sign directly to the façade of a residential property. For some commercial buildings there may be historic precedent for signage attached directly to the façade.
- d) It is not appropriate to obscure any architectural detail with a sign.
- e) A canopy or awning is appropriate in the section of the district that has commercial storefronts if there is documentary evidence that awnings were used in the history of the building.
- f) Signage on a canopy or awning should be limited in height and located only on the “flap” of the awning.
- g) A canopy or awning is appropriate on a residential property if there is documentary evidence that awnings were used in the history of the building.
- h) Except in unusual circumstances, do not drill into granite details to attach signage. Instead, drill into the mortar joint.
- i) The number of signs shall be limited to two per façade that are visible from the public way. For example, one surface applied and one parallel to façade.
- j) Redundant signs should be discouraged. Larger commercial buildings should consider single signs with directories as an alternative to multiple signs.

