

## **UNDERSTANDING YOUR BUILDING and YOUR HISTORIC DISTRICT**

Clear communication is a critical component to a successful project. It is important for property owners and Historic District Commissioners to understand each other and the terminology being used. In the case of the Historic District Commission, what is the HDC looking at? What are the character defining features of a building? Where does one begin?

This section is intended to assist property owners, builders, contractors and Historic District Commission members in understanding the fundamentals of building form and detail. In other words, how do you come up with a list of character defining features?

Before focusing specifically on your building, take a few minutes to walk around your neighborhood and get a good sense of the historic integrity and context of your historic district. Are buildings set back the same distance? Are the buildings all residential? What is the form of the buildings? How many stories? What are the dominant materials and architectural features? Outbuildings? Sidewalks? Front yard fences?

Keep in mind when looking at a building that they **do** change over time. If there are later alterations to a building, it is not appropriate to immediately assume that those changes should be removed or altered. Early photographs and newspaper articles are an excellent resource for sorting out when changes were made to a building. It may be that those later changes are just as important to preserve. The Pejepscot Historical Society is an excellent resource for historical photographs and other archival information. Also consider the historic integrity of a building. In other words, how much of the building's original or historic material is still intact?

Stand across the street and take an overall assessment of the building and its setting. At this point, do not pay attention to details, but rather "read" the building in general terms using the checklist below:

### **Form/Shape**

What is the shape of the building? Square? Rectangular? Is it a building with a series of connected additions? Garages? How many stories?

### **Roof Shape and Features**

What is the shape of the roof? Are there any dormers? Is there a cupola? How many chimneys and where are they placed? Is there a deep roof overhang? Is the ridge line of the roof parallel to the street or perpendicular?

### **Openings**

Are the windows evenly spaced across the façade? Is the door centered? How are the windows configured? Are there any unusually shaped windows? Are the windows grouped or paired?

### **Materials**

What is the exterior wall surface treatment? Is it uniform over the entire building? What is the foundation material? What is the roofing material?

### **Site**

What are the predominant site features? Mature trees? How far is the building setback from the street? Large or small front yard? Side yard? Terraces? Sidewalk? Fence or wall? Any outbuildings? How do these outbuildings relate to the primary structure?

### **Distinctive Features**

Does the building have any distinctive building elements? Turret or tower? Bay windows? Porches? Balconies? Paired doors?

Now stand in front of the building and take a closer look at the character defining features.

### **Trim and Decorative Features**

What is the treatment of the door and window surrounds? Decorative pediments above windows? Details on the cornice? Brackets? Porch columns? Shutters? Decorative details in the gable end? Railings and balustrades? Different shingle patterns? Colored glass?

Reviewing the above checklist should help identify a building's character defining elements. Use the checklist as a road map to guide alterations.