

# STRATEGIES FOR DESIGN GUIDELINES

## ***INTRODUCTION***

In 1935, Charleston, South Carolina, established the first historic preservation commission and provided for the review of all proposed construction work in the “Old and Historic District.” Today, almost 2,200 historic preservation commissions operate throughout the United States, and many of these include design review in their responsibilities. All share a common goal: To protect the historic resources of their communities. Many of these places have developed and use preservation ordinances and design guidelines in their review of proposed renovations and new construction. Design guidelines are important and provide the following:

- A basis for making decisions that are fair
- Consistency in design review
- Incentives for investment
- A tool for property value protection and enhancement
- A tool for education

### **Trends in Guidelines Use**

In recent years, many communities have asked for more protection in their historic districts, with the result that more historic preservation commissions are designating more districts and developing guidelines for them. Many of these commissions are developing guidelines in greater detail than ever before, while others are experimenting with educational and incentive programs to encourage property owners to follow their design guidelines.

However, the challenge that most commissions face is: How may one develop guidelines that will be fair and protect historic resources while also encouraging creative design solutions? Guidelines should focus on



*Design Guidelines are applied in the South Main Street Historic District in St. Charles, Missouri.*

identifying the most important features of an historic district that should be respected, while refraining from dictating design outcomes.

### **Guidelines and Their Application**

It is also important to distinguish between the “guidelines” themselves and the means by which compliance is promoted. In many cases, property owners must receive the approval of the local historic district commission prior to receiving a building permit. In others, however, commission comments are advisory only, or they are linked to an incentive. In each case, clear, effective guidelines are essential because they help convey the design policies of the community in a manner that can facilitate appropriate design approaches.

This paper describes the concept of design guidelines, the benefits of using them in a design review framework and an overview of how some communities implement design guidelines.

## WHAT ARE DESIGN GUIDELINES?

Local governments typically create preservation ordinances under local zoning regulations, within the framework of appropriate state enabling legislation. The courts have upheld this legal basis for design review, to the extent that they clearly have the right to adopt design review regulations as a part of historic preservation ordinances; they also have a *responsibility* to see that such powers are fairly and consistently administered.

Preservation ordinances and the design guidelines related to them thereby convey community policies about neighborhood design. As such, they provide a common basis for making decisions about work that may affect the appearance of individual properties or the overall character of a district. They also serve as an educational and planning tool for property owners and their design professionals who seek to make improvements that may affect historic resources.

Design guidelines typically address the following categories of work:

- **Rehabilitation and alterations to historic buildings:**

These may be individually designated historic structures or they may be properties designated as “contributing” in a locally defined historic district. Alterations to the exterior of a historic building, including construction of an addition, are subject to review.



*Winter & Company developed design guidelines for the Old Town Historic District in Wichita, Kansas.*

- **Alterations to “non-contributing” structures in historic districts:**

These are properties that may be old but have lost their integrity as historic structures, or they may be newer buildings that have not achieved historic significance. In general, the guidelines for new construction apply to these properties.

- **New building:**

Construction of new, freestanding structures, either as primary or secondary buildings within a locally designated historic district, are subject to review.

- **Site work:**

This includes new landscaping designs, the removal of original or historic landscaping and new grading and driveway construction affecting an individually designated landmark and for any property within a locally designated historic district.

### National and Local Register designations

It is important to distinguish a city’s designation of historic districts through its local ordinance process from designation to the National Register. The National Register of Historic Places is a list of sites and properties of historic significance. Properties so listed may have national significance, but they may also be listed if they are determined to have significance at a state or local level.



*Public participation is a vital component to any planning process, especially those directly related to a community member's quality of life. Here workshop participants in Carmel-by-the-Sea, California, help Winter & Company identify those character-defining features which are important and should be preserved.*

Properties listed in the National Register are also protected from federally-funded projects which might harm or alter the historic character. Otherwise, alterations are not reviewed if the property owner is not seeking the federal income tax incentive or if no federal actions are involved.

By contrast, the local designation process is established through the city's zoning ordinance. Criteria for designation are set forth in the city code and designated properties are subject to protections outlined in the ordinance.

**A Typical Guideline**

Each design guideline in this document typically has four components :

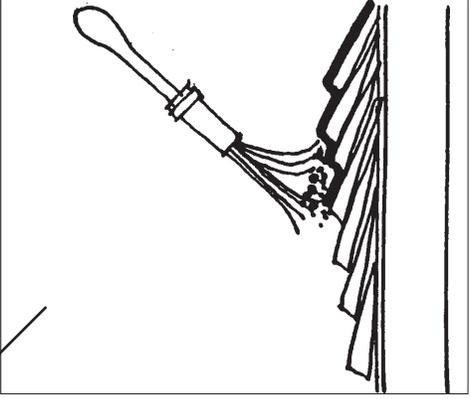
1. **Policy statement** - describes a desired condition of the design element being discussed.
2. **Design Guidelines Statement** - describes a desired design treatment.
3. **Supplementary Information** - may include additional requirements, or may provide an expanded explanation.
4. **Illustrations** - to clarify the intent

**WHY HAVE DESIGN REVIEW?**

First and foremost, design review helps preserve historic districts as records of our heritage in a consistent and fair manner. The design guidelines provide for uniform reviews of proposed work. Design guidelines should not dictate design by formula. Instead, they should identify key features of the historic resources that should be respected when planning any repairs, alterations or new construction.

Design guidelines also can establish a climate for investment for property owners because the review process assures that alterations and new construction by others will reinforce one's individual improvements.

Guidelines also may serve as educational tools, providing useful information about rehabilitation procedures and design concepts that are appropriate. They often provide practical guidance, helping property owners make well-informed design decisions.

Policy Statement	<b>HR.8 Original wood siding should be maintained with a protective coating of paint.</b>	
Back-ground Information	Wood is the dominant building material in the district. To preserve the wood, it is important to maintain the painted finish of the siding.	
Design Guideline	<p><b>A. Protect wood features from deterioration.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide proper drainage and ventilation to minimize rot.</li> <li>• Maintain protective coatings to retard drying and ultraviolet damage. Exterior wood walls should be painted, not stained. If the building was painted historically, it should remain painted, including all trim.</li> </ul>	
Additional Information	<p><b>B. Plan repainting carefully.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Always prepare a good substrate.</li> <li>• See also <i>Preservation Briefs #10: Exterior Paint Problems on Historic Woodwork</i>, published by the National Park Service.</li> </ul>	
Illustration	<p><i>Plan repainting carefully. Always prepare a good substrate. Also, use compatible paints.</i></p>	

A sample of the format of a design guideline and its components, as used in this document.

### HOW ARE GUIDELINES USED?

Design review can be an *advisory* process, in which property owners voluntarily use the guidelines. In some cases, the property owner may appear voluntarily before the historic preservation commission to hear their comments, but compliance with their comments is purely voluntary.

Other communities require property owners to attend a design critique of their proposed actions, but *compliance* is not required. This system operates on the premise that well-informed property owners will "do the right thing."

Sometimes communities use the guidelines with special *incentive* programs that encourage investment in the historic district. For example, many Main Street programs offer low-interest rehabilitation loans to qualified property owners, on the condition that certain design guidelines are followed. In this case, the owner voluntarily enters into the program, but then compliance is required in order to receive the funds.

In the majority of situations, however, design review is mandated under a historic preservation ordinance, and property owners *must* participate in the review discussions and they must abide by the findings of the commission.

Each of these alternative uses requires personnel to administer them in various forms. The chart below summarizes the start-up and operating requirements of each of these applications of design guidelines.

#### Review vs. Compliance Requirements

It is important to distinguish the requirement of an owner to submit a design for *review* from the requirement to *comply* with design recommendations of a review board. Some systems require that owners submit their design for discussion and yet do not require approval of the review board as a step in receiving construction permits.

**Advocacy Program** - Guidelines are promoted for voluntary use by a public service organization.

**Advisory Process** - Property owners are required to listen to a critique of their project, but are not required to comply with the recommendations.

**Incentive Program** - Special loans or grants are offered to owners who will comply with the guidelines.

**Regulated District** - Review and compliance are required by historic preservation ordinance, or in some cases by covenant.

### ALTERNATIVE USES OF DESIGN GUIDELINES IN HISTORIC DISTRICTS

<u>FUNCTION</u>	<u>APPLICATION</u>			
	ADVOCACY PROGRAM	ADVISORY PROCESS	INCENTIVE PROGRAM	REGULATED DISTRICT
Review	Voluntary	Mandatory	Voluntary	Mandatory
Compliance	Voluntary	Voluntary	Mandatory	Mandatory