



# CITY OF PORTSMOUTH

## Historic District Commission

### Guidelines for Commercial Development & Storefronts

#### COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT & INFILL PROPERTIES

The economic development of Portsmouth's commercial properties is encouraged and its vitality is recognized that the city's vibrance is linked to the viability of its businesses and institutions. The HDC makes every effort to assist commercial building owners and tenants with revitalizing older buildings, helping to attract new customers while promoting an appreciation of historic architecture. In addition, the HDC recognizes that new development within Portsmouth increases the city's vitality and spurs its economy as more services are available for residents, business owners and visitors alike.

When considering commercial and infill buildings, the HDC strives to:

- Encourage consistency or compatibility and provide a visual connection with the historic building and context
- Provide variety and vitality along commercial corridors
- Encourage the greatest amount of design flexibility depending on context
- Identify elements that are part of the overall character or indisputably contribute to the historic streetscape
- Encourage the consideration of how a proposed development relates to each property, the streetscape and the surrounding historic context

These *Guidelines* were developed in conjunction with the City of Portsmouth's Historic District Commission (HDC) and the Planning Department. Please review this information during the early stages of planning a project. Familiarity with this material can assist in moving a project quickly through the approval process, saving applicants both time and money.

In its review, the HDC considers a property's classification, recommending the greatest historic authenticity at focal buildings, with more flexibility at contributing structures, and the most at non-contributing properties. The HDC Staff in the Planning Department is available to provide informal informational meetings with potential applicants who are considering improvements to their properties.

Additional *Guidelines* addressing other historic building topics are available at City Hall and on the Commission's website at [www.planportsmouth.com/historicdistrictcommission](http://www.planportsmouth.com/historicdistrictcommission). For more information, to clarify whether a proposed project requires HDC review, or to obtain permit applications, please call the Planning Department at (603) 610-7216.



A common feature of many commercial properties in Portsmouth is a storefront. This example include arched transom windows, a recessed entrance alcove, and decorative supports flanking display windows.

#### COMMERCIAL STOREFRONTS

One of the common elements of commercial and infill properties in downtown Portsmouth, is the storefront. This includes storefronts at existing buildings as well as those at commercial development projects. Effective storefronts can:

- Serve a key role in the identity of a commercial building
- Enhance a pedestrian's visual experience and create a sense of transparency at the ground-floor level
- Attract potential customers with eye-catching merchandise display

#### INFORMATION FOR NEW BUSINESSES

The HDC encourages the economic development and revitalization of the Portsmouth's historic retail areas and the commercial properties within them. This helps to attract new customers while promoting an appreciation of the historic architecture and its surrounding context.

If considering opening a new business in the Portsmouth, City staff are available to discuss zoning, construction and other requirements applicable to a specific project. Please contact the HDC at (603) 610-7216 for more information.

#### SIGN & AWNING REGULATION

Prior to installing any permanent or temporary sign or awning, applicants must verify that the proposed installation is compliant with all zoning, building and other applicable codes and requirements. (Refer to the *Guidelines for Signs & Awnings*.)

## COMMERCIAL BUILDING TYPES

Commercial buildings are designed to accommodate uses that provide goods and services including stores, restaurants, offices and hotels. The Portsmouth Historic District has a concentrated commercial downtown as well as commercial buildings scattered through its residential areas. These commercial buildings include a variety of buildings of different styles, scales and types. Examples of commercial building types include:

- Buildings designed for purely commercial use, such as retail or restaurants on the first floor with offices or hotels above
- Buildings with storefronts at the ground floor and residences above
- Former residences converted into a commercial use



*Institutional buildings, including churches, often have similar needs as commercial buildings including signage, accessibility and parking.*

## INSTITUTIONAL & LARGE-SCALE RESIDENTIAL BUILDINGS

The Portsmouth Historic District includes many institutional buildings such as:

- Governmental buildings
- Educational buildings
- Religious buildings such as churches and synagogues
- Cultural institutions such as the Athenaeum and museums

In addition, the District includes several large-scale residential buildings with apartments and condominiums. Both institutional and large-scale residential buildings have many needs that are similar to commercial buildings including signs, accessibility and parking requirements. References throughout these *Guidelines* should also be applied to both institutional and large-scale residential buildings and properties.



*Many of Portsmouth's commercial buildings include storefronts at ground level, and residential or office uses above.*

## DEVELOPABLE PROPERTIES

When reviewing applications for new construction within the bounds of the Historic District, particularly in the downtown, the HDC understands that there are two types of parcels that may be available for development, those that are vacant and potentially those that have non-contributing buildings and structures. Contact the Planning Department at (603) 610-7216 to determine if a parcel has a non-contributing resource and is potentially developable.

## REVIEWS BY OTHER CITY AGENCIES

**Property Use:** The HDC does not have the authority to control the use of a property. All proposals for work on a property under the jurisdiction of the Commission must conform to the City of Portsmouth Ordinances. Applications for variances to the City of Portsmouth Ordinances or other codes may be made concurrently to the Board of Adjustment with an HDC Application in order to reduce review and processing time.

**Concurrent Reviews:** The HDC works with other branches of City Government to coordinate approvals involving use, zoning, appearance and other regulated items. The HDC may provide comments to the reviewing bodies including the Planning Board, Board of Adjustment and the City Council when appropriate. Inter-departmental meetings can be arranged on an as needed basis. The approval issued for the work approved by the HDC must be presented to the Portsmouth Inspection Department when applying for a Building Permit.

**Zoning Requirements:** Designs for new buildings, structures or additions must conform to or obtain relief from zoning requirements from the Board of Adjustment.



### TRADITIONAL COMMERCIAL BUILDING CHARACTERISTICS:

There is great variety in the commercial buildings found in Portsmouth, even within its downtown. There are some early examples of Greek Revival buildings adjacent to Italianate examples as well as more contemporary building styles.

Some of the common characteristics of Portsmouth’s commercial buildings include their construction along the front property line with shared “party walls”, in addition to their three-part organization:

- A: The cornice provides a visual cap or termination to the top of the building
- B: Upper floor operable windows appear to be “punched” through the flat, relatively solid, typically masonry, wall surface in a regular pattern that does not align with the storefront openings below
- C: A storefront capped by a storefront cornice runs along the ground floor with large display windows topped by transom windows

Other shared characteristics include the predominant use of traditional, earth-toned materials such as brick and stone with limited stucco, as well as the incorporation of more modern, quality materials such as cast stone and articulated aluminum utilizing profiled detailing similar to wood trim and window elements.

### NEW COMMERCIAL CONSTRUCTION & INFILL DEVELOPMENT IN PORTSMOUTH

The HDC recognizes that when new construction and infill is consistent or compatible, it has a positive and revitalizing impact on a streetscape and the city as a whole. Compatible new construction and infill can preserve the neighborhood by enhancing the historic, architectural and cultural features of a historic property as well as provide continuity along a streetscape.

In some cases, successful new buildings are those that are clearly contemporary in design but compatible with the character of neighboring properties. The information presented in these *Guidelines* is intended to provide the principles of appropriate design when constructing a new building within a historic Portsmouth context, regardless of architectural style.

These principles are intended to promote maximum creativity while allowing plans to be assessed fairly, objectively and consistently as possible given the unique characteristics of each property within its surrounding context. Building designers are encouraged to consider Portsmouth’s unique and wide range of existing historic building types, styles and detailing and not mimic examples from other communities. An understanding of the existing building fabric should be viewed as a starting point in the design process and not a limiting vocabulary or kit of parts.



*Although this is a large-scale building, it successfully combines elements of traditional architecture with modern elements in a manner that makes it highly consistent with its surroundings. This includes a prominent cornice, punched windows, a brick facade with contrasting cast stone elements and ground floor storefronts along the streetscape.*



Provided by McHenry Architecture

### Design Within a Historic Context

It is not required that historic properties or styles be “copied” in new construction, as the HDC encourages new construction to be well-designed and sympathetic to its distinctive surroundings. Portions of Portsmouth’s business district are largely composed of historic buildings while others have less historic integrity. In those areas with fewer remaining historic buildings, successful new buildings are sometimes those that are contemporary in design, perhaps utilizing non-traditional materials, in a manner that is compatible with the character of neighboring properties.

The information presented in this *Guidelines* section is intended to provide the principles of appropriate design for small scale structures when constructing a new building or addition the historic Portsmouth’s commercial context, regardless of architectural style.

## COMPATIBLE DESIGN PRINCIPLES

The development of Portsmouth followed its own pattern and rhythm. As the heart of Portsmouth, the heritage and culture of the previous inhabitants are expressed through the changing architectural and built environment, characteristic of the City’s historical development. To continue the District’s evolution, the HDC encourages design excellence and creative design solutions for new commercial development and construction that is sensitive to the character of their historic surroundings. Generally, there are three appropriate design approaches in Portsmouth:

- **Present Day:** A contemporary design compatible within the context of the property and neighboring sites
- **Reconstruction:** A design that faithfully duplicates details and materials based upon clear documentary evidence
- **Traditional:** A design that could have been constructed on a property for which there is insufficient evidence

The approach, style and type of consistent or compatible new commercial construction project will vary at each site depending on the specific context. Recognizing that what might be appropriate at one site is not appropriate at another, the HDC does not mandate specific design “solutions” for new commercial construction. However, when determining the appropriateness of new commercial development, the HDC is guided by the general design principles below:

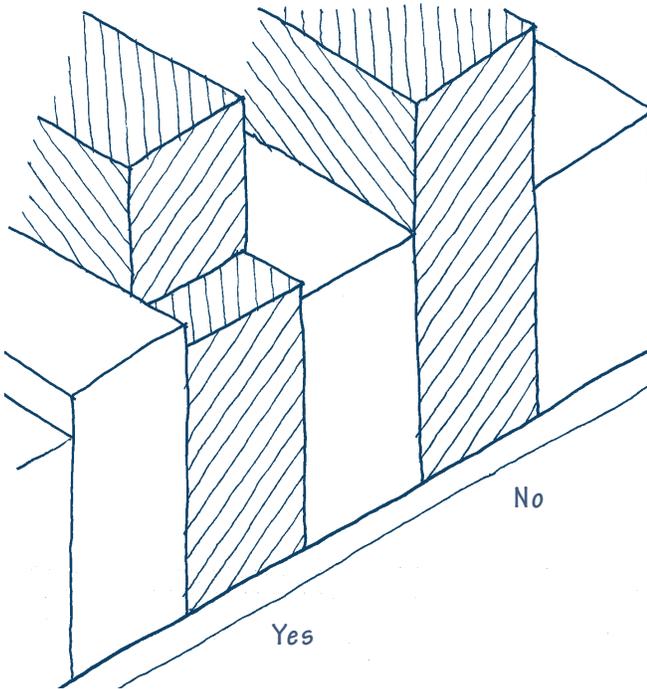
DESIGN PRINCIPLES	NEW COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT
<b>Scale: Height &amp; Width</b>	Proportions and size of the new commercial construction compared with neighboring buildings
<b>Building Form &amp; Massing</b>	The three-dimensional relationship and configuration of the new commercial construction footprint, its walls and roof compared with neighboring buildings
<b>Setback</b>	Distance of the new commercial construction to the street or property line when compared with other buildings on the block
<b>Site Coverage</b>	Percentage of the site that is covered by new commercial construction, when compared to nearby sites of compatible size
<b>Orientation</b>	Location of the front of the new commercial construction and principal entrance relative to other buildings on the block
<b>Alignment, Rhythm &amp; Spacing</b>	Effect the new commercial construction will have on the existing patterns on its block
<b>Architectural Elements &amp; Projections</b>	Size, shape, proportions and location of each entrance, balcony, roof overhang, chimney, dormer, parapet and other elements that contribute to the building’s overall shape and silhouette relative to neighboring buildings
<b>Façade Proportions: Window &amp; Door Patterns</b>	Relationship of the size, shape and location of the new commercial construction’s façade and building elements to each other, as well as when compared to other buildings in the area
<b>Trim &amp; Detail</b>	Moldings, decorative elements and features of a building that are secondary to major surfaces such as walls and roofs and how they relate to the neighboring buildings
<b>Materials</b>	Products with which a new commercial building is composed or constructed and how these relate to neighboring buildings

## PRINCIPLES FOR NEW COMMERCIAL CONSTRUCTION & INFILL DEVELOPMENT

### Scale: Height & Width

The proportions of a new building and its relationship to neighboring buildings establish its consistency or compatibility within a neighborhood or block. The height-width ratio is a relationship between the height and width of a street façade and should be similar in proportion to neighboring buildings. New construction should neither be visually overwhelming or underwhelming when compared to its neighbors.

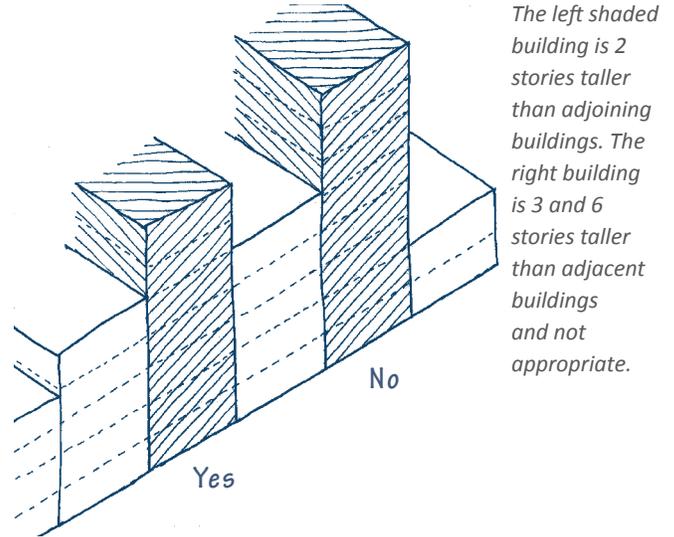
Where 3- and 4-story buildings are the norm, buildings that appear to digress from these standards by any great degree can negatively impact a neighborhood. If large-scale construction is considered, particular attention will be given to the location, siting, setbacks of the building and its upper stories, façade treatments (materials, window and door openings, etc.) and the effect of the proposed building on the streetscape and neighborhood as a whole.



*In some circumstances it might be preferable to have a building set-back above adjacent cornice heights. This minimizes the apparent height of the new development or construction to pedestrians.*

*It is Generally Appropriate to...*

- Construct a new building that is similar in height and width to buildings on adjacent sites
- Construct a new larger building than adjacent buildings by breaking the building mass, dividing its height or width to conform with adjacent buildings
- Construct taller portions of the buildings away from the street



*The left shaded building is 2 stories taller than adjoining buildings. The right building is 3 and 6 stories taller than adjacent buildings and not appropriate.*

### Building Form & Massing

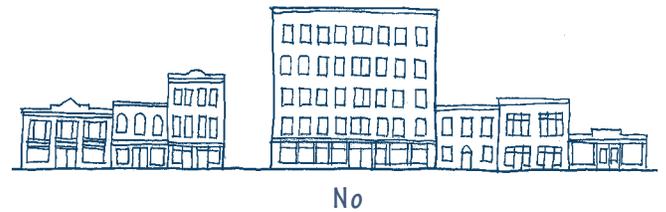
Building form refers to the shape of major volumes while massing refers to the overall composition of the major volumes, its overall “bulk” and how it sits on the site. Elements that are typically used to define building form and massing include the roof form, as well as wings and other projecting elements, such as bays and balconies. New buildings with similar form and massing to adjacent construction will allow the new building to be compatible with the surrounding neighborhood.

*It is Generally Appropriate to...*

- Construct a new building or addition with similar form and massing to buildings on adjacent sites
- Construct roof forms, wings and bays and other projecting elements that are similar to those found on the block of the proposed building
- Match adjacent cornice heights

*It is Generally Inappropriate to...*

- Construct a new building whose form and massing are not found in the immediate vicinity of the project site



*The central building in each case is approximately the same square footage. The top 4-story example abuts adjoining walls and steps up in the center. The new 5-story building in the lower example is a single volume, lacks the same level of articulations and appears more massive.*

## Setback

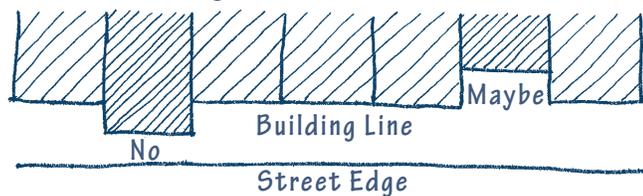
New construction and additions should reflect prevailing setbacks (distances between the building and the property line, adjacent buildings, street and/or sidewalk) which are determined by zoning requirements. Physical elements that define historic properties and buildings create visual continuity and cohesiveness along a streetscape. These elements typically include building façades, walls and fences. A consistent setback maintains the visual rhythm of the buildings and site elements in the neighborhood and makes new construction more compatible in its setting. However, large-scale development projects may benefit from minor modulation of the façade to reduce their apparent mass.

*It is Generally Appropriate to...*

- Keep the visual mass of the building at or near the same setback as buildings on adjacent sites, typically along the front and side yard lot lines
- Keep landscape elements, such as walls and fences at similar setbacks as adjacent buildings

*It is Generally Inappropriate to...*

- Construct a new building in a location on a site that greatly varies from buildings on adjacent sites
- Create large front yard setbacks to allow for parking in front of a building



*New construction should not step forward from or recede back from adjacent buildings on the streetscape.*

## Site Coverage

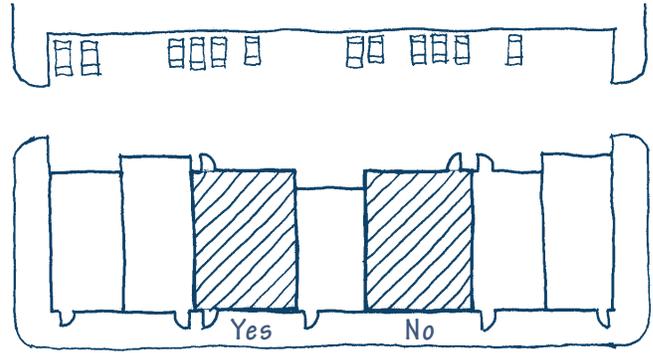
The percentage of a lot that is covered by buildings should be similar to adjacent lots. Although zoning regulates the maximum allowable coverage area and minimum setbacks, the overall building-to-lot area should be consistent along a streetscape. If parcels are combined for a larger development, the site coverage proportions should be minimized by breaking large building masses into smaller elements to be more compatible with adjacent buildings. If parking is included on a property, it should be located towards the rear of a site, away from public view.

*It is Generally Appropriate to...*

- Maintain the building-to-lot proportions found on adjacent lots
- Adjust the massing to suggest building-to-lot proportions found on adjacent sites
- Screening parking, mechanical equipment and garbage collection from public view with walls or fencing

*It is Generally Inappropriate to...*

- Construct a building that does not maintain or suggest similar building-to-lot proportions as on adjacent sites



*Commercial buildings should retain a street entrance. A secondary entrance facing a parking area can also be added.*

## Orientation

The principal façade of new construction should be oriented in the same direction as the majority of the buildings on the streetscape, with main entrances located on the principal façade. In cases where the property includes parking at a secondary elevation, an additional entrance door can be provided to accommodate users. In the case of new construction on a corner site, the front façade should generally face the same direction as the existing buildings on the street and follow the rhythm of the streetscape.)

*It is Generally Appropriate to...*

- Orient the primary façade and principal door parallel with the street

*It is Generally Inappropriate to...*

- Orient the primary façade or principal elevation of a building on secondary street elevation



*The entrance of the corner building is oriented towards the perpendicular street and is inappropriate.*

## VARIANCES

When appropriate, the HPC will work with the applicant and Planning Department officials if a variance is required for a new building to have a similar setback to the buildings on adjacent site.

## Architectural Elements & Projections

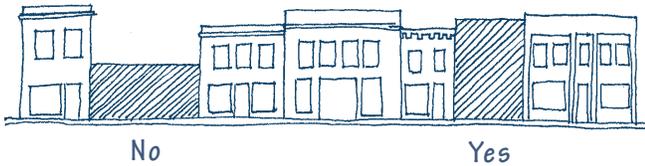
Throughout Portsmouth's neighborhoods and downtown, the rhythm of the streetscapes is highlighted by projections and the modulations of wall planes of bays to relieve otherwise flat façades. At the roof form and 3-dimensional projecting elements such as chimneys, dormers, cornices and parapets, contribute to a building's overall shape and silhouette. The choice, size, location and arrangement of elements of a proposed building should reflect those of surrounding buildings. Similarly, the type, placement and size of equipment on a roof can negatively effect the silhouette of a building.

*It is Generally Appropriate to...*

- Construct a building with an architectural element or projection designed and detailed similarly to those found at neighboring buildings
- Design an architectural element with simplified detailing that is similar to architectural elements at comparable buildings within the local Historic District or setting

*It is Generally Inappropriate to...*

- Construct a new "historicized" architectural element on a building that historically would not have included one
- Construct a bay, balcony, parapet or dormer at a building type or style which typically would not have included one or in a configuration or location where they are not appropriate for the building type



*The rhythm, spacing and proportions of the building to the right are more consistent with the streetscape than the left building.*

## Alignment, Rhythm & Spacing

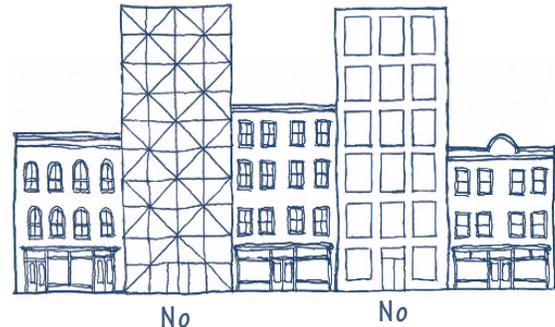
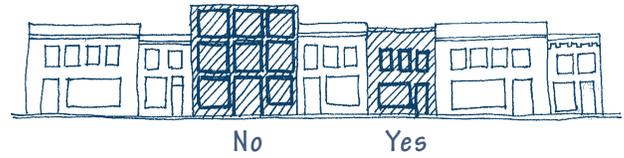
Although the architecture of Portsmouth is characterized by great variety of building types and styles, within each block there tends to be consistency in façade proportions and the width of buildings. The consistent spacing establishes a rhythm which should be applied to new construction and infill development. This rhythm and spacing not only refers to the building, but also the projections along the streetscape.

*It is Generally Appropriate to...*

- Align the façade of a new building with the façades of existing adjacent buildings
- Align parapets, roof and storefront cornices with those found on existing adjacent buildings
- Construct new buildings that have similar widths relative to other neighboring buildings on the street
- Construct new larger buildings than those on adjacent sites, if the larger building is visually divided to suggest smaller building masses

*It is Generally Inappropriate to...*

- Place the primary façade of a building out of alignment with existing buildings on adjacent sites
- Add a building to a site that does not maintain or suggest the spacing of buildings on adjacent sites
- Construct an addition that is larger than the historic building



*The window proportions at the right buildings are generally more in keeping with neighboring buildings than the left examples.*

## Façade Proportions; Window & Door Patterns

The rhythm and pattern of principal façades of new construction or additions that should reflect and maintain neighborhood patterns. Across the width of a façade, rhythm and patterns typically include the number of bays and the location and spacing between doors, windows and shutters.

There are also vertical components of rhythm and pattern. These include to the distance of the first floor or porch above ground level, building floor-to-floor heights, cornice heights, and the distance between rows of windows. In some instances, where the proposed use and scale of a new building prevents maintaining rhythms and patterns, the property owner is encouraged to incorporate detailing to suggest them such as pilasters that give the impression of bays or multiple buildings.

*It is Generally Appropriate to...*

- Construct a new building or addition whose façade height and width proportions are similar to existing adjacent buildings
- Use similar proportions, sizes, locations and numbers of windows and doors as adjacent sites
- Install stylistically compatible windows and doors at new construction with those found on existing neighboring buildings

*It is Generally Inappropriate to...*

- Construct a building that does not maintain the proportions and patterns of windows and doors as adjacent sites
- Install window or door types that are incompatible with the surrounding local Historic District or setting



*Using traditional materials, trim and details at a non-historic element, such as this bank drive-through and guard booth, can make a modern element more consistent or compatible with the surrounding context.*

### Trim & Details

Trim and details include the moldings, decorative elements and other 3-dimensional elements of a building that are secondary to major building components such as walls and roofs. Historically, trim and details were often installed to serve functional needs. Over time, they were later modified to enhance a building's type and style. Trim is not only decorative, but often serves to infill or provide a transition between different materials or building elements such as walls and windows.

Functional and decorative detail elements include cornices, lintels, arches, balustrades, chimneys, columns, posts and other common architectural features. The exterior details and forms of new construction or additions should provide a visual link to neighboring historic buildings. In the same way that new buildings should be consistent or compatible but not necessarily copy historic buildings, new details should be consistent or compatible but not necessarily copy historic trim and details.

The trim and details of new construction should be used to accomplish purposes similar to those used historically, both functionally and decoratively. When installed, trim and details should create a unifying effect on a building and should be consistent or compatible with the context of the neighborhood.

#### *It is Generally Appropriate to...*

- Construct a new building or addition with details and trim that complements historic neighboring trim and details
- Install trim and details appropriately scaled to the building type and style
- Install detail that is functional with a high level of craftsmanship rather than simply applied decoration

#### *It is Generally Inappropriate to...*

- Copy historic trim and details exactly unless duplicating a historic building
- Apply details and trim that are stylistically incompatible with the new building

### Materials

The materials used in the construction of a new building or addition for walls, sloped roofs, windows, doors, trim, balconies and other exterior visible elements contribute to a building's character and appearance. Typically, materials for new construction should be consistent or compatible to those predominantly found on surrounding buildings. Historically, the predominant materials in Portsmouth's downtown are brick and stone wall surfaces with wood trim, windows and doors.

Materials need not be identical to those found in a local historic district if they are complementary, particularly along streets where existing buildings are of diverse materials. Modern materials that may be appropriate in the context of the downtown include brick, stone, carefully selected cast stone, wood and possibly aluminum with carefully articulated profiles to evoke the appearance of wood windows and trim.

Inappropriate materials include those which unsuccessfully pretend to be something they are not, such as plastic or veneer "bricks" and aluminum or vinyl siding instead of wood. All are imitations which fail to produce the texture, proportions and colors of the real materials. It is important to note that the size, texture, color and other characteristics of exterior materials can be as important as the material itself.

#### *It is Generally Appropriate to...*

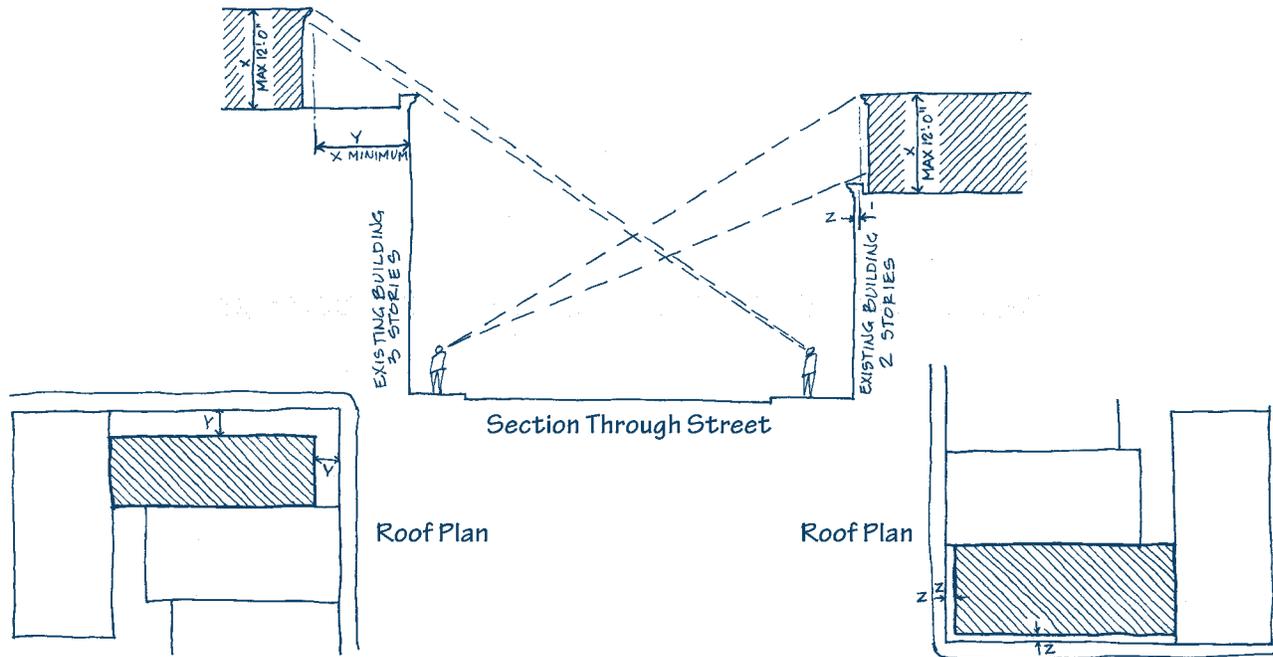
- Use exterior materials that are present in adjacent neighboring historic buildings in new construction or additions

#### *It is Generally Inappropriate to...*

- Install a material where it is historically and stylistically incompatible
- Install building materials that do not exist in the surrounding area



*The majority of buildings in the downtown area of the Portsmouth Historic District are masonry, combining brick and stone, and many have highly ornate details, particularly at the cornice. The storefront windows have large, divided lights with exterior muntins, giving them the appearance of wood.*



Rooftop additions must be set back from the street walls of the existing building by a minimum of the proposed height of the addition, (i.e. 12'-0" high rooftop addition must be set back from the street wall a minimum of 12'-0"). The HDC discourages rooftop additions on buildings less than 3 full stories in height, since their visibility from the street tends to be much greater.

## ROOFTOP ADDITIONS

Since many buildings in the downtown portion of the Portsmouth Historic District were historically built at or close to their property lines, it is often not possible to expand a building's footprint. Rooftop additions may be proposed as a means of increasing the square footage and floor area of existing buildings. This method of adding space to buildings is generally more appropriate at flat or low-sloped commercial building, rather than one with a gabled or mansard roof, or a roof with historic projecting elements, such as chimneys, party walls or dormers.

The HDC believes it is important that the historic integrity of these structures and areas be maintained. It is also important that additions, when appropriate and permitted, contribute to the character of the area and respect the design and context of the building and its streetscape. When reviewing rooftop additions, the HDC considers all applications on a case by case basis. An approved rooftop addition at one location should not be considered as a precedent or be construed to mean that new proposals will automatically be approved. Factors considered by the HDC in its review of rooftop additions include:

- The significance of the building or site;
- The location of the building and site;
- The height of the existing building, the proposed addition and surrounding buildings;
- The visibility of the proposed addition; and
- The architectural treatment of the proposed addition and its consistency or compatibility with the existing building— It should not be obtrusive or detract from the architecture of the existing building or the surrounding buildings.

## DESIGN STANDARDS FOR ROOFTOP ADDITIONS

If allowable by the Zoning Ordinance and appropriate at the specific site, the HDC uses specific design standards to review proposals for rooftop additions. When reviewing rooftop additions the HDC:

- Strives to make all rooftop additions, elevator and mechanical equipment, roof decks and furnishings as unobtrusive or minimally visible from the public way as possible (Refer to *Roof Decks, Guidelines for Roofing*, page 04-7)
- Limits the overall height of rooftop additions, including framing and parapet, to 12'-0" above the lowest surface of the existing roof, except for code-required components, such as elevator overrides
- Requires that rooftop additions be set back from the street façades of the building by a minimum of the overall height of the proposed addition, (i.e. a 12'-0" high rooftop addition should be set back from the street wall a minimum of 12'-0")
- Requires that rooftop additions incorporate elevator equipment, mechanical equipment and HVAC equipment within the single story, allowable rooftop addition footprint
- Requires that all furnishings including railings, screens, planters, plants and permanent rooftop furnishings taller than the closest parapet be setback from the street wall(s) a minimum of the height of the proposed furnishing from the lowest roof surface



Two entrance alcoves provide access to the ground floor retail and upper building floors. The alcoves provide protection from the elements and increase the retail display frontage. Display windows and doors are topped with transom windows. Fluted structural supports are topped by a decorative storefront cornice.

## STOREFRONTS

Storefronts can be found at the majority of buildings in downtown Portsmouth, whether historic or more recent construction. The attractiveness and overall maintenance of a storefront can greatly influence a casual observer's perception of a building and the business within. Because a positive impression can help draw potential customers, regular maintenance and careful design can be positive on the bottom line. The storefront is one of the most significant features of a commercial building, the business within it and the overall streetscape. Storefronts often included large sheets of glass at display windows with minimally sized mullions and often recessed entries. This configuration allowed merchants to maximize the visibility of their wares to attract potential customers.

- Serve a key role in the identity of a commercial building
- Enhance a pedestrian's visual experience and create a sense of transparency at the ground-floor level
- Attract potential customers with an eye-catching merchandise display

Historic storefronts were typically constructed of wood, metal (cast iron, bronze, copper, tin, galvanized sheet metal, cast zinc or stainless steel), masonry (brick or stone) and clear, translucent, pigmented or textured glass at transoms. Although the specific configurations of storefronts can vary greatly based upon architectural styles, at different buildings and locations, a common feature is large expanses of glass to display merchandise. In addition, it is typical to have a principal entrance to the commercial space and a separate entrance that includes a stair for access to the upper levels.

For a commercial building there is often a challenge balancing the need for a business to function and attract customers, while maintaining the historic character of the buildings and streetscape. This can include the modification of a storefront as well as the installation of a sign or awning. (Refer to *Guidelines for Signs & Awnings*.)

**Storefront Cornices** are projecting moldings at the top of storefronts, providing a visual cap or termination to the storefronts and a separation with the upper floors. Cornice materials can vary widely and include wood, pressed metal, limestone, terra cotta or decorative brick patterns. Cornice details can include brackets, dentils and panels.



**Transom Windows** may be located above display windows and doorways to provide additional daylight, and can be either fixed or operable for ventilation. They can be either single or multi-paned and historically were often leaded, stained or textured glass. Transom windows can also include signage, lettering or other ornamental details.



**Display Windows** are typically large expanses of glazing to present the available merchandise within a shop. Display windows typically flank the entrance doorway or alcove to a store and can include additional advertising to further entice potential customers.





**Entrances** at storefronts can be located flush with the outside of the building or recessed within an alcove providing additional display areas and shelter from the elements. In addition to commercial entrances, there can be secondary entrance doors that provide access to upper building floors.

**Structural Supports** at storefronts are necessary to carry the weight of the building and roof above and can be decorative, reinforcing the storefront's architectural style. Typically, structural supports flank entrance doors and display windows and can be constructed of wood, cast iron or masonry.



**Aprons** act as the base for the display windows and at the interior can provide a raised platform for merchandise display. Aprons can be constructed of a variety of materials with different finishes including wood, masonry and tile.

## STOREFRONT TREATMENT APPROACH

Changes to storefronts can be a costly endeavor that if not properly planned might negatively impact a building's architecture or the business located in it. Prior to considering alterations, property owners should identify the key storefront elements and consider options. By carefully studying alternatives, property owners tend to be much happier with the finished results. When contemplating storefront work, the following approach is recommended:

**Identify Key Historic Elements:** Develop an understanding of the architectural character of an existing storefront including the overall size, major divisions or bays, placement of components such as doors, windows and distinctive elements. This can be based on selective removals or documentation such as old photographs or drawings.

**Retain, Preserve and Repair:** Once important historic elements of an existing storefront have been identified, they should be incorporated into the new design. Deterioration of some historic elements might require stabilization, replacement in-kind, or replacement with a similar substitute material utilizing the historic material as the guide.

**Replacement:** Replacement of a historic storefront is only encouraged when the existing storefront materials are too deteriorated to be repairable, or a historic storefront has been encased in a newer storefront and the historic form and detailing are still present allowing for an accurate representation. Replacement of historic storefronts with modern storefront systems is strongly discouraged; however, appropriate suitable alternate materials that convey the same historic visual appearance can be used where the use of original materials is not technically or economically feasible.

**Reconstructing a New Storefront With Historic Documentation:** If there is no physical evidence at an existing building of a historic storefront, there might be sufficient historical evidence to allow for appropriate reconstruction. Appropriate research is recommended to ensure the greatest degree of accuracy feasible in the reconstruction.

**Installing a New Storefront Without Historic Information:** If there is not sufficient information and documentation to accurately reconstruct a storefront, or at new buildings with storefronts, the new design should be compatible in size, pattern, scale, material and color as the overall building and similar storefronts from the period if installed at an existing building, but have distinctly contemporary characters that reflect rather than copy historic storefronts.

## HISTORIC STOREFRONT APPEARANCE

Often, remnants of earlier storefronts or "ghosts" of earlier materials are concealed under newer storefront materials and careful selective removals can reveal elements or clues. Another potential source of information is old records, photographs or drawings. These can be advertisements or articles, newspapers, previous business promotional materials or postcards.



*Accessible entrances should be respectful to their users and the surrounding context. This ramp provides access to the front porch of the restaurant.*

## ACCESSIBILITY

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) strives to improve the quality of life of people with a disability. The ADA recognizes that for a person with a disability to participate in everyday activities in their community such as going to work, eating in a restaurant or shopping in a store, they need to have access to the goods and services provided by businesses. Many of the business and institutional facilities in the Portsmouth were constructed prior to the 1992 enactment of the ADA and lack features to accommodate people with a disability, including those who use a wheelchair.

The renovation of an existing building may require a wheelchair accommodations for the physically challenged. One of the most visible exterior alterations required by ADA is the installation of a wheelchair ramp, or lift, to provide access to the building. In many locations, these ramps or lifts have successfully been incorporated at the interior of a building envelope with modification of an existing door sill. When installing a ramp, it is important to remember that if the ramp is too steep, or its railing is not secure, a potentially hazardous condition may be created. Although the most appropriate means of providing accessibility will vary at each property, some issues to consider include:

- Retaining historic entrance stairs and doors
- Providing an accessible entrance that is respectful when access to the front door is not possible — located close to the principal entrance and designed in a manner that is visually unobtrusive and compatible with a building's style
- Complying with all aspects of accessibility requirements, while minimizing alteration of the primary building façade and architectural features
- Modifying sidewalk or walkway elevation a few inches, where possible, to provide an entry at grade and meet all code requirements
- Installing a ramp and/or a lift within a building envelope where it is possible to modify an existing door sill to allow entry at grade
- Installing a lift in lieu of a ramp where it would be less obtrusive
- Selecting a ramp or lift style that is compatible with the building
- Installing a railing that is simple and visually unobtrusive
- Selecting accessibility hardware and devices that are visually unobtrusive

## NON-RETAIL STOREFRONTS

Some residential uses and non-retail businesses, including a restaurant or professional office, can be found in former commercial buildings with storefront windows. Although many of these uses do not require large display windows, the HDC encourages maintaining unobstructed glazing when feasible. Recently, buildings with non-retail storefronts have begun installing large expanses of adhesive films to display windows or etched glass. Although this allows light into the interior spaces, it provides an unanimated pedestrian view without visual variety that can deaden a street front for residents and visitors alike.

Businesses are encouraged to use alternate means of providing privacy when using a former display area, such as installing display materials related to the business or service being offered or installing blinds, curtains, shutters or other operable, semi-transparent or translucent screening that can be opened or closed during the course of the day.



*The use of curtains allows the flexibility of privacy for certain areas within the building, while other areas are open to view.*

## BUILDING EQUIPMENT

Modern mechanical equipment includes HVAC (heating, ventilation and air conditioning) equipment, restaurant exhaust fans, electrical supply and generators. Although they represent necessities of modern life, the design and location of equipment can have a significant negative impact on the historic integrity of a building and its surrounding area. Most buildings in downtown Portsmouth are constructed to the property line fronting the sidewalk, and the opportunity to locate equipment in a rear or side yard is not always viable. In such situations it might be necessary to locate items like HVAC equipment and/or restaurant exhausts on a roof. The equipment should be made as compact and unobtrusive as possible and roof plans indicating the proposed location and size of equipment and penthouses submitted for HDC review. (Refer to *Guidelines for Site Elements & Streetscapes* and *Roof Mounted Equipment, Guidelines for Roofing*, page 04-9.)



Landscape elements can provide access to and conceal parking areas. This design utilizes brick paving, granite curbing and decorative plantings to provide access to a rear parking area with both steps and an accessible sloped ramp.

## NEW COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT & ADDITIONS

If considering the construction of a new commercial building within the Portsmouth Historic District, the HDC encourages consultation with the Planning Department as early in the process as possible.

### SIGN & AWNING REGULATION

Prior to installing any permanent or temporary sign or awning, applicants must verify that the proposed sign or awning is compliant with all zoning, building and other applicable codes and requirements. (Refer to *Guidelines for Signs and Awnings*.)

## HDC CRITERIA FOR COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT & STOREFRONT REVIEW

When evaluating a new commercial development or proposed repair, modification or replacement of an existing storefront, the HDC's goal is to preserve the integrity of the remaining historic fabric in Portsmouth's Historic District to ensure continued access to this shared heritage. One of the major factors in the review process is the property's historical and/or architectural value as determined by the historic designation. When considering an existing building, the more significant the property, the more critical is its authenticity.

- **Focal Properties** — Maintain the highest historic integrity with restoration of historic storefronts with original materials throughout
- **Contributing Properties** — Restoration of historic storefronts is encouraged and compatible new storefronts possible, particularly at altered storefronts
- **Non-Contributing Properties** — Restoration of historic storefronts is encouraged with sufficient documentation, with the greatest flexibility for alteration
- **New Construction & Additions** — New commercial buildings or development, appropriate to the architectural style and compatible to adjacent construction, is encouraged, with the storefronts appropriate to the proposed building's style and design

### When is HDC Review Not Required?

A Certificate of Approval is not required for:

- Ordinary maintenance and repair of an existing storefront or building element in-kind, including design and materials

## REFUSE & PARKING

Refuse or garbage collection bins and parking lots are often a visually obtrusive necessity. Many smaller commercial offices and shops rely on residential type collection bins. In larger buildings, garbage and recycling collection is often handled at a loading dock or adjacent to a rear or secondary entrance. For larger commercial uses, if refuse collection bins are located on the property at the exterior of a building, they should be located to minimize visibility and screened with opaque fencing that meets zoning requirements.

Similarly, parking areas should be screened from view to the extent possible. It is generally recommended that parking areas be located at the rear of properties with access from secondary streets and/or pedestrian ways. The installation of shrubs, plantings, fences and walls can be installed to reduce the visual impact of both refuse containers and parking areas. (Refer to *Guidelines for Site Elements & Streetscapes* regarding screening and location preferences.)

### *The HDC strongly recommends:*

- The preservation of the cohesive ambiance of the District through consistent or compatible, sympathetic new construction depending on context
- Consistent or compatible siting, proportion, scale, form, materials, fenestration, roof configuration, details and finishes
- Maintaining the appropriate historic contextual setting within the surrounding neighborhood
- Use of materials and techniques that are consistent or compatible with the surrounding neighborhood
- Construction of additions at secondary elevations wherever possible, subordinate to the historic building, and consistent or compatible with the design of the property and surrounding neighborhood
- Construction of additions so that historic building fabric is not radically changed, obscured, damaged or destroyed

### *The HDC recommends:*

- Consultation with the Planning Department early in the planning stages of a new construction project
- Review of related sections of the *Design Guidelines* to better understand the historic context and appropriate design approach and materials issues relevant to the project
- Identification, retention and preservation of all character defining features of the historic site
- Design elements and scale that are consistent or compatible with the historic context and setting
- Use of materials and techniques that are consistent or compatible to the historic context and setting

## HDC CRITERIA FOR COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT & STOREFRONT REVIEW

### (CONTINUED)

#### Rooftop Additions

In limited circumstances the HDC will consider proposals for rooftop additions that do not conform to the *Design Standards for Rooftop Additions* (page 12-9) at contributing and non-contributing buildings; however excellence in design and the architectural character of the existing building will be strong factors in the review.

#### **The HDC strongly recommends:**

- Rooftop additions to comply with the Portsmouth Zoning Code, and shall not require the granting of a variance for height limits or floor area ratios

#### **The HDC encourages:**

- Referring to *Roof Decks (Guidelines for Roofing, page 04-7)* for design criteria

#### **The HDC discourages:**

- Rooftop additions on Contributing buildings
- Rooftop additions on buildings of less than 3 full stories in height

#### **The HDC strongly discourages:**

- Rooftop additions on Focal buildings
- Rooftop additions on buildings originally constructed as residential buildings
- Rooftop additions on a roof with a pitch greater than 3" vertically in 12" horizontally and an existing parapet less than 18" in height
- Roof additions greater than 1-story and 12'-0" in height with roof forms other than flat roofs

#### Storefronts

#### **The HDC recommends:**

- Including appropriate signage and awnings in the design (Refer to *Guidelines for Signs & Awnings*)
- Installing compatible lighting where needed (Refer to *Guidelines for Signs & Awnings, page 11-5*)
- Retain residential characteristics of residences converted into commercial buildings, or vice versa
- Retaining and maintaining all building cornices, doors, stairs, features and details
- Maintaining the operability of transom windows
- Installing opaque glazing at spandrel if required to conceal interior conditions.
- Installing clear glass within a display window
- Installing privacy shades, curtains, drapes or shutters inside a non-retail door or display window
- Use materials that are consistent with the character of the existing or new building

#### Storefronts (Continued)

#### **The HDC discourages:**

- Altering a historically important storefront without sufficient evidence or documentation to provide an accurate representation including infilling windows
- Introducing a new storefront or element that alters or destroys a historic building material or where none existed
- Enclosing or removing historic elements, such as building cornices and storefronts
- Installing stylistic elements from periods that are different from the historic storefront or building and do not complement the overall stylistic expression
- Installing through-wall air conditioner or heating units that are visible from the street or remove windows to install air conditioner units
- Installing appliques, films, signage or types of glass that obstructs views into a space through storefront windows and glazing
- Installing built-in furniture or a wall that visually blocks the inside of a display windows

#### Accessibility

#### **The HDC recommends:**

- Complying with all aspects of the accessibility requirements, while minimizing alterations of the primary building façade and architectural features
- Installing ramps and/or lifts within the building envelope where it is possible to modify an existing door sill to allow entry at grade
- Installing a lift in lieu of a ramp if it would be less obtrusive
- Installing exterior ramp or lift styles that are compatible with the building
- Using railings that are simple and visually unobtrusive
- If accessibility at the front door is not possible, providing a respectful accessible entrance that is located as close to the principal entrance as possible and designed in a manner that is visually unobtrusive and complements the building's style

#### Refuse & Parking

#### **The HDC recommends:**

- Locating refuse collection bins in rear alleys or locations which are minimally visible from the street and screen with fencing
- Locating parking areas to the side and rear of buildings or along secondary elevations or streets whenever possible
- Screening refuse bins and the perimeter of parking lots with planting, fences or low walls