

# SECTION 7: QUALITATIVE GUIDELINES FOR NEW CONSTRUCTION

Historic districts can change over time and still retain the qualities that make the area historically, culturally, and architecturally significant. We accomplish this by managing the construction of new buildings and changes to existing ones. For the purposes of this document, new construction means an entirely new building or structure, rather than an addition. The construction of any new building or structure within a historic district requires a Certificate of Appropriateness.

Compatibility does not require new buildings to mimic historic properties; in fact, the City encourages contemporary design within its historic districts. When a new building is constructed, its design should relate to historic buildings in the area through mass, form, scale, proportion, siting, and materials, but a new building should be “of its own time.”

New buildings can relate to historic buildings in the area by being similar to:

- The way contributing buildings (and their front doors) are oriented to the street
- The basic forms and materials of nearby contributing buildings
- The height of contributing buildings' foundations, porches, eaves, and walls
- The arrangement of windows and doors on the fronts of contributing buildings

These basic design elements are more important than the details of individual architectural styles. As a result, new buildings can be compatible with the historic district even when they are clearly of contemporary design and construction.

This section includes qualitative guidelines for new infill construction. Measurable standards governing the size of new construction are provided in Section 5.

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*The mass and scale of these new infill buildings would be appropriate in some Houston Heights contexts.*



*This house uses new interpretations of classic Craftsman details. (Photo courtesy of Studio Z Architecture.)*

## DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

This section provides qualitative design guidelines for new construction. These require interpretation and good judgment, to ensure that the proposed project is compatible with the contributing structures in the context area. Each project is considered on its own merits; even if the same building were proposed to be constructed in multiple locations within the historic district, the differences in context areas for those various locations could result in different decisions regarding compatibility.

### 7.1 Design a new building to reflect contemporary trends in architecture.

New construction should reflect the time period in which the building is built. While many people think that new buildings in a historic district should look “historic,” best practices in historic preservation — in place for more than 50 years, and applied all over the United States — encourage new buildings and additions to look new.

Designs should be “differentiated but compatible.” Attempts to design new “historic” buildings often fail because of inaccurate scale, proportions, and detailing. In addition to failed recreations of historic buildings, even an accurate design of a historic style is inappropriate since it confuses history and the understanding of the district.

Instead, new buildings and additions or changes to noncontributing structures should either incorporate new design elements with traditional building forms, or utilize traditional design elements but apply those to unconventional or contemporary building forms. Either approach, if executed well, can result in the design being compatible with the context area but still easily identifiable as new.

- Use materials that are similar in dimensions, profile, and finish to traditional materials.
- Do not use materials that only approximate the look of traditional building elements, such as faux window sills that are flush with the wall.
- Use new interpretations of porch columns, railings, windows, and doors to distinguish new construction from older buildings.
- Use contemporary designs for skirting or screening a foundation, but install the screening in a traditional manner.
- Use simple roof forms of moderate pitch.

No specific architectural styles are required.

## 7.2 Design a new building to be compatible in level of complexity.

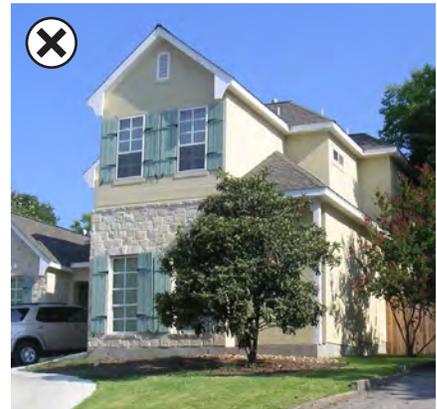
If most contributing structures in the context area are fairly simple in design, the new building should similarly be fairly modest. In a context area where buildings are more highly ornamented or exuberant in design, a new structure could reflect that higher level of complexity.

New construction is required to be compatible with the exterior features of the contributing buildings in the context area; see the criteria listed on page 1-18.

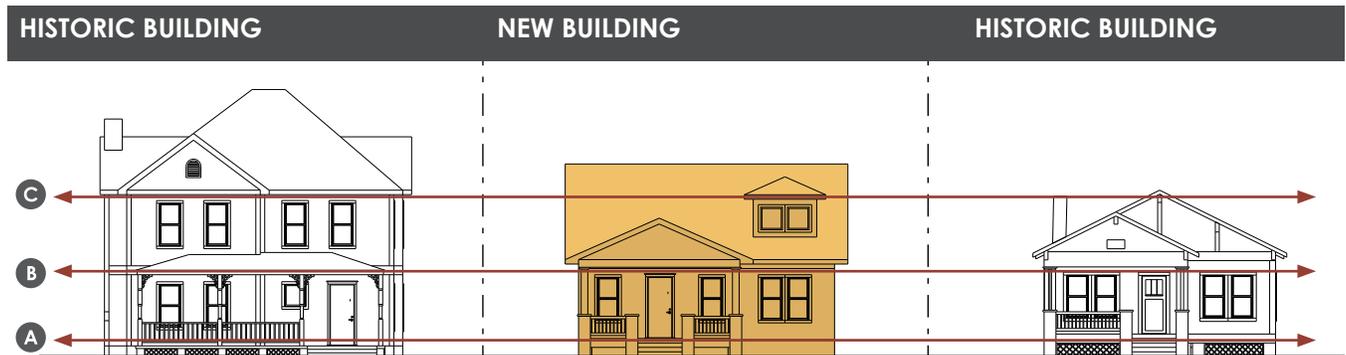
## 7.3 Design a new building to be compatible with the scale and proportion of contributing buildings in the context area.

Because contributing structures are the most important buildings in the historic district, they must remain prominent. That means that new buildings should be visually subordinate, or secondary, to their contributing neighbors. New buildings should not overshadow (literally or figuratively) contributing structures within the context area.

- Design the building using the measurable standards provided in Section 5.
- Use header heights for doors and windows that are similar to contributing buildings in the context area.



*This new infill building would be incompatible within the Houston Heights Districts due to its scale, massing, lack of a front porch, and use of stone veneer.*



Applying the measurable standards should help a new building's features align with contributing structures in the context area.

- Ⓐ Foundation and porch heights
- Ⓑ Porch eaves
- Ⓒ Main roof eaves



Use materials that are similar in dimensions, profile, and finish to traditional materials.

## Differentiation

A new building should be compatible with, but differentiated from, the existing contributing buildings in the context area. This can be accomplished by making the mass, scale, and proportions of the new building compatible. If that is accomplished, more contemporary elements can be appropriate.

### 7.4 Consider using the following options to differentiate a new building.

- Siding materials, profiles, sizes, or patterns that are not traditional
- Design features, such as columns, which are abstracted versions of traditional designs
- Non-traditional window types, sizes, or styles

## Wall Cladding

The structural wall system of a modern building or addition is covered with some form of cladding for both functional and decorative purposes. Wall cladding protects the interior of a building from weather and gives a building much of its character. Typical wall materials used today include siding, brick veneer, and stucco.

### Siding

Siding is often identified by its *profile*, or the shape of the cut end of a board. Some particularly distinctive shapes are clapboard, beveled, rabbeted bevel (aka Dolly Varden), Dutch lap, drop, and shiplap siding. The 117 and 105 profiles are particularly common designs in many of Houston's historic districts. The size of the *reveal* (the portion of the siding board that is visible) and the finish of the siding, whether smooth or textured, also contribute to the overall visual impact of siding.

### 7.5 If siding is desired, select a product with a traditional profile and no imitation woodgrain texture.

- Either horizontal siding or vertical board-and-batten siding are allowed.
- Decorative shingles may be installed in limited areas, such as within gables.
- The following siding materials are appropriate:
  - Wood siding, such as douglas fir or cypress
  - Cementitious fiber (fiber cement) siding, including that with a larger profile or size than traditional wood (although always the smooth version, not imitation wood grain)
  - Vinyl siding (allowed but not preferred)

## Masonry

Because very few houses in the Houston Heights Historic Districts were constructed in brick or stucco, these are not appropriate primary cladding material for most new buildings. Brick cladding may be used for minor building elements, such as chimneys, porch columns, and foundation piers.

- Exterior insulation and finish system (EIFS) is not allowed.
- Stone is not allowed as a wall material.
- Rusticated concrete masonry units (CMU) are only appropriate for porch columns and foundation piers.

## Windows and Doors

Windows and doors are key character-defining features.

### 7.6 Select windows and doors that are compatible with those in the existing building and other contributing buildings in the context area.

- Consider using new interpretations of windows, doors, and other features.
- Maintain a similar solid-to-void ratio between window/door openings and solid wall surfaces on walls that will be visible from the street, as compared to existing contributing buildings.
- Select windows and doors that are similar in scale and proportion to those in the context area. Other sizes and shapes are also acceptable.
- Decorative windows were used primarily for front rooms in historic houses.
- Windows must be recessed and inset, with a traditional profile. Flush, fin-mounted windows are not allowed.
- Window and door openings must be finished with trim.



An appropriate new-construction window



Use doors and windows with proportions and materials that are compatible with the context area in locations that will be highly visible from the street.



Design a porch to be compatible with the context area.



This column is out of scale with the porch.



This example of new infill with contemporary design is compatible because of the mass, form and building elements such as the porch.

## Porches

New residential buildings should have a front porch. Side or rear porches are also permitted.

### 7.7 Design a new porch to be compatible with the contributing buildings in the context area.

- Keep the scale, proportion, and character of the new porch compatible with the context area. New interpretations of traditional designs are appropriate; for example, a new porch on a Craftsman bungalow might incorporate full-height square-tapered porch columns instead of partial-height columns set on masonry bases. (See example on page 7-2.)
- The eave height of a new porch should be similar to the porch eave heights of the contributing buildings in the context area.
- Use materials that are similar in scale, proportion, texture, and finish to existing front porches.
- Design a new residential building with a one-story front porch that is *at least half as wide* as the front wall of the house.
- A new two-story house may have a two-story porch as long as the porch is *no more than half as wide* as the front wall of the house.

## Foundations

A new building may be built on a pier-and-beam, concrete perimeter wall, or slab-on-grade foundation. Slab-on-grade is allowed by the City, as long as it is detailed to look like pier-on-beam construction. However, please be aware that slab-on-grade foundations may be prohibited on some deed-restricted lots. Please check with the Houston Heights Association for any applicable deed restrictions.

In the event that there is a conflict between the design guidelines and the building code, the more restrictive measure shall prevail.

- Piers may be poured concrete or concrete masonry units (CMU).
- Piers may be clad in brick for a traditional appearance.
- Use traditional or contemporary designs for skirting or screening an addition's foundation, but install the screening within a frame located between piers.
- If conditions on a specific lot would require a different finished-floor height in order to meet requirements of the Building Code, please provide that information in the Certificate of Appropriateness application.

## Roofs

The following types of roofs are allowed for new construction:

- Gabled (front gabled, side gabled, cross gabled)
- Hipped
- Hip-on-gable
- Gable-on-hip
- Shed (minimum of 3-over-12 pitch)

Flat roofs (less than 3-over-12 pitch) are not allowed on residential buildings.

### 7.8 Design the roof of a new building to be compatible with nearby contributing buildings.

- Asphalt or composition shingles are allowed in either three-tab or architectural (dimensional) styles.
- Metal roofs are allowed for additions to **residential buildings**.
  - Material should be a typical metal color (silver, bronze, etc.) with a matte, nonreflective finish.
  - Material should be appropriately sized for a residential building. For example, standing seam metal typically measures 18–24 inches between interlocking seams for residential application. (If ribs are present between the interlocking seams, measure between the seams, not between the seam and the rib.)
- Metal roofs for additions to **commercial buildings** should be

appropriately sized and may be finished in a neutral color.

### **Dormers**

Dormers may be used in new construction as a way to create livable space in an attic.

- Dormers may be incorporated into one-story buildings.
- For a two-story building, dormers may only be located on a rear-facing roof.

*Please note: attics with dormers are included in FAR calculations for new construction.*

### **Shutters and Awnings**

Awnings and operable shutters can provide protection from the sun and help to limit heat gain to a building's interior. Shutters and awnings may be used in a residential addition. For more information about requirements for shutters and awnings, please see pages 4-29 and 4-30 in Section 4.

### **Chimneys**

Chimneys may be used in a residential addition under the following conditions:

- The chimney must be built of or clad in brick.
- Bare metal chimney pipes or chimneys clad in siding are not allowed.
- Chimneys may be located on a side or rear wall or interior of the building. Chimneys are not allowed on front walls.

For more information about chimneys, please see page 4-39 in Section 4.

### **Other Items**

The following may be used on a residential or commercial building as part of its construction. They must be included in the initial COA. If any of these are to be installed later, that project will require a separate COA.

- Solar panels
- Satellite dishes or antennae
- Low-profile skylights
- Burglar bars on windows and doors, and other security devices
- Accessibility ramps or lifts
- Signs

For more information about these items, please see Section 4.