

City of Tuscaloosa Planning Commission

HISTORIC DISTRICT BUFFER DESIGN GUIDELINES

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Introduction

The Tuscaloosa Historic Preservation Commission is intended to meet several essential needs. For the community, it assures that Tuscaloosa’s historic resources are maintained in a manner appropriate to the city’s heritage. For property owners, residents and contractors, it provides primary guidance in the planning and design of projects that are sympathetic to the special character of the historic district—and that will, in turn, assure that property values are maintained and enhanced.

General Design Guidelines for Historic District Buffers

The design of buildings is determined by the way in which various basic design concepts and elements are utilized: building orientation and setback, shape, proportion, scale/height, directional emphasis, massing, rhythm, architectural and site elements. These concepts form the basis for visual relationships among buildings, which in turn influence the ways in which the public perceives buildings.

When new work is added or a new structure is built among existing buildings, the level of success with which it relates to those existing buildings—and whether it contributes to or detracts from the area in which it is to be located—will be determined by the ways in which its design recognizes the prevailing design expression in the area of influence. The following identify and define several principal concepts of design and offer guidelines for referencing predominant design characteristics in evaluating the appropriateness of a proposed new building or addition.

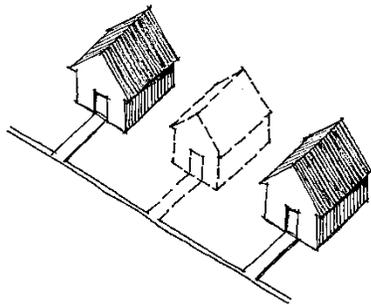
The *illustrations* are intended only to point out the types of relationships between new buildings and existing buildings of importance and are not meant to serve as specific design solutions. The Tuscaloosa Historic Preservation Commission reserves the right to amend or append these guidelines at any time. Accompanying the illustrations are written *guidelines*, such as the following:

Guideline: *Identify and respect the prevailing character of adjacent buildings and surrounding development.*

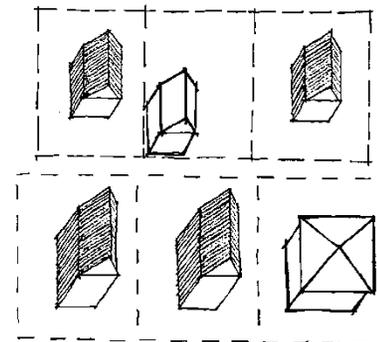
Building Orientation and Setback

Building orientation refers to the directional placement of the building on the site, while setback refers to how far back the building is from the street and side lots lines.

Guideline: *The orientation of a new building and its site placement shall appear consistent with dominant patterns within the area of influence, if such patterns are apparent.*



Building Orientation/Setback—
Appropriate: The proposed (center) building respects prevailing orientation and setback patterns.

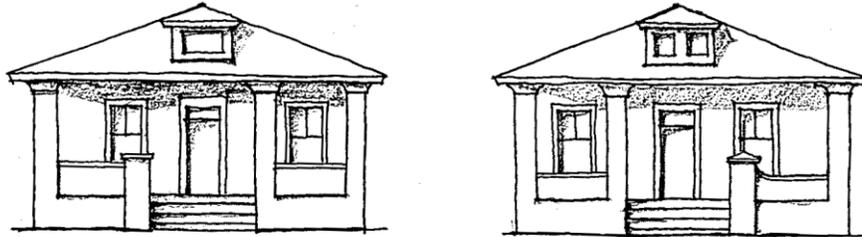


Building Orientation/Setback—
Inappropriate: The middle building at the top violates the established setbacks from the street and property lines. The building on the right at the bottom, with its square plan, is inconsistent with the established front-to-back orientation pattern of the adjacent houses.

Directional Emphasis

Most buildings are either vertical or horizontal in their directional emphasis, which is determined by the size and placement of elements and openings on a building's front façade as well as by the building's overall shape. Surface materials and architectural detailing may also influence directional emphasis.

Guideline: *A new building's directional emphasis should be consistent with dominant patterns of directional emphasis within the area of influence, if such patterns are present.*



Directional Emphasis—Appropriate: The two nearly identical houses above both exhibit horizontal directional emphasis.

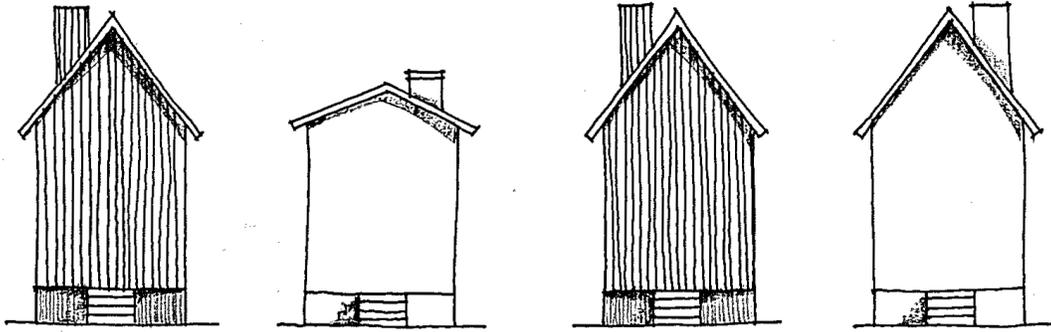


Directional Emphasis—Inappropriate: Shown above are two houses, typical for the neighborhood and each with a vertical directional emphasis, and a new house that is clearly horizontal in emphasis. This new building is neither sympathetic nor consistent with the established pattern of directional emphasis along this street.

Shape

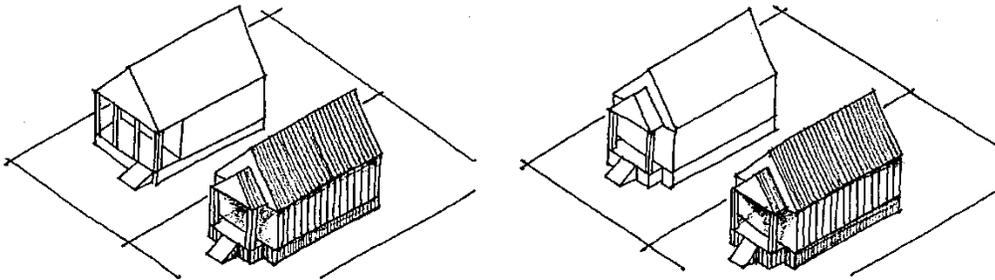
A building's surfaces and edges define its overall shape. This overall shape, in concert with the shapes of individual elements (such as roof pitch, porch form, and window and door openings), is important in establishing rhythms in a streetscape. Shape can also be an important element of style.

Guideline. Roof Pitch: *The roof pitch of a new building should be consistent with those of existing buildings within the area of influence, if dominant patterns are apparent.*



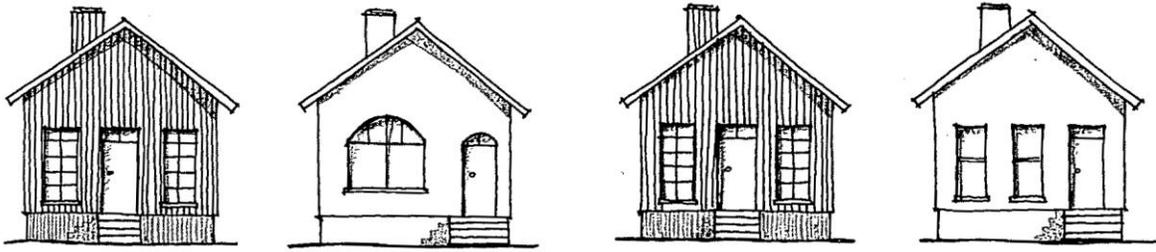
Shape—Roof Pitch—Inappropriate/Appropriate Examples: *These two comparisons depict relationships between historic and new buildings in terms of roof pitch. The example on the left is that of a historic house (shaded) with a steeply pitched roof standing next to a new building with an inappropriate shallow-pitched roof. The example on the right shows a more compatible roof pitch on the new building.*

Guideline. Porch Form: *The shape and size of a new porch should be consistent with those of existing buildings within the area of influence, if dominant patterns are apparent.*



Shape—Porch Form—Inappropriate/Appropriate Examples: *These two comparisons depict relationships between historic and new buildings in terms of porch form. The example on the left is that of a historic house (shaded) with an extending front gable porch standing next to a new building with an inappropriate integral porch. The example on the right shows a more compatible porch form on the new building.*

Guideline. Building Elements: *The principal elements and shapes used on the front facade of a new building should be compatible with those of existing buildings in the area of influence, if dominant patterns are apparent.*

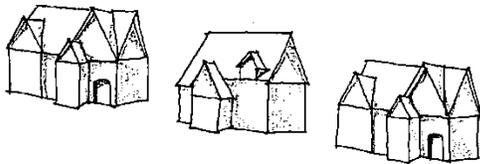


Shape—Building Elements—Inappropriate/Appropriate Examples: These two comparisons depict relationships between historic and new buildings in terms of building elements. The example above left is that of a historic house (shaded) with flat-arched windows and door openings standing next to a new building with inappropriate round-arched window and door openings. The example above right shows more compatible window and door openings on the new building.

Massing

Massing has to do with the way in which a building's volumetric components (i.e., main body, roof, bays, overhangs, and porches) are arranged and with the relationship between solid wall surfaces and openings.

Guideline: *The massing of a new building should be consistent with dominant massing patterns of existing buildings in the area of influence, if such patterns are apparent.*



Massing—Compatible New Development:
The new building in the middle has used a massing scheme that is compatible with the patterns established by the historic buildings to either side.

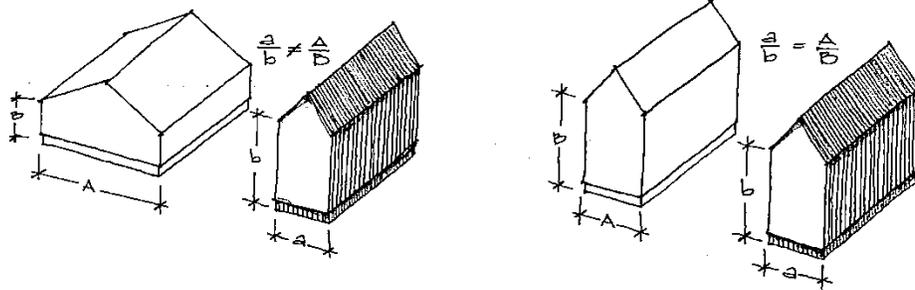


Massing—Incompatible New Development:
The new building in the middle has used a massing scheme that is not compatible with the patterns established by the historic buildings to either side.

Proportion

Proportion is the relationship of one dimension to another; for example, the relationship of the height to the width of a building, or the height and width of windows and doors. Individual elements of a building should be proportional to each other and the building.

Guideline. *The proportions of a new building should be consistent with dominant patterns of proportion of existing buildings in the area of influence, if such patterns are apparent.*

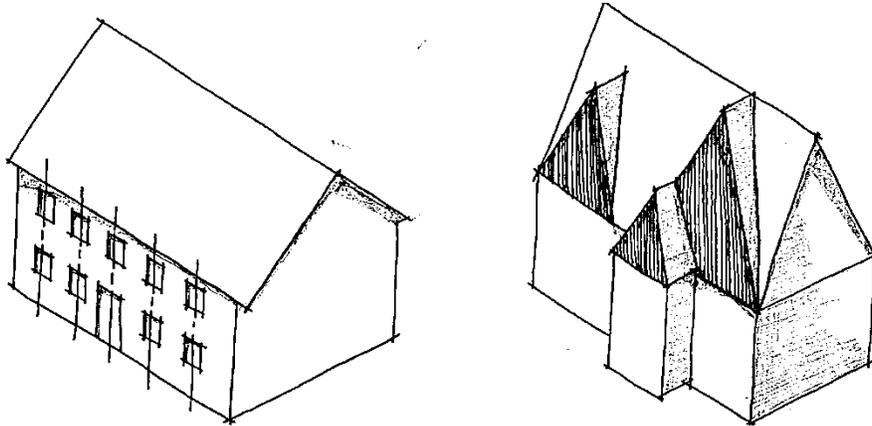


Proportion—Inappropriate/Appropriate Examples: *These two comparisons depict relationships between historic and new buildings in terms of front-façade height-to-width ratio. The example on the left is that of a historic house (shaded) with a height-to-width ratio resulting in a very vertical expression standing next to a new building with a horizontal height-to-width ratio. The example on the right shows a more compatible height-to-width ratio on the new building.*

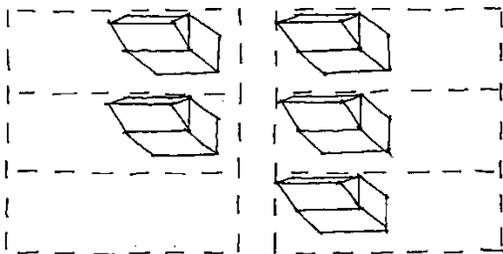
Rhythm

Rhythm is the recurring patterns of lines, shapes, forms, or colors (materials) on a building or along a streetscape. For example, the rhythm of openings on a house refers to the number and placement of windows and doors on a façade. Rhythm also occurs on the larger scale of streetscapes as created by development patterns (orientation and setback) and details of individual buildings (directional emphasis, scale, height, massing, etc.)

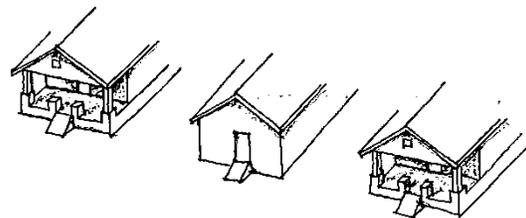
Guideline. *New construction should respect and not disrupt existing rhythmic patterns set in the area of influence, if such patterns are apparent.*



Rhythm—Symmetrical/Asymmetrical: These two houses illustrate different types of rhythms created by individual building elements. On the left is a building with a regular placement of elements creating a symmetrical façade. The building on the right has an irregular placement of elements creating an asymmetrical façade.



Rhythm—Established Setback Rhythm: These five houses have expressed a well-defined setback and placement rhythm along this street. A new building on the vacant parcel will either continue to or disrupt this pattern.

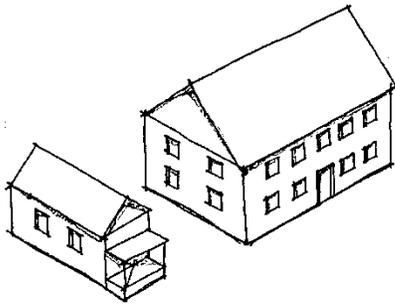


Rhythm—Inappropriate New Construction: Patterns of solid and voids help create rhythm along a street. The existing buildings in this illustration display a characteristic open porch space. The proposed building in the middle presents a solid front wall surface that disrupts the existing rhythm.

Scale and Height

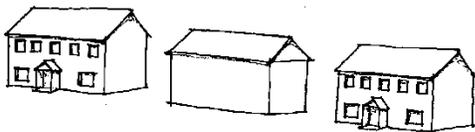
Scale refers to the apparent relationship between two entities, such as the relationship of a building's height to human height, the relationship between different buildings' heights and sizes, or the relationship between the size of an addition and the building to which it is attached. In the Historic Districts the two most important issues are (1) the relationship of new construction to structures in the area of influence, and (2) the relationship of additions to the building to which they are being added.

Guideline: A proposed new building should appear to conform to the floor-to-floor heights of existing structures if there is a dominant pattern within the established area of influence.

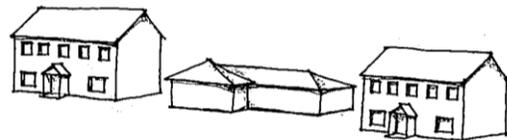


Scale/Height—Illustrations of Different Scales: The buildings to the left obviously express different scales.

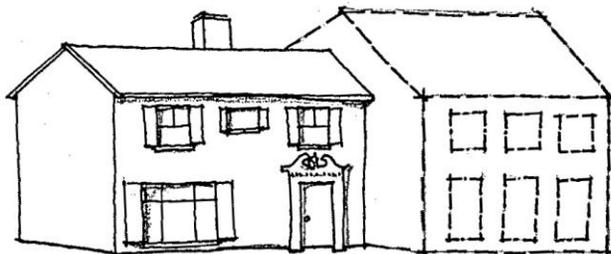
Guideline: New construction should be consistent with dominant patterns of scale within the area of influence, if such patterns are present. Additions should not appear to overwhelm the existing building.



Scale/Height—Appropriate New Construction: The scale of the proposed building in the middle is compatible with that of the historic buildings to either side.



Scale/Height—Inappropriate New Construction: The scale of the proposed building in the middle is incompatible with that of the historic buildings to either side.



Scale/Height—Inappropriate Addition: This addition (dashed) is too large and overwhelms the original structure. It also juts forward, thus accenting its presence.

New Construction

After identifying the area of influence and assessing the prevailing character of the development within that area, the next step is to begin the design of the project. Each project is unique and needs to be taken on a case-by-case basis to meet the needs of the owner while at the same time protecting the character of the property and area. There are some general concepts, however, that can assist with the design of the new development.

Guideline: *New construction should reference and not conflict with the predominant site and architectural elements of existing properties in the area of influence.*

To be compatible with its context, new construction should respect established design patterns within the area of influence. Following are some additional guidelines for new construction.

Guideline: *New construction should reference predominant design characteristics that make an area distinctive in order to achieve creative and compatible design solutions that are more than just mere imitations of existing buildings. However, new construction is not limited to historical styles, and new buildings should not be imitations of earlier styles.*