



Town of Ashland Historic District Ashland, Massachusetts

Design Review Guidelines

Ashland Historic District Commission
February 2025

Town of Ashland Historic District Design Review Guidelines

Introduction

Through the establishment of a local historic district via Town By-Law <Insert By-law number>, Ashland is able to highlight the town's historical character and protect properties within the historic district from inappropriate alterations and demolition. The locally-appointed Historic District Commission is responsible for reviewing applications for certain projects visible to the public way within this district. The Commission works with district property owners to ensure the historical integrity of properties is preserved without sacrificing the needs of the present.

The purpose of these guidelines is to encourage appropriate exterior design by applicants while ensuring fair, uniform and predictable actions from the Historical District Commission in their oversight. The Commission recognizes that certain properties, and the features of certain properties, might have greater historical significance than others. However, all applicants within the district are encouraged to follow these guidelines to the greatest extent possible and should not expect the Commission to allow applications to depart from these guidelines in most circumstances.

Any new construction or alterations to the exterior of an existing building or structure located in the Ashland Historic District and visible from a public way requires the review by the Ashland Historic District Commission. In many cases, it will also require the review of other departments in Town including, but not limited to, the Building Inspector, Planning Board and Zoning Board. Property owners within this district should always check with both the Historic District Commission and other relevant departments before having any exterior work performed.

Overview: The Ashland Historic District

Boundaries

Reference Town By-law <Insert Number> for specific boundaries of the Ashland Historic District

To find out if your property is within the Local Historic District, or to learn how to become part of the district, please contact the Historic District Commission or the Ashland Historical Commission for more information.

Historic District Guidelines for Building Care, Modifications and New Construction

The Ashland Historic District Commission wants to work with district property owners to preserve the historic integrity of downtown Ashland whenever possible. The following guidelines outline general principles for the preservation, maintenance, addition and changes to historic properties. Each property and their proposed changes are unique, and the HDC's review and decision about a given project will be assessed on an individual basis.

These guidelines are derived from the [Secretary of the Interior Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties](#), which have been used by over 2000 communities nationwide to oversee the preservation and stewardship of historic properties.

Purpose of the Historic District

1. To preserve and protect distinctive characteristics of buildings and places significant to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and the Town of Ashland
2. To ensure new construction is compatible with existing buildings in the district.
3. To maintain the integrity of not only individual structures but of the district as a whole.

The establishment of a historic district is not meant to prevent change or discourage new construction. The intent is to make changes and additions that are harmonious with the existing landscape, providing thoughtful consideration as the district grows and evolves over time. These guidelines prevent the addition of elements that might distract from the aesthetic and historic value of the district.

Establishment of the Historic District and Commission

The Ashland Historic District, including its specific boundaries, were approved by vote at Town Meeting on **<Insert DATE>**. A two-thirds vote is required for creating a local historic district. The district is overseen by the Historic District Commission, whose authority is established through the Town Bylaw and the State's enabling legislation of Chapter 40C, the Historic Districts Act. Commissioners are appointed by the Selectboard. The Commission holds meetings as needed

Purview

Any change or addition to the exterior of a property that is visible from a public way within the district requires a Certificate of Appropriateness from the Historic District Commission. Any new construction within the Historic District will also need to be reviewed and approved by the Commission before a building permit can be issued and work can be performed.

Reference Town of Ashland General By-laws <INSERT BY-LAW>:for items that are **exempt**-from review.

In addition, maintenance and ordinary repair are **exempt** from the Commission's review. This generally means replacing or repairing exterior features without changing the design, materials, color or outward appearance of the feature. To determine if your project is considered ordinary repair, it is always best to contact the Commission for clarification.

Existing Non-Conforming Materials and Design

The Commission will only review the parts of the property relevant to the proposed changes, additions or new construction. If non-conforming materials are present elsewhere on the property but are not included in the scope of the proposed changes, the Commission cannot ask the property owner to bring those non-conforming items into compliance. However, future alterations to non-conforming materials or design would fall under the review of the Commission.

General Guidelines

The Ashland Historic District Commission supports the broad philosophical principles of The U. S. Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties, intended to promote responsible preservation tactics.

The following guidelines are given consideration by the Ashland Historic District Commission when evaluating applications:

- The historic character of a property should be retained and preserved. The removal of historic materials or alteration of features and spaces that characterize a property should be avoided.
- Each property shall be recognized as a physical record of its time, place, and use. Changes that create a false sense of historical development, such as adding conjectural features or architectural elements from other buildings, should be avoided.
- Most properties change over time; those changes that have acquired historic significance in their own right should be retained and preserved.
- Distinctive materials, features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a historic property should be preserved.
- Demolition of entire structures is strongly discouraged and will likely not be approved. If necessary, deteriorated historic features should be repaired rather than replaced. When the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature should match the old in design, texture, and other visual qualities and, where possible, materials.
- New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction should not destroy historic materials that characterize the property. The new work should be differentiated from the old and be compatible with the massing, size, scale, and architectural features to protect the historic integrity of the property and its environment.
- New additions and adjacent or related new construction should be undertaken in a manner that if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment would be unimpaired.

Specific Guidelines

Wood

Wood siding: clapboards, shingles, board and batten; cornices, brackets, shutters, columns and balustrades, etc.

- Retain and repair original or later historically important material whenever possible.
- Retain and repair, and when necessary replace deteriorated material to match the original as closely as possible.
- Invest in quality paint and proper application.
- Replacement of wood with synthetic siding (aluminum, vinyl, artificial stone or brick, etc.) severely compromises the appearance and integrity of old buildings and will not be approved.

Masonry: Stonework, Brickwork, and Stucco

Building walls, chimneys, brackets, railings, cornices, window architraves, door pediments, steps, columns, etc.

- Wherever possible, original masonry, stonework, brickwork, and mortar should be retained.
- Deteriorated masonry should be repaired and replaced with material that matches as closely as possible the original.
- Applying paint or other coatings such as stucco to masonry that has otherwise been unpainted or uncoated will not be approved.

Paint

- The Commission does not require a hearing if you wish to repaint your house. Although not subject to review, the Commission encourages owners to select colors that are harmonious and compatible with other buildings in the district.

Roofs

- Preserve the integrity of the original or later historically important roof shape.
- Retain the original roof covering whenever possible.
- Whenever possible, replace deteriorated roof covering with material that matches the old in composition, color, size, shape and texture.
- Asphalt shingles are acceptable.
- Preserve the architectural features that give the roof its distinctive character, such as cornices, gutters, cupolas, dormers and brackets. Downspouts should be inconspicuously located and when painted, match the siding or trim.

Windows, Shutters and Doors

- Retain original and later historically important door and window openings where they exist. Do not enlarge or reduce door and window openings for the purpose of fitting stock window sashes, doors, or air conditioners.
- Whenever possible, repair and retain original or later historically important window elements such as sash, lintels, sill, glass, shutters and other decorative elements. If replacement is necessary, the materials and design should be nearly identical to the original.
- New replacement windows should match existing windows in configuration, material and detail to the extent possible. Window muntins must divide glass or be permanently fixed to the exterior and interior faces; removable grilles will not be approved.
- Storm windows may be added over existing windows.
- Wooden shutters that are appropriate to old windows should be repaired or replaced using materials that match as closely as possible.
- Original or historically significant entries, including reveals, doors, surrounds, transoms or fanlights, sidelights and other features, may not be altered.
- New doors shall be appropriate to the existing surround in style, material and proportions.

Fences

Fences are subject to HDC review and must be reviewed and approved prior to installation. Fences in front of buildings should be open and low (not exceeding 42” in height) so as not to block the public view. Fences should be compatible with the existing building in material, proportion, style and historic period and should enhance the streetscape. Architecturally significant fences should be maintained and repaired or restored whenever possible. More solid, taller fences are appropriate to provide privacy or safety but should be located where they have minimal visual impact from public ways. These fences should also be appropriate to the structure and surrounding area. Five feet is the recommended maximum height. Vinyl, stockade, chain link, light gauge metal and concrete block are not appropriate materials for fences and generally will not be approved.

Foundations

Existing Foundations: In both residential and commercial buildings, the typical foundation material is unpainted brick or granite. In all cases, the material and design of the original or architecturally significant foundations should be preserved whenever possible. When repair and re-pointing is necessary, refer to the Masonry Guideline.

New Foundations: Often, new foundations are substantially higher than historic ones. Every effort should be made to design a low foundation and use vegetation to screen a foundation that must be high due to building code conditions.

Lighting

Original light fixtures, where they survive, can be important and rare architectural features, contributing significantly to the structure's historic resource value. For this reason, original or later appropriate light fixtures should be retained, and if possible, repaired using recognized preservation methods. Deteriorated or missing elements should be replaced with like materials. Replacement should be based, if possible, on physical or documentary evidence. New light fixtures should be of a design and scale that is appropriate to the style and period of the building rather than imitate styles earlier than the building or structure.

Modern Equipment and Energy Conservation

Modern equipment includes utility meters, HVAC equipment, ducts, fans, solar panels, antennas, cellular towers, satellite dishes, propane tanks, and dumpsters. Modern equipment should, in general, be located to minimize visibility from a public way, and should not be located in a front yard, whenever possible. Visible elements should be designed or use colors to blend the equipment into its surroundings or be screened by an appropriately designed and scaled fence or plant material.

All such equipment is subject to review by the HDC. The HDC encourages the use of "green" technology where possible, to further adapt historic buildings to modern living.

Solar panels – mounted on the roof of a building, solar shingles, or freestanding panels – are allowed within the districts as long as they do not interrupt the historic appearance and character of the property and the larger district. Solar panels on a roof should be installed so that they are reversible and do not do any permanent damage to the roof face or structure. The slope of the solar panel should match the slope of the roof, and they should be installed no more than three inches above the roof surface. If possible, solar panels should be installed on a roof face that is not visible from the public way or in a location that is shielded by architectural features such as a chimney or dormer. The placement of solar panels on a non-historic addition is preferable to their installation on a historic section of roof. If it is not possible to mount them on a roof not facing the public way, consideration should be given to ground-mounted solar panels that can be sited in a section of the property that is not visible from the public way. The color of the panels and any associated mechanical equipment should match the roof surface and/or be painted to match the walls of the house.

Exterior Signage

<Insert Language>

Demolitions

Demolition of part or all of a structure by any means including neglect is considered to be an alteration to the exterior and is subject to the review of the Commission. Demolitions are seldom approved in the Ashland Historic District. When applying for approval to demolish a building, the Commission will consider the importance of the old building to the streetscape as well as its historical significance. Depending on the age of the building, demolition requests are also subject to approval by the Ashland Historical Commission which requires a separate review process.

Additions

New additions should not disrupt the essential form and integrity of the building and should be compatible in size, scale, material and character of the building and its environment. Where possible, new additions should be added to the rear of the house or at least be located in a secondary position relative to the original house. New designs do not need to copy the earlier building. They can evoke without copying the architecture of the building. A building should not be altered to an appearance that predates its construction. New additions or alterations should be done in a way that, if they were to be removed in the future, would preserve the basic form and integrity of the historic property.

Temporary Structures

Where possible, temporary structures within the district should be located so they are not visible from a public way. Temporary structures shall be removed or reviewed in two years. Temporary structures may also be subject to a Building Inspector's permit and Town of Ashland Zoning By-laws.

New Construction

The Commission will review all proposed alterations of, and additions to, existing structures, and all new construction within the local historic district.

New construction should respect the existing historic streetscape. The historic relationship of buildings to the street and to other properties in the district, including setbacks and open spaces, should be maintained.

The Commission will consider the appropriateness of the size, massing, scale, height, and shape of the building or structure both in relation to the land area upon which the building or structure is situated and to buildings and structures in the

vicinity. The Commission may impose dimensional and setback requirements in addition to those required by local Zoning By-laws.

The style of architecture of new construction should harmonize with the predominant style of existing historic buildings in the vicinity.

New structures should be finished on the exterior with materials, composition, and architectural details that are consistent with the architectural style predominant in the vicinity.

Individual features such as doors and windows should be compatible in proportion, size, shape, location, and pattern with similar features on other contributing structures in the district.

Alterations and additions should be compatible with the character of the building and earlier additions in terms of size, scale, massing, material, location and detail.

The original portion of the building and earlier additions should continue to be recognizable apart from the addition by means of massing, articulation of setbacks, trim and ornamental detail. Additions should be designed so that the primary elevations of the original building remain clearly delineated, and are not rendered subordinate to the original structure.

Amendments and Severability

The Commission reserves the right to amend these Guidelines.

If any part of these Guidelines is deemed to be invalid, illegal or unconstitutional, then that part shall be severed from the text, and the remaining section of these Guidelines shall continue to be in full force and effect.

Application Procedures

The Ashland Historic District Commission will not formally review an Application for Certificate until all zoning issues have been resolved through the Ashland Planning Board or Zoning Board of Appeals.

Before commencing work, an applicant should inform the Commission of the intended work. The Commission welcomes advance inquiries for interpretations or advice before filing an Application for a Certificate of Appropriateness, a Certificate of Non-Applicability or a Certificate of Hardship.

The different certificates are defined as the follows:

1. Certificate of Appropriateness - issued for approved alterations and new construction.
2. Certificate of Non-Applicability - issued for work that is an exact duplication of existing features
3. Certificate of Hardship - issued to permit work that the Commission would find inappropriate except that the Commission has determined that failure to approve such work would cause a substantial hardship, financial or otherwise and that the work would not represent a significant detriment to the district, based on conditions especially affecting the building or structure, but not affecting the district generally. The Commission grants Certificates of Hardship only after holding a Public Hearing.

The Commission will determine based on the bylaw requirements whether any of the proposed work is subject to review.