

DESIGN REVIEW GUIDELINES
FOR
NEWTONVILLE HISTORIC DISTRICT

PURPOSE

The purpose of the design review guidelines is to inform design decisions regarding renovation or construction of properties in the Newtonville Historic District. It is a resource for the community and will serve to guide the commission's policies.

INTRODUCTION

Newtonville has been recognized as an architecturally important and intact historic neighborhood displaying examples of many 19th and early 20th century residential architectural styles. In 2002 the Newton Board of Aldermen approved the formation of the Newtonville Historic District in accordance with the General Laws of Massachusetts and Newton City Ordinances. By formally recognizing the district, the city clearly acknowledges the historical significance and architectural integrity of the area contained within the boundaries of the Newtonville Historic District. Newtonville Historic District has an intact historic fabric with a variety of styles of the representative of its primary period of growth and development as a streetcar suburb of Boston. The study which formed the basis of the historic designation describes the cohesive nature of the neighborhood that results from the overall massing, scale, lot size, set backs and craftsmanship of its structures.

The Newtonville Historic District consists almost entirely of residential structures, most dating from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The dwellings are characteristically large massive houses, which were originally built as single-family homes on moderate sized lots.

Demolition of any structure within the District is strongly discouraged and will only be considered when all other possible options for reusing a structure have been exhausted. Further, it is the responsibility of the applicant to establish that the structure to be demolished has no architectural or historical character relating to the development of the Newtonville Historic District. Instead, the Commission encourages applicants to consider creative solutions or modifications which will achieve the same goal while preserving the original character of the structure.

Characteristics which are encouraged and which contribute to the uniqueness of the District include:

- designs that are residential in scale and have domestic scale elements such as porches, balconies, terraces, bay windows, dormers, etc.
- emphasis on craftsmanship for overall design as well as detail;

- use of natural materials which are consistent with historic materials within the district;
- variety of New England architectural styles;
- formal attitude of building styles and settings.

The local historic district is administered by the local historic district commission which reviews and advises on all proposals for change, including alterations, demolition, and new construction that are visible from a public street, way, park, or body of water. The Commission serves as a resource and can direct one to publications and information about appropriate design and use of materials.

WHAT IS REVIEWED

The purpose of establishing the Newtonville Local Historic District is to preserve and enhance the streetscapes and overall community character by ensuring elements of appropriate bulk, material, and detail. To ensure that the new elements and the removal or modification of existing elements have a positive effect on the physical character of the District, proposals will be reviewed for compatibility with existing architecture in terms of land coverage, massing (bulk), proportions, and materials. The compatibility will be assessed for its general principles as well as its specific elements of design. It is not the intent to dictate style or taste by the review process.

The Commission strongly discourages demolition of any structure.

In the case of new construction or additions to existing buildings or structures, the Newtonville Historic Commission will consider the appropriateness of the size and shape of the building or structure both in relation to the land area upon which the building or structure is situated and in relation to buildings and structures in the vicinity, and the Commission may, in appropriate cases, impose dimensional and set-back requirements in addition to those required by applicable zoning ordinances.

It is the Commission's responsibility to determine whether a property is visible from a public street, way, park, and/or body of water and to proceed with the review when appropriate. Those properties which are only viewed from a distance will be considered for those aspects which are perceptible.

CRITERIA FOR REVIEW

In its mission to preserve the architectural and historical integrity of the district, the Newtonville Historic District Commission will review each proposal in terms of general principles of design and in terms of specific elements of design.

The general principles of design refer to the site, streetscape, and community. The specific elements of design refer to the individual properties or elements of the site design.

General Principles of Design

- **Character** - Is the proposal appropriate to the existing community character which is illustrated by the variety of architectural styles set in generous formal settings with attention to detail and craftsmanship?
- **Harmony** - Does the proposal have a consistency and unity of form and detail?

- **Site Context** - How successful is the relationship between a proposal and its surroundings relative to setbacks, heights, and the harmony and character of streetscape and/or existing structure(s)?
- **Landscaping** - Do grade changes, garden structures, driveways, and fencing, which can articulate a site and create physical edges, maintain the formal character?
- **Spatial Relationship** - Does the proposal address the issue of varying sizes of front, side and rear spaces in relation to site and adjacent properties?

Specific Elements of Design

- **Scale** - Does the proposal demonstrate a balanced relationship in the parts of the design and a domestic scale consistent with other structures in the district? Note that the Newtonville Historic District Commission generally discourages additions to existing structures that increase the total built square footage by 50% or more. In almost all cases, additions should be clearly subordinate to the existing structure.
- **Height** - Is there a relationship of height with adjacent properties which tends to be consistent within streetscapes of the particular area?
- **Massing/Bulk** - Is there an overall relationship of the building size and scale relative to the lot and to surrounding properties? Changes should not cause a dramatic difference in the streetscape. In appropriate cases, the Commission may impose dimensional and set-back requirements in addition to those required by zoning to prevent developments which are incongruous to the historic aspects of the District or the architectural characteristics of the surrounding properties.
- **Setback** - Does the relationship to site and to streetscape maintain balance and harmony within the streetscape?
- **Roof** - Are the shapes and angles consistent with surrounding roof shapes and pitches to maintain balance and setbacks and visual lines?
- **Fenestration** - Do the patterns and rhythms of windows and doors maintain a balance, which can be symmetrical or asymmetrical, and convey a sense of function? Existing historical elements should be repaired/replaced in kind whenever possible.
- **Materials** - Is the exterior cladding, roof, window, door, and architectural trim compatible with materials used in the community which are predominantly of natural materials? Whenever possible, materials which are historically appropriate to the existing architectural features should be used.
- **Surface treatments** - Is there an overall harmony of texture, detail, and depth?

The criteria are specific to certain design principles without dictating the specific styles of proposals. Contemporary design is appropriate in historic districts when it is reflective of these guidelines for size, scale and massing. Applicants should refer to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties for further information on appropriate techniques and materials. A copy of this document is available on the National Park Services website at www.cr.nps.gov/hps/tps/secstan1.htm.

WHAT TO SUBMIT

The applicant should provide information that demonstrates how the proposal meets the standards of the district. The materials required vary according to the type, size, and scale of the project and applicants should discuss the project with the Preservation Planner or Commission staff if they have any questions or concerns. Standard items may include the following according to the scope and complexity of the proposal:

1. Photographs of existing site conditions and area of potential change
2. Site plan showing adjacent properties at a scale which is appropriate to the site (1"=20'-0" min.)**
3. Building elevations (1/4"=1')**
4. Building materials literature and/or physical samples
5. Historical information (photos, maps, architectural plans, etc.)

** Note: Replacement and/or repair projects may not require this level of documentation. Please contact the Preservation Planner for further information.

It is important to convey the size, height and massing of a proposed building or addition and how the new construction will relate to the land and adjacent topography and structures. In addition to the items listed above, applications for new construction or substantial alteration should include:

6. Additional photographs – showing at least 4 views from cardinal points looking towards the site which show the subject's relationship to relevant adjacent streetscapes and structures.
7. Site sections and topographic information.
8. Drawings/plans of proposed building construction - one bound set and one unbound set at a scale of 1/4" = 1'. Architectural details must be included and labeled on the plans (both dimensionally and specifying materials) which are presented for review and approval as well as on the construction documents submitted for the building permit. Required details include, but are not limited to, the following:
 - Chimney caps
 - Roof pitch
 - Eave detail
 - Rake detail (dimensions and material)
 - Vents (location, size, material)
 - Gutters (location, design, and material)
 - Rain leaders
 - Roof materials
 - Siding (material, detail, exposure to the weather)
 - Fenestration
 - Doors (style, frame, and material. Wood doors must be used on any principal facade)*
 - Windows (manufacturer, style, muntin profile, number of lights if divided lights, head, casing, sill. The Commission strongly encourages the use of wooden sash true or simulated divided lights with full profile muntins)*
 - Frames (full detail and section, materials)
 - Watertable
 - Cornerboards
 - Foundation
 - Utility meters and boxes (location and size)
 - Porches (posts, railings, balustrade, roofing materials, steps, and any arch detailing such as molding, brackets, etc.)*

Note: Plans stating “to match existing” will only be accepted in cases where the existing material to be matched will remain in place elsewhere in the building.

* Specific architectural details, particularly those involved in door and window frames, trim detail, entrances, porches, etc, should be drawn separately at a scale of ½”= 1’.

It is important that the same set of Commission signed and approved plans are used for construction. Any deviations from the approved plans must be approved by the Commission prior to construction.

Applicants who are considering new construction, additions, or substantial renovations are encouraged to meet with the Commission for an informal review before completing their plans or submitting a formal application. The purpose of this meeting is to evaluate any potential issues with the project and to determine additional materials or information which might be helpful for the formal discussion. The applicant should note, however, that an informal review is advisory only and that opinions expressed during this discussion do not necessarily reflect the views of other members or constitute an approval of the project. The Commission is typically available for informal reviews at the end of their regularly scheduled monthly meeting but applicants should contact the Commission’s staff person listed below to ensure availability.

Projects which have been insufficiently prepared or inadequately documented will only be dealt with informally.

Requests for Demolition

Demolition requests or partial demolition requests are inherently a risk to historic preservation and are rarely granted within the Historic District. Demolition can and will be prohibited unless strong proof is shown that the resource is either historically not significant or is verifiably beyond rehabilitation. Verification that the building is beyond rehabilitation may, at the Commission’s discretion, include an internal and external inspection of the structure by Commission members and/or a certified structural engineer.

Requests for demolition which rest upon arguments including, but not limited to:

- the poor condition of the structure due to deferred maintenance;
- promises of faithful reproduction;
- a desire for alternate uses incompatible with the original structure; or
- unverified structural reports claiming that the structure is unsound

will not be accepted per se as grounds for demolition, particularly for resources which are noted in the District’s Study Report for their historic or architectural value.

These guidelines having been stated, the greatest threats to significant resources within the District are deferred maintenance, neglect, and slow deterioration. Such deterioration is typically beyond the ability of the Commission to arrest and can result in the destruction of a resource more slowly but just as surely as deliberate demolition. The Commission is willing to work imaginatively with applicants that are intent upon the overall restoration of a property, even if this restoration entails some changes to the original resource, provided that the overall result is aligned with the preservation aims of the District.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

For additional information about procedures and appropriate documentation, please contact the Planning and Development Department at 617-796-1120.