

DESIGN REVIEW GUIDELINES

NEWTON UPPER FALLS HISTORIC DISTRICT

INTRODUCTION

First established in 1975, the Newton Upper Falls Historic District was created to protect the unique and historic character of Newton's first village and early industrial center. The village of Newton Upper Falls has long been recognized as a historically important and architecturally intact neighborhood displaying the early development of the nineteenth century mill village built along the Charles River. The original District was established around the earliest area of nineteenth century development in the village, but was enlarged in 1985 to include the village's next stage of development stretching into the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. In 1986, the Newton Upper Falls Historic District was listed on the National Register of Historic Places, acknowledging the historical significance and architectural integrity of the District. The National Register Nomination describes the District as having retained the nineteenth century flavor of its rich industrial past and as the most distinctive village in Newton.

The architecture of the Newton Upper Falls Historic District consists of a mix of residential, commercial, industrial, and institutional structures, most of which date from the nineteenth century. Residential structures built near the village's commercial and industrial center were typically designed as housing for early mill workers in the Federal and Greek Revival styles which were popular through the mid nineteenth century. Residential construction in the second half of the century is commonly found up the hill from the Charles River around the edges of the earlier village and is typically Italianate, Colonial Revival and Queen Anne in style. Regardless of the date of construction, Newton Upper Falls dwellings are characteristically modest with simple detailing appropriate to the original style of its construction.

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

- Modest designs that are residential in scale and have domestic scale elements such as porches, dormers, etc.;
- Emphasis on craftsmanship for overall design as well as detail;
- Use of natural materials;
- Compact but not oversized ratio of building mass (bulk) to land;
- Variety of vernacular architectural styles with an emphasis on simplicity

of design;

- Informal attitude of building styles and settings.

The District's commercial, industrial, and institutional structures are larger in scale and grander in design than the village's residential structures. Their architectural styles vary dramatically depending on their date of construction, use, and location. In considering the important characteristics of these structures, it is important to recognize the intent of the original design, its scale, massing, original materials, and siting.

The Newton Upper Falls Historic District is administered by the Newton Upper Falls Historic District Commission, which exists to oversee the maintenance of the District. The Commission reviews and advises on all proposals for change, including alterations, demolition, and new construction that are visible from a public way, park, or public body of water. The Commission serves as a resource. It can recommend publications and provide information about appropriate design and use of materials.

WHAT IS REVIEWED

The purpose of the Newton Upper Falls Historic District is to preserve and enhance the streetscapes and overall community character. To ensure that 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, design, detail and materials. The compatibility will be assessed for its general principles as well as its specific elements of design. It is not the intent of the Commission to dictate style or taste by the review process.

It is the Commission's responsibility to determine whether a property is visible from a public way, park, or body of water, and to proceed with the review when appropriate. Those properties that are viewed only from a distance will be considered for those visible aspects that may have an impact on the District including overall height, massing and materials. The review process will only be extended to the form and detail that are perceptible.

CRITERIA FOR REVIEW

In its mission to preserve the architectural and historical integrity of the District, the Newton Upper Falls Historic District Commission will review each proposal for 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. It is recommended that the applicant review similar properties in the District for design ideas, comparison purposes, and compatible use of materials.

General Principles of Design

- Character - Is the proposal appropriate to the existing community character that is illustrated by the variety of architectural styles set on small lots with similar setbacks?
- Harmony - Does the proposal have a consistency and unity of form and detail which is separate from style and building type?
- Site Context - How successful is the relationship between a proposal and its surroundings relative to setbacks, heights, and the harmony and character of the streetscape?
- Landscaping - Do plans related to grade changes and fencing which can articulate a site and create physical edges?
- 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?
- Height - Does it have relationship of height to that of adjacent properties that tend to be consistent within streetscapes of areas of the overall community?
- Massing/Bulk - Is there an overall relationship of the building size and scale relative to the lot and to 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, 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?
- Materials - Is the exterior cladding, roof, window, door, and architectural trim compatible and contextual with materials used in the District? Materials should be similar or complimentary to other District structures.

- Surface treatments - Is there an overall harmony of texture and detail?

The criteria are specific to certain design principles without dictating the specific styles of proposals. Modern design is appropriate in historic districts when it is reflective of proposed guidelines for size, scale and massing.

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:

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

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 should include:

- 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.
- Site sections and topographic information.
- 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)

lites, head, casing, sill. The Commission strongly encourages the use of wooden sash true or simulated divided lites 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 1/2" = 1'.

It is important that the same set of Commission approved plans are used for construction. The Commission prior to construction must approve any deviations from the approved plans.

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 that 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 that 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 shall, at the Commission’s discretion, include an internal and external inspection of the structure by Commission Members. It is recommended that the applicant hire a licensed structural engineer to provide additional information to the Commission.

Requests for demolition which rest upon:

- 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;
- are not sufficient causes for demolition.

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 Katy Hax Holmes in the Planning Department at 617-796-1143, or email: kholmes@newtonma.gov.