

DOWNTOWN RIVERHEAD HISTORIC DISTRICT
PROPOSED PRELIMINARY DESIGN GUIDELINES
TOWN OF RIVERHEAD
LANDMARKS PRESERVATION COMMISSION

2006

[Please note that these design guidelines are presented in draft form for public comment. The Landmarks Preservation Commission appreciates all suggestions, questions and comments from users.]

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INTRODUCTION

Much of the character and flavor of Riverhead's past is found in the area which has been designated as the Downtown Historic District and which contains over 220 historic structures. Dating from the early decades of the nineteenth century through the first half of the twentieth century, the district's built environment represents many of the styles popular during this span of more than a century, ranging from austere Greek Revival to ornate Victorian and stripped-down Art Deco. If these buildings could talk they would tell interesting stories -- about old families and recent immigrants; about famous people like Thomas Edison, Irving Berlin and the bosses of Tammany Hall; about those who were successful in life and others who went bankrupt. The connections are many and fascinating. The Historic District is intended to protect this valuable heritage and enable it to contribute to the revitalization of the area.

If the character of this Downtown Historic District--and others designated in the future--is to be maintained, it is important for property owners, tenants, design professionals, builders, and community leaders to understand and appreciate that methods for dealing with older properties often differ from treatments for contemporary ones, and that choosing the wrong treatment can cause serious, permanent damage to irreplaceable historic properties.

DEVELOPMENT OF A HISTORIC PRESERVATION POLICY FOR RIVERHEAD

In order to protect this valuable heritage, the Riverhead Town Board, working with the Town's Landmarks Preservation Commission, revised Chapter 73 of the Town's code pertaining to landmarks preservation and the creation of historic districts in June, 2006. The following month, the Town Board, acting on the recommendation of the Landmarks Preservation Commission, designated a large portion of downtown as a historic district under provisions of the revised code. These *Preliminary Design Guidelines* are intended to help property owners within that district understand how they can not only comply with the code, but also take the proper steps to help conserve Riverhead's rich legacy of historic structures and places.

These *Guidelines* offer both general and specific recommendations to assist with good decision-making regarding Riverhead's historic properties. Design guidelines such as these can help to avoid hasty or mis-informed alterations to historic property by offering preferred, time-tested options for dealing with significant features and by specifying precise treatments for solving common maintenance-related issues. Even more importantly, however, owners and tenants of properties within the Downtown Historic District and design professionals, real estate professionals, and contractors working with the District should become familiar with these *Guidelines* if they intend to make physical changes to the exterior of properties in the District.

These *Guidelines* are not part of Town Code. Rather they are intended to provide guidance to property owners as to how the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC), the Architectural Review Board (ARB) and the Town Board are likely to approach the criteria set out in Chapter 73 of the code and to provide advice on how best to preserve and restore the district's architectural heritage. These are recommendations, but not requirements.

This document is intended to provide guidance to property owners in the new Downtown Historic District only until funding can be found to create a more complete set of guidelines customized to the needs of Riverhead. It is also a work in progress which will become more useful as it incorporates feedback from people using it.

APPLICATION AND REVIEW PROCESS

Chapter 73 of Town Code regarding Landmarks Preservation provides protection only over the *exterior architectural character* of the buildings in the district. No restriction exists on the sale or leasing of any privately-held property in the district and it is not necessary to notify the LPC of the sale or lease of property

within the district. Moreover, the code does not require the application of museum-quality conservation treatments to the properties within the district.

All applications for a building permit or site plan approval for projects affecting the exterior appearance of structures within the historic district will be automatically referred to the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) and, for site plan approval, also to the Architectural Review Board (ARB), for review. This includes the modification of nearly every aspect of the property's exterior, such as proposed exterior materials; window changes; modifications to doors, roofs, and porches; storefront remodeling; additions; and demolition. Responsibility for implementing Chapter 73 of the Town Code is shared between the LPC, the ARB and the Town Board.

An application for a building permit for activity within the historic district which does not require site plan review shall be made directly to the Building Department, which will refer it to the LPC for review and recommendation. Assuming the application is complete, the LPC must review the application and transmit to the Building Department its recommendation for approval, denial, or approval with modifications within forty-five (45) days. In order not to delay the issuance of permits, this review will occur while the Building Department is reviewing other aspects of the application. The Building Department can not issue a building permit for the work without the positive recommendation of the LPC.

If the proposed activity in the historic district is part of a project that otherwise requires site plan review under provisions of Town Code, the site plan application shall be submitted to the Planning Department, which will refer it for simultaneous review to the ARB and the LPC. Assuming the application is complete, the ARB and LPC will meet together to review the application and will transmit their recommendations to the Town Board for consideration during the site plan review process.

In either case, any application which is not recommended for approval may be appealed to the Town Board which shall hold a public hearing within 45 days of receipt of the appeal, and shall render its decision at the next regularly scheduled Town Board meeting.

The Landmarks Preservation Commission and the Architectural Review Board strongly suggest that property owners approach them informally in advance of filing a formal application for a building permit or site plan approval. This will allow the LPC and ARB to provide guidance as to best practices and what is likely to be accepted. It is hoped that such discussions will facilitate the process for the property owner. The LPC and ARB always welcome questions relating to exterior improvement, restoration and sensitive rehabilitation of properties in the Downtown Historic District.

GENERAL CRITERIA

Chapter 73-6 of the town code lays out general criteria for the ARB, LPC and Town Board to use in reviewing applications and making recommendations to approve, deny or approve with modifications:

- i. The Board(s) shall only consider changes made to the exterior of a structure or a building designated as a landmark or any structure or building within an historic district,*
- ii. Properties which contribute to the character of the historic district shall be, to the greatest extent practicable, retained with their historic features altered as little as possible;*
- iii. Any alteration of existing property shall be compatible with its historic character, as well as the surrounding district, if applicable,*
- iv. New construction shall be compatible with the district in which it is located.*

The code further specifies that in applying the principle of compatibility, the LPC and ARB shall consider the following factors:

- i. The general design, character and appropriateness of the property of the proposed and new construction,*
- ii. The scale of the proposed alteration or new construction in relation to the property itself, and surrounding properties,*
- iii. The texture, materials and color and their relation to similar features of other properties in the neighborhood,*
- iv. Visual compatibility of surrounding properties, including proportion of the property's façade, proportion and arrangement of windows and other openings of the facade, roofline and rhythm of spacing of properties on streets, including setbacks; and,*
- v. The importance of historic, architectural or other features to the significance of the property.*

The LPC is aware that the needs of the twenty-first century are vastly different from those of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, when many of the properties in the district were developed. The LPC is keenly interested in helping owners and tenants to find appropriate and cost-effective ways to meet modern requirements without seriously affecting the physical and historic integrity of the property. Seldom will an historical or exact reproduction be recommended by the LPC. Owners, tenants, and contractors working within the Downtown Historic District are encouraged to consult with the LPC concerning all physical aspects of the property so that the result will be in harmony with the general historic character of the district.

NORMAL MAINTENANCE

The code specifically states that nothing in it should be construed to prevent ordinary maintenance or repair with like materials of similar quality and color. Review is only required when the project otherwise requires either a building permit or a site plan review.

DEMOLITION

1.0 Demolition in the Downtown Historic District

In any historically-significant area, the demolition of contributing properties is an irreversible and negative action which will be felt in the district forever. Demolition is seldom an acceptable treatment for historic buildings in the Downtown Historic District.

1.1 Demolition of buildings in Riverhead's Downtown Historic District is inappropriate unless it can be proven that:

- The building's failed structural integrity has been clearly documented to the LPC by an engineer or architect, and
- The safety of the public requires that the building be demolished, and
- All feasible alternatives to demolition have been explored by the owner, including rehabilitation, stabilization, repair, and the sale of the property to an owner who is able to undertake the rehabilitation process, or
- An economic hardship exists which prevents an owner from rehabilitating the property, or
- The building does not contribute to the character of the district because of its age or the degree to which it has been altered.

1.2 Any demolition project must assure that adjacent properties will not be damaged.

1.3 In the unlikely event that demolition of a significant building is approved, the owner should consider making available salvageable architectural artifacts to an appropriate organization for re-use in rehabilitation/restoration projects within the district.

NEW CONSTRUCTION, INFILL, ETC.

2.0 New Construction/Infill within the Downtown Historic District

The construction of new buildings within historic areas presents exciting challenges. New buildings add vibrancy and life to older sections, but their design must be carried out in such a way that they complement, rather than detract

from, the streetscape. The following issues are important when planning new construction within the district:

2.1 *Location*: New construction should be oriented in conformity with the other buildings on a given street, and the prevailing setback of the street should be maintained by any new construction.

2.2 *Scale*: New construction should be compatible in scale with adjacent buildings and the prevailing scale of the buildings of the district.

2.3 *Rhythm*: New construction should acknowledge, incorporate or otherwise respond to the historic window and door rhythm and the height of the various elements--windows, rooflines, etc.—of the other buildings in the neighborhood.

2.4 *Massing*: New buildings should acknowledge, incorporate or otherwise respond to the same general patterns of massing, including window and door forms, roof profiles, and building shapes as are evident in the existing architecture of the district.

2.5 *Materials*: New buildings should acknowledge, incorporate or otherwise respond to exterior materials as exist on the historic buildings within downtown Riverhead. Incorporation of newer synthetic materials, imitation materials (such as aluminum and vinyl, synthetic stucco, etc.), contemporary aluminum and glass is discouraged.

2.6 *Additions*: Additions to historic buildings should generally be made on a side or rear elevation with a minimal impact on historic features, and should be made in such a manner that the addition frames or otherwise reinforces the character of the historic property.

2.7 Additions should use materials that are compatible with or otherwise reinforce the historic building and should incorporate, acknowledge, or otherwise respond to the appropriate massing, scale, window and door proportions, etc.

EARLY ADDITIONS, MODIFICATIONS, ETC.

3.0 Previous Alterations to Existing Buildings

The architectural character of the Downtown Historic District evolved over a long period, and many changes which have occurred to the buildings in the district have acquired significance in their own right. Even though they might not be original to the property, it is important to evaluate their own character and appearance before removing such features.

3.1 Each property in the district should be viewed as a product of its own time, whether that time is the mid-nineteenth century or the earlier decades of the twentieth century.

3.2 When previous modifications are architecturally compatible with the overall character of an individual building, such modifications should be respected as reflections of the long life of the property.

3.3 Avoid demolition of added features which were installed on buildings within the district without fully investigating their condition and the effect that such removal will have on the main building.

DEPENDENCIES, OUTBUILDINGS, ETC.

4.0 Dependencies and Other Associated Buildings

Dependencies include carriage houses, outbuildings, and early garages which are primarily found in the residential portion of the Downtown Historic District.

4.1 Historic dependencies should be treated with the same care as the principal buildings which they serve, and should be repaired and retained.

4.2 Adhere to the requirements for demolition of dependencies, which are the same for the requirements for other types of buildings; they appear above.

EXTERIOR SURFACES

5.0 Masonry

5.1 Exposed masonry surfaces on historic buildings within the district should remain exposed. Surfaces should not be covered with new materials such as vinyl, aluminum, EIFS synthetic stucco systems, plywood panel siding, etc.

5.2 Masonry surfaces which have not been painted previously should not be painted, since painting will cover defining features such as joint profiles and bonding patterns. Painting will also create an instant and continuing maintenance expense for the future. Exceptions to this general principle may exist in special cases.

6.0 Wood

6.1 If possible, damaged wood siding should be repaired rather than replaced. When replacement of deteriorated wood is necessary, it should be carried out with new material of matching size and profile.

6.2 The removal of non-historic siding from wood buildings is encouraged. Care should be taken to plan for the repair of the original material after the non-historic siding is removed.

6.3 The application of non-historic siding material is discouraged throughout the Downtown Historic District. However, man-made materials that closely mimic the look of real wood and can be applied like real wood, such as Hardie Plank siding or composite materials, may be appropriate.

6.4 The use of metal and vinyl trim is discouraged. Existing wood trim, including fascia and soffits, brackets, cornices, frieze boards, etc. should be restored and exposed, not covered over with inappropriate siding materials.

WINDOWS AND DOORS

7.0 Windows and Doors

7.1 Windows and doors are among the most defining features of historic buildings, and can account for as much as one-third of a building's surface area. For this reason, the care given to windows and doors is extremely important and alterations should be carefully planned. The relationship of wall surface to openings—often called the “rhythm” of the windows and doors—should be acknowledged.

7.2 The overall size of window and door openings should not be modified and openings that have been changed should be returned to their original dimensions whenever feasible. Exceptions are permitted where the design response is an interpretation that reinforces the existing historic design and is necessary for purposes such as compliance with accessibility rules.

7.3 Windows and doors should always be repaired rather than replaced. If replacement is necessary, it should be completed using units that match the original in material, configuration of panes, and dimension.

7.4 Avoid the temptation to create a false sense of history by “earlying up” a building by installing windows with small-paned sash unless the historic appearance of such sash can be documented. When using divided-light windows, only true divided muntins should be used. Avoid using snap-in grilles on interior or exterior side of glass.

7.5 Storm doors and windows may be used in the district, but their finish should be painted to match the other trim on the building. Shiny metallic surfaces should be avoided. “Crossbuck” storm doors are architecturally and historically inappropriate and their use should be avoided.

7.6 If exterior storm windows are used, they should fit the opening of the windows without having either to infill any portion of the opening or flatten any part of an arch. Storm windows should be installed within the window opening, rather than on the outside surface of the building and the window frame and dividers should match those on the primary window unit.

7.7 Interior storm windows offer an attractive solution to the problem of air infiltration. They do not compromise the exterior appearance of the window and often a window with a curved sash has a flat-topped inside frame which can easily accommodate an interior storm window.

7.8 Shutters should be used only when their original appearance can be documented. If shutters are to be used they should be hung onto the face of the window frame--not the wall of the building--using hinges and should be sized to fit one-half of the window opening. Shutters should be only of wood construction.

7.9 Whenever possible, avoid the placement of window air conditioners where they will be easily seen from the street; attempts should be made to insert units on secondary elevations.

ROOFS, CHIMNEYS, AND PORCHES

8.0 Roofs, Gutters, and Downspouts

8.1 The original form and pitch of historic rooflines should always be maintained.

8.2 Whenever it is feasible, historic roofing material such as slate or metal should be repaired rather than replaced.

8.3 If a roof is highly visible, replacement material should match the original as closely as possible in scale, texture, and color. If the roof surface is not visible--such as on a commercial building with a nearly flat pitch--then a contemporary material such as rubber is acceptable.

8.4 The replacement of existing roofing material with new material which matches in color, composition, and texture is generally preferred.

8.5 Ornamental features applied where a roof and wall intersect--such as gable-end trim and cornices—are highly significant elements and should always be repaired and retained.

8.6 Original gutters and drainage features should be maintained whenever possible. If necessary, replacement gutters and downspouts of a full-round or half-round form are preferred for the nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century buildings in the Historic District.

Chimneys and Other Areas of Moisture Penetration

8.8 Chimneys, dormers, and snowguards are important architectural features and should be retained in any roofing project. Chimney rehabilitation and reconstruction should match the original in dimension, materials, brick pattern, details, and form as closely as is possible.

Porches

8.9 Many residential properties in the Historic District retain original or early porches. Porches are very important visual features and should be repaired and retained.

8.10 Porches should not be enclosed to create additional living space.

8.11 Avoid the construction of new porches without evidence that an earlier porch existed on the property.

8.12 Porch components should be repaired rather than replaced. If deterioration is too severe, then replacement units should match the original. Contemporary stock replacement components-- columns and balusters, for example--are often not scaled properly to match historic buildings and should be avoided.

8.13 In porch restoration, or in construction of new porches, avoid the use of plastic and vinyl posts, railings and trim. The use of plastic wood decking products must be carefully considered to ensure that its appearance does not compromise the historic character. Natural and authentic wood materials are generally preferred.

COMMERCIAL ARCHITECTURE

9.0 Commercial Properties, General

All issues set forth in this document are applicable to commercial buildings as well as residential architecture. However, some additional issues should be recognized regarding the restoration, renovation and adaptive reuse of buildings in the Downtown Historic District which were originally erected for commercial use.

9.1 The facades of the historic commercial buildings in Riverhead's Downtown Historic District consist of three major components: the storefront--the first story; the upper facade--the second story and above; and the cornice--the decorative feature typical found at the top. Each of these elements is important and should be maintained accordingly.

9.2 Consult detailed guidance found in the following specialized publications dealing specifically with historic commercial facades:

U. S. Department of the Interior Preservation Brief No. 11, *Rehabilitating Historic Storefronts*. See <http://www.cr.nps.gov/hps/tps/briefs/brief11.htm>

Preservation League of New York State Technical Publication No. 2, *A Practical Guide to Storefront Rehabilitation*. To obtain a copy, see <http://www.preservenys.org/publications.htm>.

Storefronts

9.3 As with other types of buildings, avoid the use of historically-inappropriate materials or, if using contemporary materials, incorporate them in ways that reflect or enhance the prevailing historic materials. Storefronts are highly visible and materials should be of the best possible quality.

9.4 The storefront area should remain as transparent as possible. Display windows should not be reduced in size; if the retail space is converted to a different use, privacy can be assured by using blinds or curtains.

9.5 If display windows are replaced, such treatment should use laminated glass or insulated glass; the historic configuration of the replacement windows and their traditional display window dimensions should be retained or acknowledged and/or reinterpreted in the proposed replacement. Pay attention to the thickness of original storefront and window mullions and trim. Avoid the use of newer storefront which has a thicker or “heavier” trim appearance. Avoid the use of dark bronze anodized trim elements unless appropriate to the original historic character.

9.6 If transom windows are found above the display windows, they should be retained, particularly if they are of art glass. In storefront rehabilitation projects, transoms may or may not be included within the design.

9.7 Bulkheads below the display windows are encouraged to be retained. If new bulkheads are to be installed, they should be of wood, and may have recessed or raised panels or should match the historic detail if documentation is available; molding strips applied to the surface should be avoided. Bulkheads should not be any more than about twenty inches in height. New or replacement display windows without bulkheads are permitted that otherwise acknowledge same in a responsive manner.

9.8 Significant surviving historic elements, such as storefront cornices and cast iron features, should be retained and re-used in any rehab project.

9.9 Substitute materials conveying the same sense as the original may be considered for rehabilitation projects.

Upper Façade

9.10 Windows should be retained within the upper facade without alteration to their openings.

9.11 Original exterior surfaces should be retained or restored if they have been covered or otherwise altered.

Cornice

9.12 Cornices on buildings in the district should be retained and repaired as needed.

APPENDICES

I. The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation

For further guidance, refer to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation at <http://www.cr.nps.gov/hps/TPS/tax/rhb/>

II. MAP OF THE DOWNTOWN HISTORIC DISTRICT

[Follow link on Riverhead Town web site]

III: LANDMARKS PRESERVATION ORDINANCE

Chapter 73 of Town Code can be found on the town's website riverheadli.com.