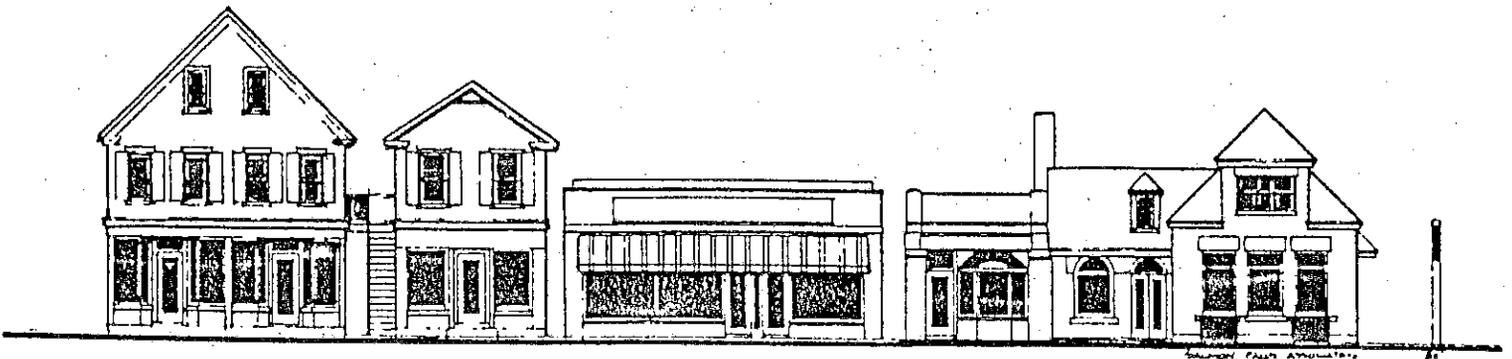


VISUAL GUIDELINES

For the

SOMERSWORTH HISTORIC DISTRICTS



The Review Criteria

In making a determination on an application, the Historic District Commission shall give consideration to the following:

- a. The historical, architectural or cultural value of the building(s) or structure(s) and its relationship and contribution to the setting.
- b. The compatibility of the exterior design, arrangement, texture and materials proposed to be used in relationship to the existing buildings or structures and its setting, or if new construction, to the surrounding area.
- c. The scale and general size of the buildings or structures in relationship to existing surroundings including consideration of such factors as the building's overall height, width, street frontage, number of stories, roof type, facade openings (windows, door, etc.) and architectural details.
- d. The impact that the applicant's proposal will have on the setting and the extent to which it will preserve and enhance the historic, architectural and cultural qualities of the district and community. The Commission shall be guided by the following:
 1. Every reasonable effort shall be made to provide a compatible use, which will require minimum alteration to the structure and its environment.
 2. Rehabilitation work shall not destroy the distinguishing qualities or character of the structure and its environment. Historic materials or architectural features should not be removed or altered.
 3. Deteriorated architectural features should be repaired rather than replaced, wherever possible. In the event, replacement is necessary; the new material should match the material being replaced in composition, design, texture, and other visual qualities. Repair or replacement of missing architectural features should be based on physical or pictorial evidence rather than on conjectural designs or the availability of different architectural features from other buildings.

4. Changes, which may have taken place in the course of time, are evidence of the history and development of the structure and its environment and these changes shall be recognized and respected.
5. All structures are recognized as products of their own time. Alterations to create an earlier appearance are discouraged.
6. Contemporary design for additions to existing structures are encouraged if such design is compatible with the size, scale, material and character of the neighborhood, structures or its environment.
7. Wherever possible, new additions or alterations to structures shall be done in such a manner that if they were removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the original structure would be unimpaired.

Background

The downtown area of Somersworth was primarily built following a "master plan" designed by the Great Falls Manufacturing Company starting in 1823. This design attempted to relate the brick mills, brick, or wood worker-housing and small-scale commercial buildings. Also, this overall plan included large-scale landscape features like the tree-lined canal. The effect created was like the pedestrian-oriented mill cities of Lowell and Lawrence. As the mill prospered and the city grew, other commercial buildings and areas were established; these included other areas (such as High Street), and replacement of earlier, smaller businesses. By the end of the 19th century, the downtown boasted many fine brick hotels and commercial blocks.

The topography of the city played a central role in its development; i.e., the mills were located on the river, their source of power; worker housing and early commercial development was built on the flat land on the other side of the canal, within easy walking distance to the mills; and the mill owners and managers built their houses a carriage ride away, high on the hill to take advantage of the spacious views and cool breezes. An architectural hierarchy was established that closely followed the topographical and social dictates. (The higher up you were the higher up you were!)

The history of Somersworth can still be read in her streets and buildings, but unfortunately, some pages are missing. Fire and urban renewal erased large chunks of the streetscape; especially in the downtown. The "master plan" as envisioned by the city founders can never be finished nor re-created and it is not even desirable that it should be. However, recognizing the value of planning and good design the Historic District Commission hopes to guide future changes in a manner that will be complimentary to those original intentions.

Guidelines for Reviewing Applications

A. RENOVATIONS

GUIDELINE: INCORPORATE ELEMENTS OF THE ORIGINAL INTO THE RENOVATION SCHEME.

Do not obscure the entire facade by covering it with metal or plastic panels.

Do not obscure original materials.

Do not obscure facade details by covering them with panels or signs or by painting them out.

Do not alter the shape of original openings. If a window must be blocked because of a change in use, maintain its original shape.

Repair or replace original building elements.

GUIDELINE: RESPECT THE ORIGINAL CHARACTER AND PERIOD OF THE BUILDING.

Do not try to make the building look "historical", older than it really is, because this debases what is truly historic.

GUIDELINE: PRESERVE THE ORIGINAL FINISH OF MASONRY FACADES.

Always use the gentlest cleaning methods possible. Some chemical cleansers may be acceptable, but their effects should be researched before they are used. (Consult the State Historic Preservation Officer for further suggestions.)

Never sandblast masonry. Sandblasting removes water-protective glaze and accelerates erosion.

Usually, let painted masonry stay painted, let unpainted masonry stay unpainted.

B. ADDITIONS

Many of the ways in which an addition should relate to an existing building have already been covered in the design criteria set for Streetscape i.e., pattern and alignment should be maintained, horizontal banding of openings, lintels and building eaves should be addressed, size and shape of building mass should be similar, etc...

GUIDELINE: THE MATERIALS USED FOR ADDITIONS SHOULD BE SIMILAR TO MATERIAL USED ON THE ORIGINAL BUILDING.

GUIDELINE: ADDITIONS ARE ENCOURAGED THAT ARE SYMPATHETIC TO THE ORIGINAL BUILDING YET CONTEMPORARY IN SPIRIT.

GUIDELINE: THE MATERIALS USED FOR RENOVATIONS OR ADDITIONS SHOULD BE FINISHED IN WAYS THAT ARE CONSISTENT WITH THE ORIGINAL BUILDING.

New lap siding, for example, should have the same dimensions as original lap siding; if old brick has been painted, new brick should also be painted; and so forth.

C. NEW CONSTRUCTION

Excellent examples of most 19th century styles are found within the City of Somersworth. Recognizing the ongoing manner of history, the IMITATION of Historic styles is strongly discouraged.

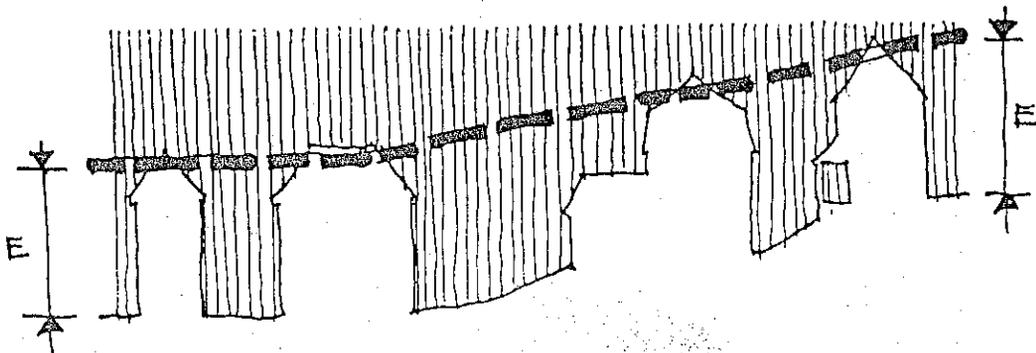
GUIDELINE: NEW BUILDINGS SHOULD BE COMPATIBLE WITH OLDER STRUCTURES: ESPECIALLY IN TERMS OF OTHE GUIDELINE CRITERIA. HOWEVER, THEY SHOULD ALSO BE A TRUE PRODUCT OF THE PRESENT, NOT A FALSE PRODUCT OF THE PAST.

ALIGNMENT OF BUILDING ELEMENTS:

A. HEIGHTS

Buildings within each area are similar in height except where irregularities occur because of later replacements. Seen from above, groups of buildings echo the original contours of the land beneath them.

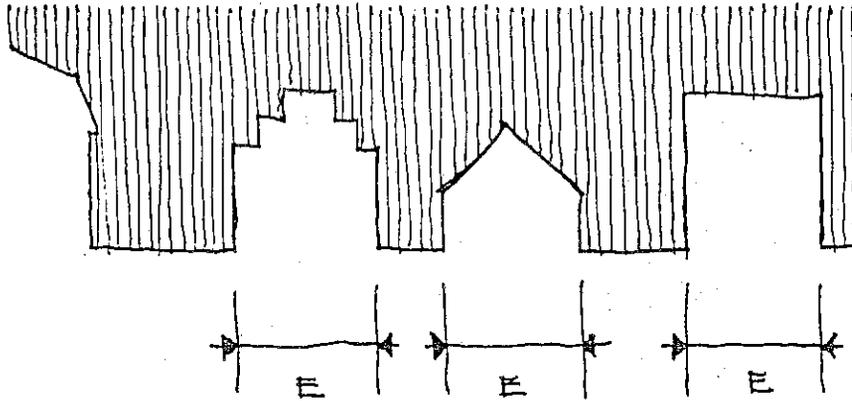
GUIDELINE: THE HEIGHTS OF NEW BUILDINGS SHOULD BE SIMILAR TO THE AVERAGE HEIGHT OF EXISTING BUILDINGS IN EACH AREA SO THAT THE RELATIONSHIP OF BUILDING HEIGHTS AND LAND CONTOURS REMAINS CONSTANT.



B. WIDTHS

Buildings along each block are of similar width. Exceptions occur where later buildings have been added.

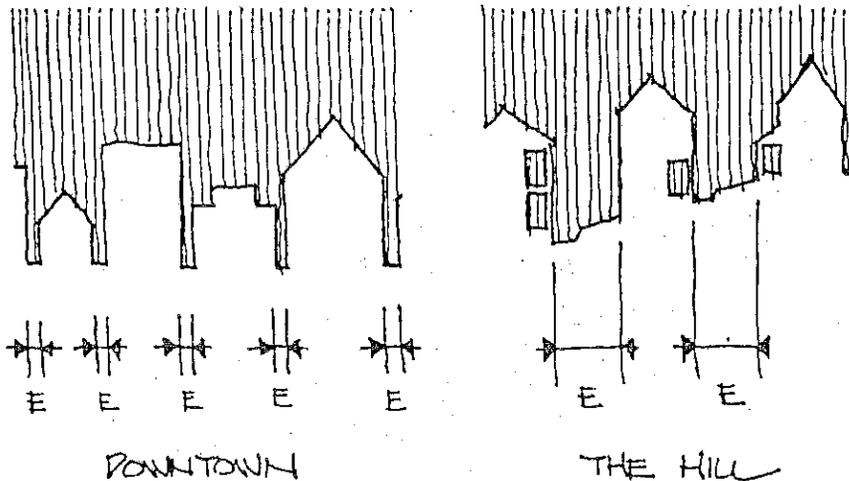
GUIDELINE: THE WIDTH OF NEW BUILDINGS SHOULD BE SIMILAR TO THE AVERAGE WIDTHS OF EXISTING BUILDINGS ON EACH BLOCK SO THAT THE RELATIONSHIP OF BUILDING MASS TO OPEN SPACE IS MAINTAINED.



C. SPACES

Spaces between buildings are generally consistent within neighborhoods or areas. (Side yard spaces on the Hill, or very narrow or no space between buildings downtown). The effect is one of a continuous "wall" along each street with an established "Rhythm" of solid and empty spaces.

GUIDELINE: MAINTAIN THE AVERAGE YARD WIDTHS AT FRONT, SIDES, AND REAR OF ALL BUILDINGS WITHIN A GIVEN AREA.

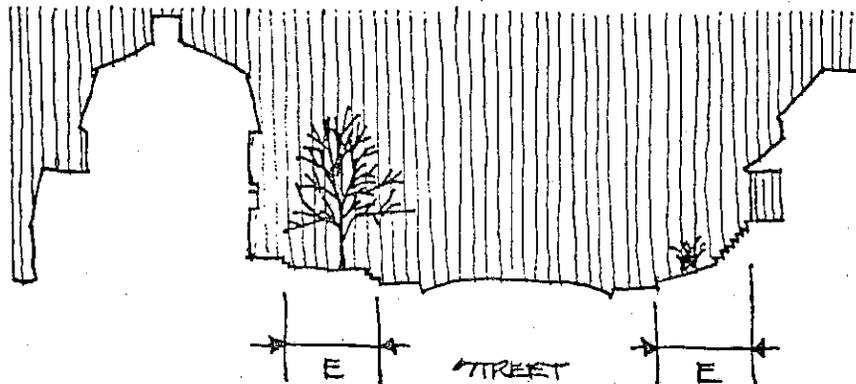


D. SETBACKS

Most buildings along Downtown blocks are built out to the sidewalk with no setback from the front property line. Most buildings on the Hill have front yards on uniform average depth. These setbacks create a uniform alignment of facades that give each block a strong edge.

GUIDELINE: MAINTAIN THE ALIGNMENT OF FACADES AT THE AVERAGE ESTABLISHED WITHIN EACH NEIGHBORHOOD.

Where facades do not align, use columns, hedges, low walls, or other screens to define the edge of the site and to preserve alignment. Use similar separations between the sidewalk and the site to screen parking areas.



E. OPENINGS

Window sizes and shapes should not be altered during renovation. New construction should use windows of similar sizes and shapes or incorporate other facade elements that establish the same sort of pattern.

GUIDELINE: MAINTAIN THE PATTERN CREATED BY UPPER-STORY WINDOWS AND THEIR VERTICAL HORIZONTAL ALIGNMENT.

First floors, which have large areas of glass and small areas of opaque materials, are clearly separated visually from upper floors, which reverse the pattern: small areas of glass, predominance of opaque materials.

GUIDELINE: MAINTAIN THE SAME HIGH PROPORTION OF GLASS IN RENOVATIONS AND NEW CONSTRUCTION.

F. DETAILS

Similar shapes frequently recur along the street: double-hung rectangular windows, dormers, triangular roof pediments, hip roofs generally oriented with their ridgelines perpendicular to the street, other sorts of roof angles and shapes, cornice moldings, porches, covered entry ways...

GUIDELINE: BUILDING COMPONENTS SHOULD BE SIMILAR IN SIZE AND SHAPE TO THOSE ALREADY IN USE ALONG THE STREET.

Although the use of similar forms is strongly encouraged, the duplication or imitation of "historic" components and details is strongly discouraged.

GUIDELINE: BUILDING ELEMENTS (LIKE SHUTTERS, BRACKETS, PORCHES...) SHOULD BE OR LOOK FUNCTIONAL.

Use shutters with caution and only where the size of the shutters fits the size of the window.

Porches should actually shelter entrances; brackets should actually support something.

GUIDELINE: WHILE THE USE OF VINYL SIDING IS DISCOURAGED WITHIN, THE DISTRICT THE COMMISSION REALIZES THAT THERE WILL BE CIRCUMSTANCES THAT MAY MAKE IT A REASONABLE CHOICE OF MATERIAL. IN ORDER TO PRESERVE THE NATURE AND QUALITY OF CONTRIBUTING BUILDINGS AS WELL THE OVERALL QUALITY OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD THE FOLLOWING GUIDELINES ARE TO BE FOLLOWED:

- Vinyl will have the same exposure as pre-existing clapboards.
- Wooden corner boards are to remain on the building.
- Soffits and window trim are to remain wood.
- All ornate wood details on the building are to be maintained.
- Shutters may be replaced with vinyl.
- No "J channel" is to be used, existing trim is to be routed, and siding placed underneath.

G. COLOR

Many buildings have been repainted in such a manner that their paint no longer distinguishes their architectural features.

GUIDELINE: COLOR SCHEMES SHOULD BE CHOSEN FROM THE SAME HISTORIC PERIOD AS THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE BUILDING. THE COLORS CHOSEN SHOULD BEAR SOME RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER BUILDINGS ON THE BLOCK. USE OF CONTRASTING COLORS TO ACCENT ARCHITECTURAL DETAILS IS STRONGLY ENCOURAGED.

Although the Commission makes no ruling as to color, historically appropriate color schemes are encouraged. The Commission shall make literature available to property owners wishing help in making decisions.

H. SIGNS

GUIDELINE: KEEP SIGNS SUBORDINATE OF BUILDINGS.

Commercial Buildings:

Signs should fit within the existing features of the facade. On most buildings, lintels or bands of decorative moldings create natural frames for signs.

Where possible, align signs with other signs on adjacent buildings.

Sign colors, materials, sizes, shapes, methods of illumination should reinforce the overall composition of the facade.

Wood, metal or glass are preferred materials. Plastic is discouraged.

Letters applied directly to building facades are recommended on areas where signage would normally be placed (such as Lintels).

In general, internally lighted signs are prohibited in areas where they would tend to overpower their historic setting.

Flush-mounted signs are encouraged.

Projecting signs should be limited in size and number to avoid obscuring building features that would otherwise be visible along the block.

Residential Buildings:

Signs should be mounted on buildings. They should be mounted near entry doors, and should be located no higher than the top of first floor elements. They shall be no longer than 12" high x 18" wide.

Wood, metal and clear Plexiglass are the preferred materials for signs introduced into neighborhoods where older buildings of wood and brick prevail.

No exterior lighting specifically for the residential sign is allowed.

J. STREETSCAPE FEATURES

GUIDELINE: PARKING AREAS SHOULD NOT BE VISIBLE FROM THE STREET OR SIDEWALK.

Place parking areas to the rear of buildings whenever possible. Driveways should be similar in the placement and function to the average of the neighborhood. When parking areas are visible from the street, screen them. Planting beds and hedges are recommended, but fences and low walls with plantings in front of them are also acceptable. Driveways to side-yard parking areas should be located so that the pattern of street trees is not interrupted. Avoid removing trees. Plant new trees where necessary to continue the pattern. Break up large paved areas with landscaping in the interior of the site. Many lots on the Hill were historically bordered by low fences of wood picket, granite, and cast or wrought metal. Many of these fences are gone or in poor condition.

GUIDELINE: THE HISTORIC PATTERN OF TERRACING SHALL BE MAINTAINED ON THE HILL. LANDSCAPE FEATURES SHALL BE CONSTRUCTED TO MATCH SCALE, TEXTURE, AND MATERIALS OF EXISTING ELEMENTS.

