

## **TOPSFIELD HISTORICAL COMMISSION GUIDELINES**

The purpose of the historic district bylaw is to promote the educational, cultural, economic and general welfare of the public through the preservation and protection of the distinctive characteristics of buildings and places significant in the history of Topsfield through the maintenance and improvement of such buildings and places and the encouragement of design compatible therewith.

These guidelines were formulated and approved by the Topsfield Historical Commission to assist the Commission in their review process and to provide property owners with an overview of the criteria used by the Commission in evaluating applications. It is our hope that these guidelines will help expedite the approval process. It is important to note that these guidelines are intended for use in preparing the application and that changes to a property, building or parts thereof must still be approved by the Commission according to the Town's Historic District and Demolition Delay Bylaws.

### **Architectural Trim and Siding**

1. Trim is an essential part of a building's architectural character. Features such as cornices, brackets, window moldings, doorway pediments, corner quoins, and all other decorative elements should be retained.
2. Original siding material should be retained whenever possible.
3. Deteriorated material should be repaired or replaced, where necessary, with new material that duplicates the original as closely as possible.
4. Wood shingles are only appropriate for exterior cladding if they were used as an original siding material such as on some Queen Anne buildings. Shaped shingles and shingle patterns of that period should be duplicated where repair and replacement are necessary.
5. Aluminum or synthetic sidings (such as vinyl and asphalt) or materials that were unavailable when a building was constructed are not permitted for properties in Topsfield's historic district and their installation will not be approved. Removal of such sidings is encouraged.
6. If a house is to be resided with clapboards, the clapboards should line up to match the window heads and sills.

### **Doors, Doorways, Porticos, and Steps**

1. Historically appropriate entries including doors, glass, pediments, hoods, moldings, steps, and all hardware should be retained.
2. The enlargement or reduction of historical or original door openings to fit new stock door sizes is not advised and will only be approved for compelling reasons (ie. modification for handicap accessibility).

3. The stylistic period or periods a building represents should be respected. Original doors and door hardware should not be discarded when they can be repaired and reused in place. If replacement doors are necessary, the replacements should duplicate the material, design, and hardware of the older or original doors.
4. The arrangement of door panels is a significant architectural feature and varied from period to period. Replacement doors should have the appropriate panel arrangement for the date of the house's construction.
5. Generally it is not appropriate to introduce a new door opening into the principal or front elevation. The appropriateness of new side or rear doors depends on their design.
6. The design of the entrance is related to the style of the house. Simple houses tend to have relatively plain doorways while high style houses have greater articulation around doorways. Therefore, when a replacement doorway is necessary on the principal facade or a new doorway is being added on a side or rear facade, it should harmonize with the style of the house as far as the type and extent of detail. For rear locations, French doors are preferred to sliding glass doors because they are divided into several panes. Large sheets of glass are not generally in keeping with the character of a historic house.
7. Doorways above ground floor level which provide secondary egress must be individually evaluated. In general, approval will result only when visibility from the street is minimal. The application of exterior staircases to buildings is generally not acceptable.
8. Porticos, porches, steps, and railings that are appropriate to the building and its development should be retained. Porticos or additions reflecting later architectural styles are often important to the building's historical integrity.
9. Deteriorated porticos, porches, steps, and railings should be repaired, where necessary, with materials that duplicate the original as closely as possible.
10. Front steps should be made of granite or wood. Brick, flagstone, or concrete steps were not used historically in Topsfield and are not appropriate.

## **Fences**

1. Fences are significant architectural features. They were sometimes architect designed. Therefore, architecturally important fences should be repaired or replaced in kind, where necessary, with new materials that duplicate the old as closely as possible. Other fences may be architecturally unimportant, the result of inappropriate fence replacement in more recent years. In these cases, property owners would be encouraged to upgrade their design to be more compatible with the historic character of the building rather than duplicate the existing fence.

2. Fences along the street facades of historic houses were meant to serve a decorative purpose. Such fences should not block a house's view, but complement it; they should be in scale to the property and they should be open, not solid. Narrow pickets (approximately 2 1/2" in width) are preferred to wide pickets. Back and side yard fences which serve a screening purpose may be higher and solid.
3. The design of a fence should be sensitive to that of the house. Since Federal architecture stressed delicate proportions, the fence in front of such a house should also be delicate in scale, whereas the fence in front of a more massive Victorian house could be heavier. Also, elaborate fences are suitable for elaborate house; simple houses should have simple fences.
4. If wood is to be used, picket, capped picket, or spindle fences are recommended for anywhere around the yard. Capped flat board fences are most appropriate for side and back yards. The flat board fence with a lattice top is a good privacy option.
5. Aluminum or synthetic fencing (such as vinyl or plastic) or materials that were unavailable when a building was constructed are not permitted for fencing for properties in Topsfield's historic district and their installation will not be approved.
6. The Commission encourages the retention of suitable cast and wrought iron fences. Such fences should be repaired and painted as necessary. If sections are missing and it is financially feasible, replacement sections should be obtained. Otherwise it is preferable to consolidate the existing sections of the fence than to remove the fence altogether.
7. Historically, fences were located along the sidewalk and the continuity of such fences is an important asset to the street. The Commission generally discourages fence relocation to accommodate off-street parking. Gates may be required as an alternative to relocation.
8. Chain link, stockade, and wire-type fences are not appropriate in historic districts. Low brick walls and brick planters are also not appropriate.

### **Masonry**

1. Original masonry and mortar should be retained, whenever possible, without the application of any surface treatment. Do not apply waterproof or water repellent coatings unless required to solve a specific technical problem that has been studied and identified.
2. Old mortar should be duplicated in composition, color, and texture. Do not repoint with mortar of a high Portland cement content. Mortar that is harder than the material it is binding will cause masonry to deteriorate.
3. Old mortar should be duplicated in joint size, method of application, and joint profile.
4. Masonry should be cleaned only when it is necessary to halt deterioration and always with the gentlest method possible, such as low pressure water and soft natural bristle brushes. DO

NOT SANDBLAST MASONRY UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES. Chemical cleaning products which could have an abrasive reaction with masonry should be avoided.

5. Deteriorated original materials should be repaired or replaced, where necessary, with new materials that duplicate the old as closely as possible. Replacement bricks should be carefully matched in size and color to the originals.
6. New construction should follow traditional brick coursing and appearance; salvage brick should not be used.
7. Foundations should be repaired or extended with the material of the existing foundation. The exposed portion of a foundation for a new building should not be concrete or concrete block.
8. The original or early color and texture of masonry surfaces should be retained whenever possible. Brick or stone surfaces may have been painted or whitewashed for practical and aesthetic reasons. Indiscriminate removal of paint from masonry surfaces may be historically incorrect and may also subject the building to harmful damage.
9. Chimneys are an important architectural feature. They should not be shortened or removed but repaired as necessary.
10. Existing stucco should be repaired with a stucco mixture duplicating the original as closely as possible in appearance and texture.

### **Paint Colors**

1. Although paint color is not under the jurisdiction of the Historical Commission, the following suggestions may be helpful:
  - a. Paint colors should be chosen with consideration for the colors of surrounding buildings and with sensitivity to the architectural period of the house. The Commission has materials explaining the types of colors used during various architectural periods and can recommend appropriate color combinations from name-brand paint manufacturers, particularly those who carry a line of historic colors.
  - b. If a two-color scheme is appropriate, clapboards should be painted the body color and all else should be painted the trim color. For certain 19th century buildings, it may be appropriate to pick out some of the trim elements with the body color or to use a three-color scheme.
  - c. With proper preparation, opaque stains are acceptable alternatives to paint.

## **Parking Solutions**

Providing for off-street parking is a significant alteration to a property and the Commission encourages careful consideration of parking alternatives and design options. Sensitivity to the surrounding landscape and the type of paving material used is important. Landscaping can greatly enhance the appearance of a yard and should be considered an integral part of the design and installation of a driveway. While the Commission does not have jurisdiction over driveway installation per se, it does review fence construction and removal. Therefore, if alteration or construction of a fence is involved in a driveway installation, the Commission must be consulted.

## **Roofing**

1. The roof of a house is an important architectural feature and should be treated as such. Therefore, all efforts should be made to preserve the original roof shape and to properly maintain or replace roofing materials as necessary.
2. Slating should be retained whenever possible. Slate should not be removed without a careful evaluation of the cost of its repair.
3. Roof replacement materials should be sensitive to the original. Slate and wood shingles are preferable but may not be feasible due to cost, longevity, or fire safety considerations. Acceptable alternatives (if appropriate to the original design) are to install one of the limited group of products which successfully imitate slate or wood or to "render out" the roof by using a dark asphalt or fiberglass shingle which does not draw attention to this feature and the absence of original materials.
4. Asphalt or fiberglass should be black, charcoal, or, in limited uses, dark - brown. Only a very subtle blending of lighter and darker tones is acceptable; variegated asphalt lights and darks are unacceptable.
5. All architectural features that give the roof its essential character, such as dormer windows, cupolas, cornices, brackets, chimneys, cresting, weather vanes, etc. should be preserved or replaced, where necessary.
6. Skylights, roof vents, and mechanical equipment, such as air conditioners should be placed in the most inconspicuous locations possible. Roof vents should be painted to match the color of the roof.
7. Solar panels – see below
8. Wooden or copper gutters can be an important architectural feature. In older houses they were often designed as part of the eave moldings. Therefore gutters should be properly maintained and only replaced in cases of extreme deterioration.

9. New gutters and downspouts should be placed in an architecturally sensitive manner and painted the color of the surface on which they are installed; i.e. if a downspout runs down a white corner board, it should be painted white.

### **Solar Panels**

1. Before considering the expense of solar, first implement all appropriate treatments to improve energy efficiency, which will have greater life-cycle cost benefit than on-site renewable energy.
2. Investigate off-site, renewable energy options as alternative to negatively impacting historic character of the building or site.
3. Install solar array out of view from a public way or in a compatible location on the site or on a non-historic building or addition where it will have minimal impact on the historic building and its site.
4. Install building-integrated panels, solar shingles, or other low-profile solar devices so that they are not visible or only minimally visible from the public right of way.
5. Install solar device in a manner that does not damage historic roofing material or negatively impact the building's historic character or features and is reversible.
6. Install solar roof panels horizontally – flat or parallel to the roof – to reduce visibility.

### **Windows**

1. Historically appropriate window openings including window sash, glass, lintels, sills, moldings, hoods, and shutters should be retained.
2. The stylistic period or periods a building represents should be respected. If replacement of a window is necessary, the replacement should duplicate the material, and design of the historically appropriate window sash.
3. New window openings in a principal elevations are rarely appropriate. Window openings should not be enlarged or reduced to fit new stock window sash sizes.
4. Replacement windows should have the same number and configuration of panes as the original or existing historic windows.
5. The muntin thickness and profile of replacement windows should approximate those of the original historic windows. Also, the proportions of the frame to the sash should be preserved. Windows with removable muntin bars are unacceptable.
6. Double-glazing is permitted under the following circumstances:

- a. when the use of single-paned sash is appropriate to the architectural style of the building.
  - b. when the double-glazed sash has integral (fixed) muntin bars, provided the proportions of the muntin bars suit the building.
  - c. when the double-glazed sash has glued-on muntin bars-of the proper proportions along with spacers between the panes.
7. Replacement windows should be made of wood. Aluminum and vinyl clad windows are generally not acceptable.
  8. The frame and decorative window trim should be retained and repaired if necessary with materials that duplicate the original as closely as possible.
  9. Stained glass which has historic significance should be retained and repaired as necessary. Modern tinted glass, however, is not permitted in the historic district.
  10. The architectural detail of windows should reflect the elaborateness or simplicity of the building.
  11. Size, location, and material are important determinants for the acceptability of skylights. No bubble skylights are permitted. Skylights should be placed on roof surfaces with the least visibility to the street. Smaller skylights are preferable to larger ones.
  12. Vinyl or aluminum shutters are not permitted. Wooden replacement shutters should reflect their original operable use: their size should be such that they would cover the entire window if closed; they should be hinged to the window casing so as to be operable, not nailed; the slats should point up if the shutters are open, down if the shutters are closed. Shutters may not be appropriate or necessary to every architectural style and the Commission should be consulted before action is taken to remove or install them.

### **Storm Windows**

Although, storm windows are not under the jurisdiction of the Commission, the following suggestions may be helpful:

- a. Consider the house's overall energy needs. An energy audit should be done before any measures are taken to tighten the house. Since hot air rises, attic insulation should take priority over storm windows;
- b. Caulking and weather stripping are inexpensive do-it-yourself procedures that cut down on infiltration. Once these measures are taken, storm windows may not be necessary. Also, movable interior shutters, panels, curtains or quilts can be an effective storm window substitute;

- c. If storm windows are to be installed, interior storms are preferable to exterior storms because they are less visible from the exterior;
- d. If they are used, exterior storms should be bought in a color that matches the building's trim or should be painted to match; and,
- e. If triple track storms are purchased, their aluminum mid-rails should match the meeting rails of the historic sash.