



WINCHESTER  
HISTORIC DISTRICT  
DESIGN GUIDELINES  
**NEW COMMERCIAL  
CONSTRUCTION**

**H**istoric preservation has played a major part in the economic revitalization of many of Virginia's older downtowns, including Winchester. Appropriately rehabilitated facades located within the downtown historic district create a natural setting for commercial activities. Customers and visitors expect an attractive and well-

maintained central business district. Each building improvement helps generate the next project.

These guidelines reflect the pragmatic approach that historic downtowns continue to evolve and adapt with each new generation. Physical changes to historic assets are managed in a careful way but no attempt is made to stop change. Overtime, the framework of historic preservation and economic development can work together to keep downtown viable and help it to continue to play its role as the historic heart of the community.

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The following guidelines offer general recommendations for the design of new commercial buildings in Winchester's Historic District. The intent of these guidelines is not to be overly specific, or to dictate certain designs to owners and designers. The intent is also not to encourage copying or mimicking particular historic styles, although some property owners may desire a new building designed in a form that respects the existing historic styles of the district.

These guidelines are intended to provide a general design framework for new construction. Good designers can take these clues and have the freedom to design appropriate, new commercial architecture for Winchester's Historic District. These criteria are all important when considering whether proposed new buildings are appropriate and compatible; however, the degree of importance of each criterion varies within each area as conditions vary. For instance, setback, scale and height may be more important than roof forms, since the sloping roofs of most buildings are not visible in the downtown area.

The guidelines in this brochure do not pertain to certain types of institutional buildings such as schools, libraries, and churches. These buildings, due to their function and community symbolism, usually are of a distinctive design. Their scale is often more monumental, and massing and orientation relate to the particular use within the building. For this reason, the design of any new such institutional building in the district would not follow these commercial guidelines, but should relate more to traditional designs of that particular building type. Nevertheless, the design of this type of project would still be reviewed by the BAR.

There is limited opportunity to build new structures in the downtown area since most of the land is already occupied by existing historic buildings. For this reason, buildings that contribute to the historic character of Winchester's historic district generally should not be demolished for new construction.

## SETBACK AND SPACING

Setback is the distance between the building wall and the property line or right-of-way at the front of the lot. Spacing refers to the distances between buildings. Most commercial buildings in Winchester's historic district have a very limited setback and spacing.

Set back and spacing for new construction in downtown should relate to the majority of surrounding historic commercial buildings.



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## MASSING AND BUILDING FOOTPRINT

Mass is the overall bulk of a building and footprint is the land area it covers. In Winchester's downtown, most buildings have a tall rectangular mass and are sited on lots with an average width of twenty to forty feet. The nature of the mass will be further defined by other criteria in this chapter such as height, width and directional expression.

New construction in downtown should relate in footprint and mass to the majority of surrounding historic dwellings.



The massing and footprint of a new structure (green box) may appear too large for this block unless its facade is divided into several smaller bays.

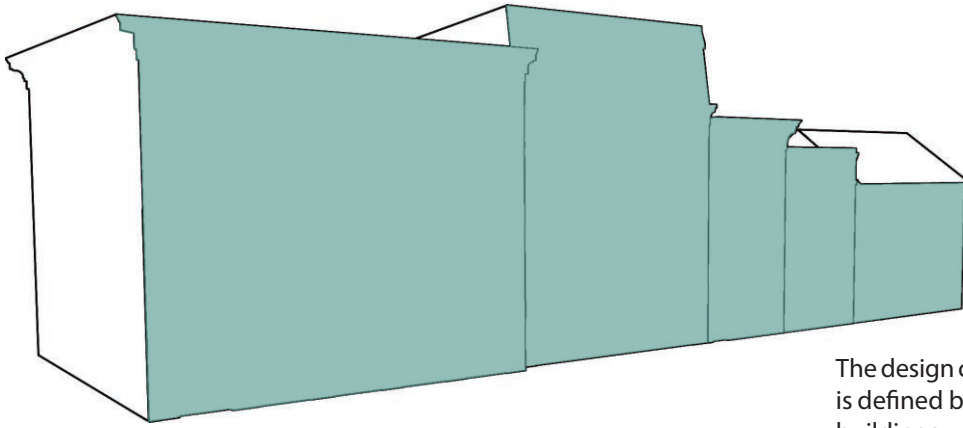
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## FACADES

Traditionally, most commercial buildings in downtown Winchester contain ground floor retail businesses that require display windows and upper-story space for housing, storage, or offices. As a result, the primary elevations - or facades - of historic commercial buildings have a predictable appearance. Generally, commercial buildings average two to four stories and nearly all have flat or shed roofs. Traditional commercial buildings have three distinct parts that give the facade an overall unified appearance: storefront, upper floor(s) and cornice.



The design character of the downtown area is defined by the street wall created by the buildings.



The design character of the downtown area is defined by the cornice, which is the decorative cap at the top of the building.

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The design character of the downtown area is defined by patterns of windows that create a rhythm of openings along the street wall.



The design character of the downtown area is defined by storefronts, windows, and entrances that create the transparent openings at the street level.

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## COMPLEXITY OF FORM

A building's form, or shape, can be simple (a box) or complex (a combination of many boxes or projections and indentations). The level of complexity usually relates directly to the style or type of building.

In general, use simple rectangular forms for new construction that relate to the majority of surrounding commercial buildings.



The rectangular forms of these commercial buildings are simple, as is their facade organization. Decoration, cornices, and openings add interest and complexity.

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## DIRECTIONAL EXPRESSION

This guideline addresses the relationship of height and width of the front elevation of a building mass. A building is horizontal, vertical, or square in its proportions. The majority of commercial structures are vertical in their expression, although there are several types of exceptions in the district. Many of the larger buildings are more horizontal in proportions, as are late eighteenth and early nineteenth century residential structures that have been adapted for commercial purposes. Lastly, many of the twentieth century commercial buildings are more horizontal or square since they are built on larger lots or on several older lots that have been combined into a larger parcel.

In new construction, respect the directional expression (or overall relationship of height to width) of surrounding historic buildings. The directional expression of many commercial buildings in Winchester's Historic District is vertical.



While many of the commercial buildings have vertical proportions, larger historic structures and more recent buildings are more horizontal in appearance.

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## HEIGHT AND WIDTH

The actual size of a new building can either contribute to, or be in conflict with, a historic area. While zoning allows up to 75 feet in height in the B-1, Central Business District, commercial buildings in the historic district, for the most part, range from two to four stories.

New construction proportions should respect the average height and width of the majority of existing neighboring commercial buildings in the district.



The new building (shaded box) reflects the average height of the block, and its three vertical bays relate better to the existing buildings than one large facade (See drawing below).





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## SCALE AND ORIENTATION

Height and width also create scale, or the relationship between the size of a building and the size of a person. Scale also can be defined as the relationship of the size of a building to neighboring buildings and of a building to its site. The design features of a building can reinforce a human scale or can create a monumental scale. In Winchester, there is a variety of scale. For instance, an institutional building like a church or library may have monumental scale due to its steeple or entry portico, while a more human scale may be created by a storefront in a neighboring commercial building. Orientation refers to the direction in which the front of a building faces.

- 1 Provide features on new construction that reinforce scale and character of the surrounding area, whether human or monumental, by including elements such as storefronts, vertical and horizontal divisions, upper story windows and decorative features.
- 2 New commercial construction should orient its facade in the same direction as adjacent historic buildings, that is, to the street.
- 3 Front elevations oriented to side streets or to the interior of lots should be discouraged.



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## ROOF

The roof is not a prominent element in many of the commercial buildings found in the historic district, since most are hidden from public view. Exceptions include gable or mansard roof forms that are scattered throughout the downtown. Many of these are gable roofs of earlier dwellings that have been adapted to commercial use. Common roof materials in the historic district include slate, metal, and composition shingles.

- 1 When designing new commercial buildings, respect the character of roof types and pitches in the immediate area around the new construction.
- 2 For new construction in the historic district, traditional roofing materials such as slate or metal remain preferred for additions or new construction; however, artificial slate may be appropriate on a case-by-case basis. There are new metal roof materials available that are pre-coated steel in various colors. Some of these products can be installed to give a very similar appearance as a standing-seam metal roof, and may be considered for new construction. Industrial metal roofs that have wide strips covering seams are not appropriate for use in the historic district.



While many roofs are not visible in commercial buildings, this drawing shows that some blocks in Winchester's downtown have structures with mansard or gable roof forms.

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## OPENINGS: WINDOWS & STOREFRONTS

Traditionally designed commercial buildings found in Winchester have distinctive rows of upper story windows and storefronts on the first level. The windows typically have vertical proportions and may have a decorative lintel or cap over them. Their light (pane) configuration varies with the style and age of the building.

- 1 The rhythm, patterns, and ratio of solids (walls) and voids (windows and doors) of new buildings should relate to, and be compatible with, adjacent facades. The majority of existing commercial buildings in Winchester's Historic District have a higher proportion of openings to wall area. This factor suggests that new buildings should also share that general proportion of openings to wall, particularly in regard to the storefront on the first level.
- 2 The size and proportion, or the ratio of width to height, of window openings of new buildings' primary facades, should be similar and compatible with those on facades of surrounding historic buildings.
- 3 Window types should be compatible with those found in the district, which are typically some form of double-hung or casement sash.
- 4 Traditionally designed openings generally have a recessed jamb on masonry buildings and have a surface-mounted frame on frame buildings. New construction should follow these methods in the historic district as opposed to designing openings that are flush with the rest of the wall.
- 5 Many storefronts of Winchester's historic buildings have typical elements such as transoms, cornices, bulkheads, and sign areas. Consideration should be given to incorporating such elements in the design of storefronts on new buildings.
- 6 If small paned windows are used in a new construction project, they should have true divided lights and not use clip-in fake muntin bars. Most major window manufacturers make a wide variety of windows that still have true divided lights.



The design of new buildings should reflect the large area of openings that Winchester's traditional commercial structures contain, particularly at the first level.

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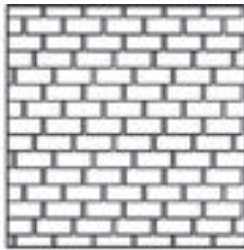
## MATERIALS AND TEXTURE

There is a rich variety of building materials and textures found throughout Winchester's downtown, including brick, limestone, wood siding and stucco.

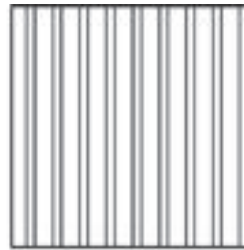
- 1 The selection of materials and textures for a new commercial building should be compatible with, and complement neighboring historic buildings.
- 2 In order to strengthen the traditional image of the commercial area of the historic district, brick or stone is the most appropriate material for new buildings.
- 3 Synthetic materials such as aluminum and synthetic stucco (EIFS products) are generally not considered appropriate in the Historic District. Traditional materials remain preferred for additions or new construction; however, certain new materials such as cementitious siding, may be considered on a case-by-case basis. New materials associated with new architecture styles/forms and materials that are integral to that style shall be considered on a case-by-case basis.



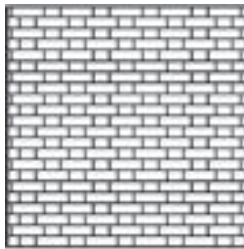
Stucco



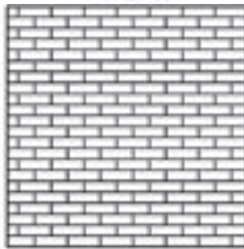
Rectangular Wood Shingles



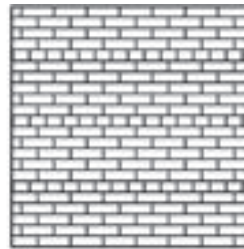
Beard & Bertram



Brick-Flemish Bond



Brick-Running Bond



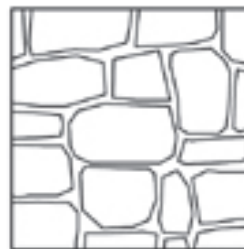
Brick-Common Bond



German Wood Siding



Wood Siding



Stone

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## ARCHITECTURAL DETAILS

The details and decoration of Winchester's commercial historic buildings vary tremendously with the different styles, periods, and types. Such details include cornices, roof overhang, chimneys, lintels, sills, brackets, masonry patterns, shutters, entrance decoration, and storefront elements. The important factor to recognize is that many of the older commercial buildings in the district have decoration and noticeable details.

It is a challenge to create new designs that use historic details successfully. One extreme is to simply copy the complete design of a historic building, and the other is to "paste on" historic details on a modern unadorned design. Neither solution is appropriate for designing architecture that relates to its historic context and yet still reads as a contemporary building. More successful new buildings may take their clues from historic images and reintroduce and reinterpret designs of traditional decorative elements.

The illustrations and photographs found throughout all of these guidelines' brochures offer many examples of details from the historic district, and may serve as a source for new designs.

## COLOR

The selection and use of colors for a new commercial building should be coordinated and compatible with adjacent buildings. For further information, see the general painting guidelines and illustration on page 16 of *Brochure 3: Residential Rehabilitation*.

## GUIDELINES FOR ADDITIONS

There are limited opportunities to make additions to many of Winchester's commercial buildings. An exterior addition to a historic building may radically alter its appearance. Before an addition is planned, every effort should be made to accommodate the new use within the interior of the existing building. When an addition is necessary, it should be designed and constructed in a manner that will complement and not detract from the character-defining features of the historic building.

These guidelines for additions apply to schools, churches, and other institutional buildings, as well as houses and commercial buildings in Winchester's Historic District.

The design of new additions should follow the guidelines for new construction on all elevations that are prominently visible (as described elsewhere in this section). There are several other considerations that are specific to new additions in the historic district and are listed below.

## FUNCTION

Attempt to accommodate needed functions within the existing commercial structure without building an addition.

## DESIGN

New additions should not destroy historic materials that characterize the property. The new work should be differentiated from the old and should be compatible with the massing, size, scale, and architectural features to protect the historic integrity of the property and its environment.

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## REPLICATION OF STYLE

A new addition should not be an exact copy of the design of the existing historic building. If the new addition appears to be a part of the existing building, the integrity of the original historic design is compromised, and the viewer is confused over what is historic and what is new. The design of new additions can be compatible with and respectful of existing commercial buildings without being a mimicry of their original design.

## MATERIALS AND FEATURES

Use materials, windows, doors, architectural detailing, roofs, and colors which are compatible with the existing commercial historic building.

## ATTACHMENT TO EXISTING BUILDING

Wherever possible, new additions or alterations to existing commercial buildings and structures shall be done in such a manner that, if such additions or alterations were to be removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the building or structure would be unimpaired. Therefore, the new design should not use the same wall plane, roof line or cornice line of the existing structure.

## SIZE

Limit the size of the addition so that it does not visually overpower the existing commercial building.

## LOCATION

Attempt to locate the addition on the rear elevations, or in a manner that makes them visually secondary to the primary elevation of the commercial structure. If the addition is located on a primary elevation facing the street, or if a rear or side addition faces a street, parking area, or an important pedestrian route, the visible elevation of the addition should be treated under the new construction guidelines.

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