

The Historical Society of the Somerset Hills Historic Preservation Committee

Historic Preservation Guidelines

Background and Purpose of the Guidelines

These guidelines endorsed by the Historical Society are *voluntary*.

The Somerset Hills of New Jersey is home to many areas, sites, and structures that have shaped the identity of generations of citizens, collectively and individually, and have produced significant historic, architectural and cultural resources constituting our heritage. Many properties contribute to the historic nature of our community through their unique architectural, historical or geographic characteristics. The goal of the Somerset Hills Historical Society is to enhance and preserve historic structures as we seek to ensure the longevity of our community's rich tradition.

The Historical Society promotes the guidelines below when considering a restoration, renovation, or alteration of historic buildings. These guidelines are intended to observe the rights of individual property owners with a respect for preserving our community's architectural heritage. As such, the guidelines can inform interested homeowners and prospective buyers of relevant design issues *prior* to hiring a professional to rehabilitate or modify an historic property. Architects and other professionals may then use the guidelines –which include some general architectural principles on page 3 - during the design process. Further, these guidelines establish criteria the Historical Society will use when responding to any formal proposals submitted for consideration.

How do I know if I own a historic building?

Fifty years or older is a generally recognized guide for a building to be considered historic, but not all historic buildings are *historically significant*. Bernards Township maintains an Inventory of Historically Significant Homes in Bernards Township. Copies are available to view at the Engineering Department and at the Historical Society. Bernardsville is in the process of creating an Inventory. More information is available from the Bernardsville Historic Preservation Advisory Committee. However, even if a building is *not* listed in a formal inventory, an owner of an older building may find the guidelines and principles helpful.

Criteria for considering a structure or site to be historically significant:

- Character, interest or value as part of the community's development
- Location was site of a significant historical event
- The property is identified with people who made important contributions to political, social and/or cultural life of the community.
- The building embodies distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type
- The building was designed by an architect, or constructed by a master builder or craftsman of local, regional, or national stature
- The building embodies architectural design, detail, materials, or craftsmanship, which are significant. In some cases the architectural value may be due to the unique or innovative nature of the structure such as an expression of indigenous materials or techniques.
- The building may have a unique location that has become an established or familiar visual feature of the neighborhood or community.
- The property has symbolic meaning, value, or appeal to the community.

Using the Guidelines

A general rule of thumb for when guidelines of Historic Preservation are relevant is based on a property's visibility in a public context. The guidelines are recommended when considering:

- Alterations to the façade, including additions and removals that will be visible from a public street.
- New improvements that would substantially obstruct the view of the main or front elevation as seen from a public street.

In an effort to keep privately owned historic buildings and sites useful for modern living, one option may be a **Renovation** or **Retrofit**. This can entail the insertion of new mechanical, electrical, or other supporting technology into the existing structure. Care should be taken with any modifications to the building's interior and exterior surfaces.

To facilitate contemporary usage of a property, **New Construction** may also be appropriate. At times, this seemingly places the property owner "at odds" with standards of historic preservation. However, there is much evidence to suggest balancing new design and construction while maintaining the historical integrity of a structure often increases the property's monetary value as well.

GUIDELINES FOR MODIFYING AN HISTORIC BUILDING

Here are some general guidelines when a renovation involves *modifying* an historically significant property. When higher degrees of historical authenticity are desired, closer adherence and respect for the guidelines below would be required.

- Minimal changes to the property
- The historic character shall be retained and preserved where possible
- Buildings, or portions, should be recognized as a record of the physical time and place where it was constructed.
- Changes in the property over time can become significant in their own right and deserve the same intent to protect and preserve.
- Distinctive features should be maintained as much as possible.
- When replacing deteriorated features use documentary evidence where possible to retain historical accuracy.
- Demolition activities on the historic portion of the property should be kept to a minimum.

GUIDELINES FOR NEW ADDITIONS TO AN HISTORIC BUILDING

The guidelines below are intended to protect historical portions of the building while integrating additions or other new construction.

- New construction should acknowledge a property's specific site characteristics.
- Additions to extend structures should respect existing rooflines, materials, textures, scale, design and mass of the existing building or structure. Additional stories of the new structure may be set back from the wall plane of the original structure to ensure a *differentiation* between the two structures. Other conditions where *differentiation* is of concern include rooflines, cornice heights, and continuity of siding. To maintain historical authenticity, care should be taken to maintain a clear distinction between the old and the new.

- New materials and finishes should match or complement the historical features of the existing structure. Design elements in the new structure may mimic or take references from motifs contained in the original structure.
- Locate the new addition on an inconspicuous side of the building while limiting the size and scale in relationship to the original structure. Often the best outcome is when the alterations are as inconspicuous as possible when viewed from the street.
- Walls and fences should be in keeping with historical patterns.
- Lighting should be integrated so it does not impinge on the historical character of the site and structures.
- If the historic structure cannot be retained in its present location, it may be best to relocate it to another appropriate site.

GENERAL ARCHITECTURAL PRINCIPLES

These general principles are useful for renovations or new construction projects. As an initial step in the planning process the original building can be evaluated according to these principles to identify character-defining features that should be maintained as much as possible.

1. Massing

Massing is the relationship of a building's proportions such as height, width and bulk. The massing of a new addition should be compatible with the original massing of the building and maintain the visual integrity of the original building. New structures should not undermine character-defining aspects of historical portions and should be consistent with adjacent structures.

2. Height

The height of the new structure should be visually compatible by maintaining the overall proportions. Efforts should be made to ensure the compatibility of visual lines that give a sense of height to the building, including roof lines, eave lines, cornice lines, etc.

3. Fenestrations (Windows and Doors)

Fenestration is the arrangement, proportion, and design of windows and doors in a building. Care should be taken so *openings* in the new construction are visually compatible with those in the original building. Considerations include materials, proportions, types of windows, multiple window groupings and general configuration.

4. Materials

Where possible materials should be the same as those of the original building, with the same or similar detailing. Modern materials and technology may be more suitable for infrastructural demands, but special consideration should be given to the appropriateness of siding, roofing and paving material selected.

5. Roofs

Rooflines should be in harmony with the original building, and where possible, in keeping with the original style. Consideration should be given to roof slopes, shapes, materials, dormer windows, location and articulation of chimneys, cornice lines, and eaves where the roof meets the facade.

6. Directional Expression

Directional expression refers to the flow between the old and new structures. For instance, the original building may be based on an axial ordering principle. Continuity of the original axis should be respected as much as possible to retain the directional expression of the original structure. Ordering principles pertain equally to façades, floor plans, and siting.

7. Relief

Additions should reflect the relief and texture of the original structure including depth of windows or door openings, setbacks, profiles and depth of cornices, moldings, columns, and trim. Caution should be taken

when using modern equivalents of historic features if they lack the relief and detail required to maintain the building's historical character unless the intent is to clearly alter the original condition.

8. Color

Application of historically accurate colors not only enhances the visual beauty of a property but also may be accomplished with high degrees of historical accuracy. Many resources exist for researching period appropriate color palettes. Additionally, many tools and techniques can be used to discover a paint history within the original structure's existing layers of paint.

IMPORTANT TERMS

When considering Historic Preservation as a practice, four terms describing a hierarchy of treatment approaches should be understood: **Preservation**, **Rehabilitation**, **Restoration**, and **Reconstruction**. **Preservation** places a high premium on the retention of all historic fabric through conservation, maintenance and repair. **Rehabilitation** also seeks a high degree of historical authenticity but provides more latitude in repair and replacement due to varying levels of deterioration. **Restoration** focuses on specific period elements of a building. If necessary, removal of materials from other periods is acceptable. If a building is structurally unsound, **Reconstruction** may be required to recreate the appearance of the building. Often utilizing historical records or artifacts as a basis for the design, varying levels of construction and material authenticity may be applicable. Find out more about these terms at <http://www2.cr.nps.gov/tps/common/index.htm>.

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

These guidelines acknowledge and are in support of the *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties with Guidelines for Preserving, Rehabilitating, Restoring and Reconstructing Historic Buildings*. Though the Standards are mandated for all historic structures officially recognized by Federal, State or local authorities, in many cases the *Guidelines* are also an excellent resource for those interested in working with any historic building. They provide information on all types of historic buildings whether commercial or residential and are not limited to types of construction, building sizes or levels of occupancy. In summary, the Secretary's *Guidelines* recognize four basic tenets when strictly adhering to the *Standards* of Historic Preservation: **Identify**, **Protect**, **Repair** and **Replace**. Available through the internet at <http://www2.cr.nps.gov/>, the *Standards* and *Guidelines* are an excellent resource when considering the rehabilitation or alteration of any historic property. The National Park Service also has a number of additional resources available on the Internet, including a series of *Preservation Brief* that provide guidance on preserving, rehabilitating and restoring historic buildings.