

# SKIDMORE/OLD TOWN GUIDELINES



## MEMORANDUM

TO: Property Owners, Tenants and Potential Developers of the Skidmore/Old Town Historic District

FROM: Portland Historical Landmarks Commission and the Skidmore/Old Town Historic District Advisory Council

RE: Design Guidelines for the Skidmore/Old Town Historic District

As you know, the Skidmore/Old Town Historic District is a unique asset to Portland and has been recognized nationally by its placement on the National Register of Historic Places. In addition, the Skidmore/Old Town Historic District has been identified as a National Landmark, of which there is only one other in Portland, Pioneer Courthouse. There are certain procedures and regulations the City has adopted for the protection and enhancement of the Skidmore/Old Town Historic District. Enclosed are the Design Guidelines. Other information available at the Bureau of Planning that may be useful includes:

- Title 33 - Code regulations pertaining to Historical Districts, Buildings and Sites
- Urban Conservation Fund Information

The design review process for projects within the Skidmore/Old Town Historic District is initiated with the Skidmore/Old Town Advisory Council. The Advisory Council is made up of individuals from the District who have a special understanding and appreciation for the District. The Portland Historical Landmarks Commission will act on a design review request within the District after review and recommendation from the Advisory Council. Once review by the Advisory Council has been conducted, contact the Bureau of Planning for a formal design review application.

The design review request may be processed administratively or may be reviewed by the full Landmarks Commission in a public hearing. In general, projects which are minor in scale (such as a sign or awning) and which are endorsed by the Advisory Council are processed administratively, i.e., by the Landmarks Commission Chair and Bureau of Planning Staff. Larger projects are reviewed by the Commission in a public hearing.

Should you have any questions regarding the enclosed guidelines, please contact the Bureau of Planning staff at 796-7700.

August 1987

## SKIDMORE/OLD TOWN HISTORIC DISTRICT DESIGN GUIDELINES

### INTRODUCTION

In September 1868, the City of Portland adopted a City Ordinance, Chapter 33.120, Historical Districts, Buildings and Sites, which established the formal procedures and regulations for historical structures and areas. The ordinance provides the necessary regulatory controls and administration procedures to accomplish preservation of historical districts. Additionally, in August 1976, the Urban Conservation Fund was established by the City, a program jointly administered by the Portland Development Commission and the Portland Historical Landmarks Commission. The program provides financial assistance for preservation and restoration of historic properties through low interest loans, grants and other means. The Historic District Ordinance and the Urban Conservation Fund are two primary tools for regulating and effecting changes to historic buildings in Historic Districts.

Historic Landmarks Ordinance: The Landmarks Ordinance provides procedures for regulating designation of historical buildings and districts, exterior remodeling or construction of new structures, building demolition, building artifacts, signs and redevelopment improvement projects. Additionally, the ordinance provided for the establishment of a Landmarks Commission, District Advisory Councils, and designated City Bureaus to assist in the enforcement and administration of the Ordinance.

Landmarks Commission: The Landmarks Commission is a Mayor appointed body charged with the responsibility of reviewing any changes to structures or new construction in historical areas.

District Advisory Councils: In historic districts designated by the City Council, advisory bodies to the Landmarks Commission are appointed by the Portland Historical Landmarks Commission and the Mayor. The Councils are responsible for recommending guidelines and criteria for development and/or preservation within a particular historic district and for reviewing plans for any exterior alteration or new construction within the district, and for submitting recommendations to the Landmarks Commission on proposed changes.

Bureau of Planning: The Landmarks Ordinance designates the Bureau of Planning to provide staff assistance to the Landmarks Commission.

Bureau of Buildings: All building alterations or new construction in an Historic District requires a permit through the Bureau of Buildings.

## PROCESS

Any proposed exterior alteration, new construction or demolition within an Historic District requires approval by the Portland Historical Landmarks Commission. Following the filing of the permit or application and review by the Advisory Council, the Landmarks Commission will review the submission within approximately 30 days. As noted, minor requests will be processed administratively within about a week of application. Landmarks Commission review occurs as a public hearing with decisions subject to appeal to the City Council. Recommendations from the District Advisory Council are presented to the Commission at this time. The Bureau of Buildings is responsible for insuring that approved modifications or new construction occurs in accordance with the approved plans.

## GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

- A. Every reasonable effort should be made to provide a compatible use for buildings, which will require minimum alteration to the historical character of the building and its environment.
- B. Rehabilitation work should not destroy the distinguishing qualities or character of the property and its environment. The removal or alteration of any historical material or architectural features should be held to the minimum, consistent with the proposed use.
- C. Deteriorated architectural features should be repaired rather than replaced, whenever possible. In the event replacement is necessary, the material should match the material being replaced in design, color, texture and other visual qualities to achieve a replica matching the exterior appearance of the existing feature. Repair or replacement of architectural features should be based on accurate duplications of original features, substantiated by physical or pictorial evidence rather than on conjectural designs or the availability of different architectural features from other buildings. The Oregon Historical Society has a substantial collection of vintage photographs of the District. This, or other sources should be researched to obtain accurate information on the building.
- D. Distinctive stylistic features or examples of skilled craftsmanship which characterize older structures and often predate the mass production of building materials should be treated with sensitivity.
- E. Many changes to buildings and environments which have taken place in the course of time are evidence of the history of the building and the District. These changes may have developed significance in their own right, and this significance should be recognized and respected.

- F. All buildings should be recognized as products of their own time. Alterations to create an appearance inconsistent with the actual character of the building should be discouraged.
- G. Contemporary design for new buildings in old neighborhoods and additions to existing buildings or landscaping should not be discouraged if such design is compatible with the size, scale, color, material and character of the neighborhood, building or its environment.
- H. Wherever possible, new additions or alterations to buildings should be done in such a manner that if they were to be removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the original building would be unimpaired.
- I. A structural soundness survey should be obtained prior to any substantial rehabilitation. This should include an analysis of the types of structural elements (primary: foundations, bearing walls, columns, beams, floors, and roof; secondary: non-load bearing walls, windows and doors, stairs, and utilities; minor: finish materials, roof coverings, siding, ceilings, etc.) and the extent of deterioration of each element.

GENERAL GUIDELINES - ALTERATIONS AND ADDITIONS TO HISTORIC LANDMARKS, POTENTIAL LANDMARKS AND OTHER COMPATIBLE BUILDINGS

- A. Retention of Original Construction -- So far as practicable, all original exterior materials and details shall be preserved.
- B. Cast Iron -- In the case of cast iron structures which have lost cast iron elements, every effort shall be made to replace such elements with appropriate cast iron parts available in the City. If this is not feasible, replicas matching the exterior appearance of the existing features may be permitted.
- C. Height -- Additional stories may be added to historic buildings provided that the following are addressed:
  - The added height complies with requirements of the building and zoning codes. The Historic District has an FAR (Floor Area Ratio) designation of 4:1. The FAR may be increased to 5:1 if the 1:1 increase is for residential only. This residential bonus was established to stimulate new housing construction in order to enhance the vitality and economy of Downtown.
  - The added height does not exceed that which was traditional for the style of the building. Example: Portland's cast iron buildings did not exceed four stories. The majority of Portland's masonry buildings did not exceed six stories.

- The added height does not alter the traditional scale and proportions of the building style.
  - The added height is visually compatible with adjacent historic buildings.
- D. Width -- Horizontal additions may be added to historic buildings provided that the following are addressed:
- The width of the addition does not exceed that which was traditional for the building style.
  - The addition maintains the traditional scale and proportion of the building style.
  - The addition is visually compatible with adjacent historic buildings.
- E. Visual Integrity of Structure -- The vertical lines of columns and piers, and the horizontal definition of spandrels and cornices, and other primary structural elements shall be maintained. Such structural lines should be restored if previous alterations have substantially changed such elements.
- The modulation of building facades was determined by lot parcelling. Generally, buildings were built at 25, 50 or 100 foot widths. Within those general building widths, the building was further divided into smaller bay storefront systems.
  - Where structural lines cannot be carried to the ground, integrate the upper and lower floor design with color, materials and form simplicity.
- F. Scale and Proportion -- The scale and proportion of altered or added building elements, the relationship of voids to solids (i.e. openings such as doors and windows to walls and column elements) shall be visually compatible with the traditional architectural character of the historic district. An important element within the Historic District was the emphasis on the pedestrian scale activities which were characterized with the addition of canvas awnings or permanent canopies. This defined an important scale and proportion element of the District and to the extent possible, this relationship at pedestrian level should be re-established within the District.
- G. Exterior Building Materials -- Most of the buildings within the District were constructed of bearing wall brick masonry (left exposed or covered with plaster), or stone. This feature gives the area much of its textural surface character. Surfaces need to be treated, repaired, and maintained in a manner which is sympathetic to the District.

1. Walls --

- Original building materials shall be preserved wherever possible. Cleaning and/or repointing masonry is preferred over replacement.
- If masonry has to be replaced, repair or replace existing masonry with masonry of matching color, texture, size, coursing. Avoid using "used" brick in replacement. This conflicts with traditional masonry surfaces.
- Mortar should match the color and joint configuration of the existing masonry wall.
- Masonry was painted to seal soft bricks from the weather or painted later for other reasons. Where soft brick surfaces are found to be painted, surfaces should not be stripped but should be repainted.
- Plastered surfaces should be cleaned, repaired with a similar plaster texture and repainted. Avoid exposing brick to the weather by removing finish plaster as this will speed deterioration of the brick.
- Do not apply artificial and/or inappropriate coverings to masonry surfaces. Examples are metal, plastic or wood sidings.

2. Storefronts, Doors and Windows -- The shape, size, placement and trim of storefront openings are a key element in establishing the character of a building.

- Where original storefronts remain, preserve and repair. Where covered with other materials, remove and determine condition of original materials.
  - Storefronts requiring new materials could consider a wide variety of replacement systems. Building Codes require non-combustible materials (steel, aluminum, etc.), but wood systems may be acceptable provided other means of fire protection are installed. Wood systems should be painted, rather than stained or treated naturally.
  - New window and door openings should maintain a similar horizontal and vertical relationship as the originals. Traditionally, windows were two-over-two or one-over-one. Large panes of glass, as used in contemporary storefronts, should be avoided.
  - Glazed portions of windows were important elements to the building and should not be altered, painted over or eliminated.
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- Clear glass is traditional and should be used instead of tinted glass. Additionally, signs cannot be painted on tinted glass without the possibility of breakage due to the effect of sunlight.
  - Re-use original hardware whenever possible. If impossible, new hardware should be in keeping with original designs.
  - On side-walls, avoid walling-in openings with masonry, if possible. Rather, maintain the opening and replace the glazing if necessary with appropriate hard surface materials.
- H. Rear and Side Walls -- Generally, the standards which apply to the fronts of buildings also apply to rear and side walls, although the conditions to meet are usually much more simple. The chief concern lies with the removal of redundant additions to each building including signs, pipes, non-functioning stacks, grills, television aerials, etc. The repair and repointing of brick or masonry, painting of wood or certain masonry surfaces, and an effort to coordinate and subdue the clutter of the mechanical equipment are all recommended.
- I. Color -- The colors used in alterations or additions within the District shall be visually compatible with the traditional architectural character of the historic buildings within the area.
- Historically, in the era of the late 1800's and early 1900's, painting was usually done using earth colors, i.e., hues tending towards brown, soft greens, and beiges.
  - Bright colors and white were rarely used. Buildings, therefore, are perhaps most appropriately painted using subdued colors. Little or nothing is gained by the use of strong or loud colors, especially those with no tradition of local usage.
  - Color combinations will occur, as nearly all buildings will have wood trim or metal ornamentation in addition to their base materials. This, plus the further elaboration of wood storefronts, suggests the use of an overall wall color plus one or two trim colors.
  - A method for determining the original wall and trim colors consists of scraping chips from the existing surface and analyzing them microscopically. This should be done whenever the original color is unknown and major repainting is contemplated.
- J. Signs -- Exterior building signage should be visually compatible with the traditional architectural character of the historic buildings in the District. A variety in signage is encouraged, incorporating excellence in graphic design and lettering, careful color coordination with the building, good mounting, readability, and materials, all of which are compatible with and sensitive to the character of the building.

Lighting may also be permissible which is creative without being overwhelming. Sign design should be done in an "identification" sense rather than an "advertising" sense. All types of exterior signs are reviewed.

Signs are controlled by three ordinances. One is the Signboard Control Zone (S Zone) which includes the area at the Morrison and Burnside Bridgeheads and along Front Avenue; another is the newly adopted ordinance which regulates signs in CI Zones (downtown); and finally, the Landmarks Ordinance provides for sign review. Projects should address all ordinances in addition to District compatibility.

- K. Lighting -- Historically, lighting within the District was provided by lighting in the public right-of-way with the use of gas lamps, electrical lights, etc. First floor storefront lighting should be consistent with the overall character of the building and the District.
- L. Awnings/Canopies -- Alterations and/or additions to historic buildings within the District should consider the use of awnings and/or canopies. These should be consistent with the function of the building and the relationship of the awning to adjacent buildings and to the District.

#### GENERAL GUIDELINES - NEW CONSTRUCTION

An analysis of old photographs depicting the area at the turn of the century indicates the District was a compact, urban environment. With the addition of Harbor Drive and the reconstruction of Front Avenue in 1942, the eastern edge of the District was seriously weakened. Additionally, the loss of buildings within the District for the conversion to surface parking lots added to the historic loss. An essential ingredient to the development of the District is re-establishing the compact urban feeling it once had with compatible new infill buildings.

- A. Siting -- In addition to zoning requirements, the relationship of the new building to the street, and to the open spaces between it and other historic buildings should be visually compatible with the adjacent buildings and with the architectural character of the District.
- B. Height and Bulk -- In addition to zoning requirements, the height and width of a new building should not exceed the height and width of the largest landmark building in the District, and should be visually compatible with adjacent landmark buildings.

It is the intention of these guidelines to ensure District compatibility with respect to new construction. It is recognized that development could occur which combine several parcels. In this event, the project should respond to the above guidelines through major vertical "breaks" in the facade design. The maximum height should not exceed 75 feet.



- C. Scale and Proportion -- The size and form of a new building, the relationship of voids to solids, the size and relationship of windows, doors, porches, and other architectural elements, should be of a scale, and have a proportion that is visually compatible with adjacent landmark buildings, and with the architectural character of the District.
- The horizontal dimension of a facade of any new building should not exceed 100 feet on east-west streets and 50 feet on north-south avenues. It is further recommended that there be major facade breaks at 25 or 50 foot bay modules, consistent with traditional District development.
  - An important element within the District was the emphasis on the pedestrian scale activities, emphasized with awnings or canopies. New development should include provisions for this element.
  - New development should avoid blank walls at the pedestrian level.
- D. Materials, Colors and Textures -- The exterior materials, colors and textures used in new buildings should be visually compatible with adjacent landmark buildings, and with the architectural character of the District. Refer to previous guidelines outlined under Alterations and Additions to Historic Landmarks, Potential Landmarks and Other Compatible Buildings for guidelines.
- Use of masonry and stuccoed masonry as a major building material should be given consideration. Attention should be given to new brick work as follows: (a) the color, texture and size of the brick themselves; (b) the width of the joints between the bricks; (c) the color and tone of the mortar in the joints; and (d) the profile of the mortar joint.
  - The use of artificial finish materials shall be avoided. Also, the use of wood as a major surface material should be avoided.
- E. Rear and Side Walls -- Generally, the standards which apply to the fronts of buildings also apply to rear and side walls, although the conditions to meet are usually much more simple. A strong effort should be made to coordinate and subdue the clutter of mechanical/electrical equipment on exterior surfaces.
- F. Signs, Lighting and Other Appurtenances -- Signs, exterior lighting, and other appurtenances such as walls, fences, awnings/canopies, and landscaping should be visually compatible with adjacent landmark buildings, and with the architectural character of the District.
- G. Cast Iron -- For new buildings the appropriate re-use of available cast iron elements is encouraged.