

HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION
POLICY STATEMENT and DESIGN GUIDELINES
FOR ELEVATING HISTORIC BUILDINGS

CITY OF NEWPORT

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DEPARTMENT OF ZONING AND INSPECTIONS

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By motion of the Historic District Commission at their January 21, 2020 meeting, the following guidelines and standards were adopted concerning the elevation of buildings within Newport’s Historic Districts:

Appendix A: Graphical Support to Building Elevation Design Concepts

Appendix B: Additional Flood Mitigation Options for the Homeowner

Appendix C: Landscape Best-Practices and Recommendations Related to Flood Mitigation and Building Elevation

Newport has historically been plagued by significant flooding issues in its low-lying areas in part due to the development on filled-in land where marshes once stood. However, in recent years there has been an intensification of flooding due to hurricanes, severe storms and high tides. Newport’s Historic District Commission has concluded the best policy for the long-term preservation of historic structures is to support elevating structures to FEMA requirement, when necessary.

Newport is aligned with federal and state guidelines regarding flood adaptation for historic buildings. United States Department of the Interior Memorandum dated November 18, 2019 – “Changing weather patterns, stronger hurricanes, and other extreme weather events have increased the risk of flooding, both in terms of frequency and magnitude. Historic properties that have never flooded before are now exposed to this risk, and those that flooded infrequently in the past are experiencing more instances of flooding with water reaching higher levels than ever before.”

This document focuses on four key areas to guide elevation projects for historic buildings:

- 1) Streetscapes and Context Consideration
- 2) Site Design Consideration
- 3) Foundation Design Consideration
- 4) Architecture and Preservation

Building Categories:

- Contributing Buildings
 - All elevation projects require Commission review and subsequent approval.
 - All elevation projects must demonstrate that the building is in the FEMA Flood Zone with a Flood Elevation Certificate defining Base Flood Elevation (BFE).
 - All Streetscape, Context, Site Design, Foundation Design, Architecture and Preservation Guidelines in this document are mandatory for these structures.
 - Encourage the use of FEMA Historical Structures Variance to minimize change to only that height necessary to avoid flood hazard. Maximum height allowable is Base Flood Elevation (BFE) plus one (1) foot.
 - Before being approved for elevation, applicants must provide thorough documentation of the building in its existing state, to include ‘As-built’ elevations, floor plans, building

sections, site plan, elevation certificate and exterior photographs. Interior photographs are highly desired if interior floorplans need to be changed to accommodate the building elevation.

- In addition to exterior details, the Commission needs to understand how an elevation will impact the interior floor plan and structural integrity of the building. Supporting interior floorplans and structural engineering plans are integral to the overall approval.
- **Non-Contributing Buildings**
 - All elevation projects require Commission review and subsequent approval.
 - All elevation projects must demonstrate that the building is in the FEMA Flood Zone with a Flood Elevation Certificate defining Base Flood Elevation (BFE).
 - Before being approved for elevation, applicants must provide thorough documentation of the building in its existing state, to include as-built elevations, floor plans, building sections, site plan, elevation certificate and exterior photographs.

Across all key areas outlined for historic building elevations, sustainable building concepts, and Community Resilience shall be considered by both the Historic District Commission and the Applicant. See definitions at the end of this document.

Streetscape and Context Considerations

Guidelines:

- Broadly, submittals must include careful consideration of the following:
 - Impact on important streetscape features (fences, walls, etc.)
 - Impact on relationship to immediate context and neighboring buildings
 - Impact on streetscape scale and building patterns
 - Impact on property and neighborhood greenspace, trees and landscape features
- More specifically, submittals for elevations must include careful consideration of contextual examples, including but not limited to elevated buildings, typical materials, and the following specific architectural details:
 - Relationship of entrance to the street
 - Staircases and stair configuration
 - Railings and Ironwork
 - Foundation Treatment
 - Walls (garden and site)
 - Fenestration Patterns
 - Eave Heights
 - Landscaping
- Building 'Set-Backs' or minor relocation of buildings on the same lot may be more sympathetic to the context of historic streetscape. For example, moving a house back to allow for the construction of steps typical.
- Elevation of sister houses should be architecturally coherent within the grouping. The first sister house to be elevated shall provide a reference point for the future elevation of structures within the grouping. The HDC requires the highest quality of design of the first building in a sister house grouping to be elevated, along with others that follow.

Site Design Considerations:

Guidelines:

- Buildings should not be moved to accommodate additions, parking, etc. Buildings should remain in their original location on the lot, unless doing so prevents the reasonable introduction of stairs, as required by elevation to allow access to building.
- Applicants should make every effort to maintain a distinct stair connection to the sidewalk.
- Entry stairs should be consistent in design and material with the architectural style of the building.
- In unique situations, it may be acceptable to move buildings being elevated back on a lot to correspond to adjacent properties (i.e. to align with neighboring properties)
- If necessary, to move the building on the property, the impact should be minimized with existing porches, low walls, fencing, planting beds and terraced landscaping in a manner that is in keeping with the building's architectural style. The addition of a porch, if not existing, is not appropriate.
- Maintain existing historic hardscape features, such as planter walls, fences, gates. See Newport Ordinance Chapter 17.74 – “Historic Stone Walls.”
- Retain to the greatest extent possible, existing pathways from the street/sidewalk to the building.
- Introducing planter walls (30” or below) will help mitigate transition height.
- Front fencing when introduced as part of an elevation should be historically appropriate materials, such as iron or wood.
- Encourage the use of plantings or other pervious materials to help absorb water.

Foundation Design Considerations

Guidelines:

- Exterior foundation designs and materials should be based on historic evidence of original foundation of the building and on neighborhood/context specific examples.
- Foundation components should complement existing façade features:

- Visual support of columns
 - Pilaster expression
 - Solid foundation wall under main body of house, especially at the street front, and piers at porch with infill screening
 - Use traditional masonry materials
 - Use existing elements as visual references to be repeated and extended throughout the foundation design
- Pier infill (if used) where piers are introduced or required, techniques could be:
 - Recessed or proud
 - Use louvers or custom lattice
 - New foundation material should match the historic foundation material, and when possible, use salvaged material from the historic foundation. When building onto existing foundation, delineation between new and original is desired.
 - Required flood venting should be limited to the sides and rear of the house. On occasion, if required by engineering, venting may be acceptable at the front of the house not to detract from the historic elements of the building.
 - If front elevation flood vents are required, these may include decorative iron vents/grilles. They may be minimized by skirt board/water table, landscaping, elevated planters, staircases, etc. Use of creative openings/windows to break up wall expanse is also encouraged.
 - Parking underneath elevated contributing buildings is not permitted. Parking underneath elevated non-contributing and new construction buildings may be considered depending on proposed design and context of surrounding historical neighborhood.
 - For non-contributing buildings and new construction, garage doors on front elevations are prohibited.

Preservation and Architecture Considerations:

Guidelines:

- Quality of historic materials and detail shall be maintained throughout.
- Buildings that have a direct architectural relationship with their neighbors (such as sister houses or adjoined houses) will be considered within their context and the effect on one another and future elevations.
- Historic, character-defining features should be retained first, salvaged and reused second, or rebuilt in-kind when necessary as a last option.
- Chimney options (in order of preference):
 - Preferred method: retain chimney and elevate with the structure.

- Elevate the house around the chimney and extend the chimney accordingly with materials to match.
- Other chimney options require an engineering report and recommendation.
- Primary entries should maintain the existing door locations and pathways to the street.
- Employ architectural strategies relating to the specific context to lessen the overall impact of the raised structure:
 - Continue siding down foundation.
 - Lowering window level to relate to streetscape pattern and pedestrian scale on new buildings. This pertains only to non-contributing and new structures.
 - Add a skirt board/water table.
- Significant elevation changes without site adjustment or mitigation should create the appearance of an additional full floor that proportionally relates to the floors above and fenestration patterns on the streetscape.

Definitions:

1. Building Sustainability and Resiliency; Community Resiliency
 - a. 'Sustainability' and 'Resiliency' as they pertain to buildings
 - i. Building Sustainability – The main objectives of sustainable design are to reduce or completely avoid depletion of critical resources like energy, water, land, and raw materials; prevent environmental degradation caused by facilities and infrastructure throughout their life cycle; and create built environments that are livable, comfortable, safe and productive.
 1. 5 Characteristics
 - a. Environmental Sustainability
 - b. Technical Sustainability
 - c. Financial Sustainability
 - d. Organizational Sustainability
 - e. Social Sustainability
 - b. Building Resiliency – is the capacity of a building to continue to function and operate under extreme conditions, such as (but not limited to) extreme temperatures, sea level rise, natural disasters, etc. As the built environment faces the impending effects of global climate change, building owners, designers and builders can design facilities to optimize building resiliency.
 - c. Community Resiliency - is also an important concept for consideration. This includes how the city, community or neighborhood respond to extreme conditions noted above, specifically with respect to city, state and federal resource allocation when required.
2. Terms:
 - a. Base Flood Elevation (BFE).
 - i. The elevation to which flood waters are anticipated to rise during the base flood (1-percent-annual chance) event with wave effects included in coastal areas.
 - ii. The BFE is the basis of insurance and floodplain management requirements.

- iii. BFE is measured at the bottom of the lowest non-water resistant, horizontal structural member (of the first floor).

- b. Sister Houses. 2 or more houses built side by side with identical (very similar) dimensions, floor plans and architectural details. Usually constructed by same builder or same family.

- c. Adjoining or Adjoined Buildings. 2 or more buildings of separate address, separate floor plan and likely separate ownership that are adjoined by a common wall.

The above criteria are intended as general guidelines to give property owners, architects, builders and others involved in presenting elevation projects to the Historic District Commission general awareness of the Commission's expectations.

APPROVED BY RESOLUTION:

K.A. Bok
Chair, Historic District Commission

1/21/2020
Date

Appendix A

Graphical Support to Building Elevation Design Concepts

To be added.

Appendix B

Additional Flood Mitigation Options for the Homeowner

To be added.

Appendix C

**Landscape Best-Practices and Recommendations
Related to Flood Mitigation and Building Elevation**

To be added.