

West Tisbury Historic District Commission

DESIGN GUIDELINES: What is meant by “appropriateness”?

Design guidelines are a set of guiding principles that the WTHDC uses to establish a basis for its decisions, and that applicants may use in formulating design solutions. Every building has architectural features that make it look the way it does. The size, shape, materials and color of each of these elements help to define the style of the particular building. Appropriate changes acknowledge and are sympathetic to the style of the original building and to the neighborhood in which the building is located. An appropriate addition would repeat or be responsive to a building’s architectural features.

Additions and New Construction

SIZE: The size and scale of a proposed addition in relation to that of existing and neighboring buildings will be evaluated.

MASSING: A proper addition is not overwhelming. Its height, width and depth (massing) are similar in scale to or smaller than the original structure. Additions should be subservient to the original structure, and should be located where least visible from the public view.

ROOF CONFIGURATION: Proposed additions should match or harmonize with the roof style and details of the existing building.

NEW CONSTRUCTION should blend in well to the surrounding neighborhood by using similar scale, materials and siting.

Architectural Elements

Architectural elements, such as doors, windows, porches, dormers, balconies, decorative details such as cornices, railings, and similar features that falsify or confuse the history of a building should be avoided. They play a key role in defining the style of a building and so deserve particular attention and respect.

Balconies and Roof Walks

Balconies and roof walks are generally inappropriate additions to existing structures. If balconies are proposed they should be located out of public view.

Barns

Barns should be preserved and maintained. Renovations that destroy the integrity of the structure as a barn (by making it look like a house) are discouraged.

Chimneys

Chimneys should be retained in most case, and repaired as necessary. Pipe extensions should be avoided. Red clay water struck brick with natural mortar is generally appropriate.

Decks

Decks should not be sited where they detract from the historic design of the structure. Appropriate vegetative screening should be considered.

Demolitions

Demolitions are seldom approved. The HDC will issue a demolition permit only if the structure to be demolished has no historic merit. Where a new building or structure will replace the old,

approval for the new structure must be granted as a condition of demolishing the old. In addition the applicant must provide a timetable and guarantees for completion and replacement of the structure. Documentation of the building or structure to be demolished may be required through measured drawings and photographs.

Doors

Existing doors should be retained and repaired. New openings are discouraged. Altering the size of the existing door will generally not be allowed.

Dormers

Dormers should be small in scale, and facades visible from the public way should not appear as if an additional story has been added.

Driveways

The most appropriate driveway pavement for a pre-1900 house is packed gravel. If asphalt is desired, it is appropriate that stone dust be rolled into the surface while hot to mitigate the “ink black” look. Many different surface treatments are available for asphalt to gain the appearance of gravel or peastone, and in general these are encouraged.

Fencing

Fences, of wood, or stone, are approved at times. Fences across the front of a property are discouraged, especially across the front of a house. When a fence is proposed in front of a building it should be open and low (not exceeding 42” in height) so as not to block the public view. White picket or natural split rail are the two fences preferred in the District. More solid fences to provide privacy or safety should be located where they have minimal visual impact and they should be no more than 5 feet high. Landscaping should be considered in combination with fencing to relieve the visual impact of a long fence. Stockade fencing is discouraged.

Foundations

New foundations should be in harmony with the foundation heights of buildings in the surrounding area, and should be consistent with the typical foundation height of the architectural style of the house. Original masonry and mortar should be retained when possible without the application of any surface treatment. Foundations should be repaired or extended with the materials of the existing foundation.

Grading and Site Work

The existing natural contours and topography of the landscape should be preserved to the fullest extent possible.

Gutters and Downspouts

Gutters should be of wood or copper, and in some cases painted aluminum. Unpainted aluminum is generally not appropriate for flashing, gutters and downspouts. Hung gutters should be as unobtrusive as possible. Downspouts should not obstruct the view of the structure’s corner wall elements.

Landscaping

The Commission may require plant screening for approval of a feature, but in general does not have jurisdiction over landscaping, with the exception of trees 30 feet or over, which may not be removed without HDC approval. The removal or alteration of any plantings which have been made a necessary condition to the granting of a certificate of appropriateness requires approval.

Lighting

All lighting fixture changes visible from a public way require a hearing. The intensity and distribution of light is taken into account. Preference is for a lamp (light bulb) to be fully shielded inside the fixture, so it is not visible from adjacent properties. It may be appropriate in some cases to have a low lumen lamp (25 watts incandescent) as an alternative. Many historic-style fixtures can be easily altered to shield the lamp. Pole lights are discouraged.

Materials

Traditional materials, including but not limited to wood, glass, brick and stone are the preferred building materials in the Historic District. These are the materials historically used in construction, and it is appropriate to use the same materials when building, renovating, or expanding. Synthetic materials are generally not appropriate. As new materials are developed that are indistinguishable from natural traditional products the Commission will consider their use on a case by case basis.

Modern Equipment

Modern equipment, such as an external air conditioner or an electrical generator, should be as small and inconspicuous as possible, and should be screened by vegetation. Front yard locations are discouraged.

Outbuildings

Visually filling the lot from side to side with house and outbuildings detracts from the landscape component of the historic streetscape, and is not appropriate. The WTHDC will consider size, scale and placement of the outbuilding.

Parking

Providing off street parking may be a significant alteration to a property. Applicants are encouraged to carefully consider parking alternatives and design options. Designs should be discreet and conservative in the amount of open space converted to parking. Parked vehicles should not dominate the view of the structure from a public way or place. Parking should be to the side, or preferably, behind the building, and should not be excessive.

Painting

You may repaint your house its current color, or white. White does not include off-white. For any other color a certificate is necessary. There are occasions when a color may be refused because of the color of adjacent houses, or the style of the architecture or the age of the house. For example, Victorian houses (1850 – 90) often had multiple colors, but Gothic Revival (1850 – 70) did not.

Porches

Original porches that contribute to the historic appearance of the structure should be retained. New porches should be consistent with the period and style of the building.

Shutters

Shutters should be wood, and reflect their original use. They should appear to be operable, slats should point up when shutters are open, and shutters should cover the entire window when closed.

Siding

Cedar shingles or white clapboard are appropriate. Vinyl siding is not.

Signs

The Commission reviews temporary structures or signs, except those meeting conditions of duration or use and similar matters as the Commission shall specify. The Commission allows signs, in connection with the non-residential use of each building or structure, consisting of letters painted on wood without symbol or trademark, and if illuminated, illuminated only indirectly with a steady light, and which comply with the Town statute as to number and size. (The Town statute is more restrictive than the WTHD By-Law. Please check with the Building Inspector for those requirements.) All other signs require review. Variety and creativity are appreciated. Synthetic signs are generally not appropriate. The applicant should note existing signs in the vicinity.

Skylights

Skylights require approval, and are unlikely to be permitted on an elevation facing the street.

Solar Panels

Installation of solar collectors shall not permanently change any architectural feature. They require a certificate.

Walkways

Brick, stone, gravel, or peastone are recommended. Asphalt is discouraged.

Windows

The WTHDC prefers that windows be repaired rather than replaced. If replacing, the HDC will favor “true-divided lights” rather than grid dividers, and clear-paned non-tinted glass, except when replacing original stained glass. Windows should be made of wood. Vinyl clad windows are inappropriate. Aluminum clad will be considered on a case by case basis.

The WTHDC holds most meetings and all hearings, unless otherwise posted, on Monday evenings, at 5:30 at the Howes House, and does not meet on State or Federal holidays which fall on a Monday. We encourage applicants to come in and discuss their project before submitting a formal application. Please call the Chair, Sean Conley, to be put on our meeting agenda.

If you have any questions, please contact Sean Conley, Chair of the WTHDC by telephone at 508-693-6677 or by mail to West Tisbury Historic District Commission, PO Box 278, West Tisbury MA 02575.

Thank you.

West Tisbury Historic District Commission

Sean Conley, Chair

Marcia Cini
Nancy Dole
Anne Fisher

Mark Mazer
Lanny McDowell
Ben Moore

