

Guidelines for Construction and Alterations for the Overlook Local Historic District Bristol, CT

SECTION I - GENERAL

The Overlook Local Historic District (“the District”) has been established to preserve and protect the unique architectural heritage of a portion of the Federal Hill neighborhood in the City of Bristol. Various phases of growth, development, and lifestyle are reflected in the varied architectural structures of this area. Nevertheless, continued growth anticipates the needs of future property owners within the district. The need to expand, reduce, or modify specific properties to meet the continuing functional requirements can be expected with the passage of time.

Because the Bristol Historic District Commission (“the Commission”) has the responsibility to “preserve and protect” the various architectural phases reflective of the area, it has the authority to rule on the “appropriateness” of all modifications that would change the appearance of any district property when viewed from the street line.

The purpose of the following guidelines is to give the Commission a set of reasonable standards to aid it in judging the appropriateness of proposed modifications, and to provide a basis for consistency in decisions over time. These guidelines and future Commission decisions govern only those parts of buildings visible from a public street, way, or place.

In general, the underlying principle of the District is that, when bringing an old building up to modern functional standards or when constructing a new facility, it is essential that the architectural character of the building and the neighborhood not be lost in the process. The following eight basic principles – modeled on the U.S. Department of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation – provide a foundation for the set of guidelines for the District contained herein.

1. Every reasonable effort should be made to provide a compatible use for buildings that requires minimum alteration to the building and its environment.
2. Rehabilitation work should not destroy the distinguishing qualities or character of the property and its environment. The removal or alteration of any historic material or architectural features should be held to a minimum, consistent with the proposed use.
3. Whenever possible, deteriorated architectural features should be repaired rather than replaced. In the event that replacement is necessary, the new material should match the material being replaced in composition, design, texture, and other visual qualities. Repair or replacement of missing architectural features should be based on accurate duplications of original features, substantiated by visual or pictorial evidence rather than on conjectural designs or the availability of different architectural features from other buildings.
4. Distinctive stylistic features or examples of skilled craftsmanship that characterize older structures and often predate the mass production of building materials should be treated with sensitivity.
5. Many changes to buildings and environments that have taken place in the course of time are evidence of the history of the building and neighborhood. These changes may have developed significance in their own right, and this significance should be recognized and respected.
6. 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.
7. 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, material, and character of the neighborhood, building, or its environment.
8. Wherever possible, new additions or alterations to buildings should be undertaken 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.

SECTION II – BUILDING DESIGN

A. New Construction

1. Scale and Form

a. Try to keep all new construction consistent with the scale of the surrounding structures. Scale includes such factors as building height, width, and the proportion of height to width; proportion of solid to void elements, i.e., wall area to area of window and door openings; the size of the dominant elements of the building; and the massing of the building, i.e., the arrangement of the building's dominant elements that affect setbacks, overhangs, etc.

2. Mood and Character

- a. Try to assess carefully the mood and character of the neighborhood where new construction is to take place.
- b. Avoid new construction that by its form, texture, etc. is not consistent with the mood and character of the neighborhood, even though all requirements for appropriate scale may be met.
- c. Avoid new construction that reproduces older architectural styles in an unauthentic manner.
- d. Try to utilize contemporary design and construction for new buildings, provided the qualities of scale, mood and character are met.

B. Restoration and Rehabilitation

1. Replacement of Original Materials

- a. Try to re-use original materials to the greatest extent possible.
- b. Where original material is unavailable or deteriorated, use new materials in the same form and with the same method of installation as the original.

2. Use of New Materials

- a. Avoid selecting new building materials that are out of scale, character, or otherwise present an appearance distinctly different from that of the original building.
- b. Avoid the use of materials that were not available at the time of the building's construction.

3. Restoration

- a. Try to research thoroughly the history of the structure and restore it as nearly as can be determined to its original form.
- b. Try to make use of the most current methods of restoration of partially deteriorated materials.
- c. Avoid "gutting" of a structure before new functional arrangements have been carefully planned.

SECTION III – EXTERIOR ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENTS

A. Foundations

1. Try to maintain the original appearance of the foundation material.
2. For stone foundations, avoid patching with stones that are not generally the same shape and size as the original.
3. With brick or stone, try to use mortar of the same color and strength as the original.
4. Avoid over-mortaring joints or tooling to a profile inconsistent with the original.

B. Walls

1. Frame Walls

- a. Whenever possible, try to retain and restore original materials.
- b. Avoid the removal of existing materials such as clapboards or shingles, since these form a major part of the building's texture.
- c. When deteriorated material must be replaced or repaired, try to use material that duplicates the old as nearly as possible. Be aware of the use of different materials on a single building, such as a single gable over a clapboard first story, and replace or repair with similar materials.
- d. Avoid resurfacing frame buildings with material that changes the textural appearance of the original building or that was not available at the time of construction.

2. Masonry Walls

- a. Try to retain the original masonry and mortar without the application of surface treatment.
- b. Avoid applying water repellent coatings unless their use has been carefully studied and recommended for a specific problem. These materials are often unnecessary and can, in fact, hasten deterioration by trapping moisture in the masonry.
- c. If re-pointing is necessary, try to duplicate the original mortar joint in color, texture, size and profile.
- d. Avoid re-pointing with mortar of high Portland cement content that can create a bond stronger than the original material. This can result in differing coefficients of expansion and cause cracking of existing joints.
- e. Try to clean masonry, when necessary, using the gentlest method available, such as with soft brushes and low-pressure water.
- f. Avoid sandblasting or using harsh chemicals that may react with masonry. These methods destroy the material's natural ability to repel water.
- g. Try to repair or replace deteriorated masonry and stucco with materials that match the original.
- h. Avoid indiscriminate removal of paint from masonry surfaces since this may have been originally applied for aesthetic or practical reasons.
- i. Avoid the use of artificial materials such as simulated brick or stone siding since these may not have been available at the time of construction and will give the structure an artificial appearance.

3. Low-Maintenance Siding

Low-maintenance siding, such as aluminum or vinyl clapboards, asbestos or asphalt shingles, are products of the mid-20th century, and as such, are by nature inappropriate for use on most historically significant buildings. Despite the efforts of manufacturers to duplicate the appearance of other building materials, these products nearly always have a glossy uniformity that reveals their true nature. In addition, even though these products are sold to reduce maintenance, they may, in fact, create new maintenance problems.

In spite of this, there will be some property owners who still wish to use low-maintenance siding on their homes and will have a valid reason for doing so. In this situation, certain guidelines should be followed in order to preserve, to the greatest degree possible, the architectural integrity of the structure.

- a. Try to use siding that duplicates the width of existing clapboards.
- b. Avoid using a "clapboard" type siding over existing shingles or other materials bearing no resemblance to clapboard.
- c. Try to use corner boards and other flat trim pieces of the same width and appearance as the original.

- d. Avoid using artificial material to clad trim pieces such as balusters, brackets, cornices, moldings, posts, and columns, even though the major wall areas may be covered.
- e. Avoid cladding all wall surfaces with the same type of siding irrespective of their original appearance. For example, a shingled gable should not be clad in the same way as the clapboard body of the house.
- f. Avoid the use of highly textured or “wood grain” patterns, since these rarely bear any resemblance to the original material.
- g. Avoid using artificial decorations such as shutters, scrolls, grilles, etc., since these rarely have the appearance of original materials (if, in fact, the building originally had such decorations at all).

4. Sandblasting

Sandblasting should be avoided since it can damage siding and other architectural features. However, property owners wishing to sandblast siding should employ a reputable contractor experienced with and sensitive to historic structures. Sandblasting should result in no permanent change to a structure except the removal of paint.

C. Trim and Decorative Features

1. Cornices, Brackets, Columns, Posts, Balusters, Etc.

- a. Try to retain such decorations and trim, since they are usually an essential part of the building's character and appearance.
- b. When severe deterioration requires, try to replace or reconstruct such features as nearly as possible to their original form.
- c. Avoid removing or cladding these important elements, since this would significantly alter the appearance of the building.

2. Ornamental Metal Work

- a. Try to clean, repair, and restore decorative metal work such as railings, fences, and other trim.
- b. On iron work, try to clean areas of rust and halt further rusting by repainting to match the original color.
- c. Avoid painting of non-ferrous metals such as brass and copper. Brass should be cleaned of oxidation when possible, and copper should be left to oxidize naturally.

3. Door and Window Trim:

- a. Try to retain and restore door and window trim, such as lintels, sills, architraves, pediments, hoods, etc., to their natural form.
- b. Avoid cladding door and window trim, especially when ornamental or decorative, with artificial siding products.

4. Shutters

- a. Try to research the original design of the structure to determine if shutters were actually used. If so, try to restore the originals or replace them with shutters that match the originals in form and material.
- b. Avoid installing pre-fabricated or mass-produced shutters of artificial materials, such as aluminum or vinyl.

D. Doors:

1. Primary Doors

- a. Try to respect the “main entrance” to the building and its relationship to the site and the building form.
- b. Avoid relocating or introducing new doors into the principal elevations of the building.
- c. Try to retain the original door design including panels, lights, and hardware; if replacement is required, try to duplicate the original design in form and material.

2. Secondary Doors

While less important visually than primary doors, secondary doors such as back or side doors, basement doors, hatchways, etc., should be retained or replaced in a way that respects their original form. If new secondary doors must be introduced, avoid locating these in a way that destroys the original composition or symmetry of the facade.

3. Storm Doors

Although pre-20th century buildings were not usually equipped with storm doors or windows, the energy-conscious property owner of today often finds these to be essential in reducing heat loss. When used, storm doors should be selected to compete as little as possible with the design of the main door.

- a. Try to use wood-frame storm doors. If metal storm doors must be used, try to select a frame color that is the same as the door trim.
- b. Avoid using bright aluminum-colored frames.
- c. Try to select a design and arrangement of lights that complement rather than detract from the design of the door.
- d. Avoid decorative grills or scrolls that may be inappropriate to the design or character of the building.

E. Windows

1. Windows in Walls

- a. Whenever possible, try to retain existing window sash.
- b. If replacement is required, try to respect the stylistic period of the building by selecting sash design and arrangement of lights that reflect the building's original form.
- c. Avoid creating new window openings that destroy the original composition or symmetry of the facade.

2. Dormer Windows

- a. Avoid creating dormers in roofs where their form would be inappropriate to the historical integrity of the building.
- b. Try to retain all dormer windows in their original style including the arrangement of lights and the sash detail.

3. Storm Windows

Early storm windows were wood-framed single units that covered the entire window opening. They were used in place of the window screen in winter, and, like the screens, hooked into clips at the top piece of window trim. When installing storm windows on buildings of the early 20th century or older, try to use this type of wood frame window. If metal storm windows must be used, try to select a color that is close to that of the existing trim. Avoid using bright aluminum-colored frames where the color would be inappropriate to the character of the house.

F. Porches and Steps

1. Try to retain porches and steps in their original form. Remember that porches and steps that were added later often reflect evolving architectural styles and are important to the building's historical integrity.
2. Avoid stripping porches of original material or features such as handrails, balusters, columns, brackets, or decorations of wood, metal, tile, or masonry.
3. Try to repair or replace deteriorated architectural features with new material that duplicates the old as closely as possible.
4. Avoid enclosing porches and steps in a manner that destroys their intended appearance. If it is essential to enclose a porch, try to do so inside the columns and railings, and do so in a way that preserves the original form and character of the building.

G. Roofs

1. Form and Features

- a. Try to retain the original roof form, including gables and eaves, hips, dormers, etc.
- b. Avoid introducing forms inappropriate to the original form of the roof such as oversized dormers, skylights, etc.
- c. Try to retain or replace the original architectural features that give the roof its essential character, such as dormers, cupolas, cornices, brackets, cresting and weathervanes.

2. Roofing Materials

- a. Try to replace deteriorated roofing material with the same material originally used. If new material must be substituted, try to select one that matches the old in composition, texture, size, shape, and color.

3. Gutters and Downspouts

- a. Try to retain original gutters and downspouts.
- b. If replacement is necessary, try to use materials that are similar in form and color of the original.
- c. Remember that gutters and downspouts can be strong visual elements; avoid introducing new ones in locations where they will detract from the original composition or symmetry of the building.

4. Roof-top Equipment

- a. Try to place roof-top equipment such as TV antennae, satellite dishes, air conditioners, exhaust fans, vents, and solar collectors in a location where they cannot be seen from the street.
- b. Where solar collectors must face the street (south) for efficiency, try to mount them in a way that minimizes their profile and makes them as inconspicuous as possible.

H. Chimneys

1. Try to retain the original height, form, number and location of the chimney(s), since these are critical links with the historical development of the structure.
2. Avoid adding new chimneys, especially false ones that give the building an appearance it never had.

I. Outbuildings

1. Outbuildings such as garages, carriage houses, and barns often contribute significantly to the historical or architectural interest of the property. Because of this, they should be treated with no less respect than the principal structure itself.
 - a. Try to follow the procedures for the particular features and types of construction covered elsewhere in these guidelines.
 - b. Try to retain and repair as needed those buildings and their features that are important to the historical integrity of the property.
 - c. When modifications or rehabilitation is required, such as installing new "garage"-type doors on a garage or carriage house, try to select materials of the same design and character as the original.
 - d. Avoid hasty demolition of deteriorated outbuildings before studying them for rehabilitation. When constructing new outbuildings, try to keep the design compatible with that of the principal structure and its site.

Official Policies of the Bristol Historic District Commission

Adopted August 2, 2007:

The following activities shall not require a Certificate of Appropriateness from the Bristol Historic District Commission:

- the installation of freestanding animal shelters (e.g., dog houses) no larger than 15 square feet in area and no taller than 5 feet in height to the peak of its roof;
- the installation of mailboxes;
- the removal of television antennas and satellite dishes;
- the installation of window flower boxes installed in such a manner as to not do permanent damage to the building to which they are attached; and,
- retaining walls up to 18 inches in height.

Adopted December 6, 2007; last modified 6/5/08

The following activity shall not require a Certificate of Appropriateness from the Bristol Historic District Commission:

- The replacement of any type of asphalt roof shingles with architectural asphalt roof shingles whose color is, or is comparable to, one of the following colors specified in "The Roofing Collection Architect Product Guide" (published by Owens Corning, © 2007): Brownwood, Teak, Driftwood, Woodland Blend, Onyx Black, Williamsburg Gray, Estate Gray, Slatestone Gray, or Quarry Gray. Comparability of colors shall be determined by the staff of the Commission.