

# CONSERVATION GUIDELINES OVER-THE-RHINE HISTORIC DISTRICT

*July 18, 2003 and revised XXXX XX, 2023*

## New Construction

New construction will be reviewed using the Over-the-Rhine Historic Conservation Guidelines for New Construction attached hereto as Attachment \_\_\_\_\_ and incorporated herein by reference.

### A. Intent and General Guidelines

- ~~1. Infill construction is allowed on vacant sites in Over the Rhine, because gaps due to demolition weaken the streetscape and the overall character of the district. New construction can improve both the physical quality and economic vitality of the neighborhood.~~
- ~~2. New construction should be well designed but should not replicate the existing buildings. The exceptional quality of the existing buildings in the district provides an outstanding framework for new construction.~~
- ~~3. The Historic Conservation Board's review of new construction will focus on the design compatibility with the surrounding contributing structures. The appropriateness of design solutions will be based on balancing the programmatic needs of the applicant with how well the design relates to the neighboring buildings and to the intent of these guidelines. New design proposals should pay particular attention to composition, materials, openings, rhythm, scale, proportion and height.~~
- ~~4. The new construction guidelines for this district will be used to judge the compatibility of new work. The specific site and programmatic needs of each project will be taken into consideration.~~

### B. Specific Guidelines

- ~~1. **Composition:** New buildings should respond to the traditional subdivisions found on historic property: a base, a middle and a top. Most buildings in Over the Rhine are built of brick with the principal facade parallel to the street it faces. The most important features of buildings in Over the Rhine are the arrangement of openings on the principal facade and an overall vertical emphasis of the whole design. Each building provides its own variations, but collectively they share many basic features.~~

~~**Base:** New buildings should have a well defined base. Within the district most buildings have a base that is distinguishable from the rest of the building. This is accomplished through a change of materials, a change of scale, and/or a lintel or other type of horizontal banding. In larger buildings the original base may include more than the first floor.~~

~~**Middle:** Details on new buildings should relate to the detailing of adjacent or nearby buildings. Buildings in the district often incorporate architectural details such as changes in plane or changes in materials on their upper floors. Decorative, horizontal bands indicating the floor lines, sill heights or lintel heights should not overpower the vertical emphasis of the design.~~

~~**Top:** New construction must employ a strong element that terminates the uppermost part of the building. Distinctive elements in the architecture of Over the Rhine are elaborate projecting cornices, decorative parapets and the expressive use of materials.~~

2. ~~**Roofs:** Roofs for new construction should be similar to roofs of adjacent and nearby buildings of similar size and use. In the district, buildings of three or more stories generally have low-pitched shed roofs that are not visible above the principal facade. Smaller buildings in the district typically have simple gable roofs on which the gables are perpendicular to the principal facade. Institutional buildings in Over the Rhine have a variety of roof shapes, including dormers, multiple gables, hip roofs and towers. Roofs in this district have little or no overhang.~~

3. ~~**Window Openings:** Window openings are extremely important in this district. The openings of new buildings should be related to the size and placement of openings found on historic structures of similar use in the district. In residential buildings, window openings are typically found individually rather than in pairs or grouped. The openings are taller and wide (typically in a proportion of 2:1), window sash are set back from the wall surface, and openings have some form of definition, such as lintels, sills or decorative surrounds. Window openings, which are typically aligned vertically, usually occupy between 20% and 50% of the principal facade.~~

~~In commercial, industrial and institutional buildings, windows are often grouped within a single opening. These building types may also use a combination of window sash, including double-hung, awning and hopper.~~

~~If muntins are used in new window sash, they must provide true divided lights. Within the individual opening, window sash are usually divided into two or more lights. In all cases the glass must be clear; tinted or reflective glass is not acceptable. Also, roll down shutters and metal bar systems installed on the exterior of the building that cover door and window openings are not appropriate.~~

4. ~~**Storefronts:** New storefronts should relate to the characteristics of existing storefronts on historic buildings. Storefronts in the district are typically taller than individual upper floors; framed by piers and/or columns and have a lintel separating them from the upper floors; are divided into bays which increases their verticality and provides a pedestrian scale and proportion; and have large, fixed expanses of clear (not tinted or reflective) glass. As with rehabilitated original storefronts, roll down shutters and metal bar systems installed on the exterior of the building are not appropriate elements for new storefronts.~~

~~The storefront lintels are 12 to 18 feet above grade; the window sill height is between 18 inches and 3 feet above grade; and storefront windows are set back from the structural elements approximately 12 inches.~~

5. ~~**Setback:** Setback is an important issue in a dense urban area such as Over the Rhine. The setback for new construction should be consistent with the buildings of similar use on adjacent and nearby sites. In Over the Rhine, most commercial buildings are built up to the property line. Some residential property, especially detached buildings, have shallow setbacks but retain an "edge" at the property line with a fence. Some larger institutional buildings such as schools, churches and public buildings are setback from the street to provide public space and to add to their monumentality. In most cases new construction on corner sites should be built up to the edge of both outside property lines.~~

6. ~~**Rhythm:** New buildings should incorporate design features, such as window groupings, articulation of wall surfaces, and decorative elements such as columns or piers in an effort to~~

~~maintain the rhythm that already exists in the district. New construction should avoid creating long unrelieved expanses of wall along the street by maintaining the rhythm of bays found on the district. Most buildings in Over the Rhine are relatively narrow, 25 to 50 feet in width. A building facade typically displays vertical subdivisions that establish a visual rhythm. In dense commercial areas such as Vine Street, there are no setbacks, creating a solid wall along the street. This wall is articulated by the individual buildings, which in turn are divided by window groupings, changes in wall planes and decorative elements such as pilasters, columns or piers.~~

- ~~7. **Emphasis:** New residential and mixed use construction should have a vertical emphasis, because in Over the Rhine buildings are taller than they are wide, window openings are tall and narrow, and storefronts have slender columns, which emphasize verticality. Commercial and industrial buildings, which may have an overall horizontal emphasis, often incorporate vertical elements, such as pilasters or vertically oriented openings.~~
- ~~8. **Height:** The height of new construction should not vary more than one story from adjacent contributing buildings. Most buildings in Over the Rhine are between two and five stories.~~
- ~~9. **Materials:** New construction should use materials that are found on the historic buildings in Over the Rhine. Clearly the dominant material in Over the Rhine is brick, but other materials such as limestone, sandstone, cast iron, slate, wood and sheet metal are important as well. Materials such as stucco, synthetic stucco and plastic are not appropriate and should not be considered as exposed finish materials for new construction in this district.~~

## Additions

### Intent and General Guidelines

1. Additions are allowed and should follow new construction guidelines. They should be compatible in character with the original. They should be sympathetic but not imitative in design.
2. Additions should be designed to relate architecturally to adjacent buildings in general and to the building they are a part of in particular.
3. Additions should not overpower the original building.
4. The appropriateness of design solutions will be based on balancing the program needs of the applicant with 1) how well the proposed design relates to the original building and neighboring buildings and 2) how closely the proposal meets the intent of these general guidelines and the specific guidelines for new construction.

## Rehabilitation

### A. Intent and General Guidelines

These guidelines are intended to assure that rehabilitation will maintain significant features of buildings. The guidelines are not hard-and-fast rules, but are used by the Historic Conservation Board as a guide to assess the compatibility and the appropriateness of proposed changes. Reviews are limited to the exterior changes proposed for buildings; alterations made to the interior of buildings are not reviewed by the Historic Conservation Office.

1. Ordinary repair and maintenance which does not change the appearance of the building shall not be reviewed.
2. Existing features in good condition should be conserved, and damaged features should be repaired wherever possible.
3. Replace badly damaged or missing features sensitively to harmonize with the character of the original feature. Replication is appropriate, but it is not essential.
4. Completely new features and materials should be compatible with the building in design, color, detailing, texture, size and shape. By their nature adaptively reused buildings may require more flexible and creative design approaches.

## B. Specific Guidelines

1. **Materials:** Missing or deteriorated materials should be replaced with recycled or new materials that match the original as closely as possible with regard to the following: type, color, style, shape, and texture of material. The composition, type of joint, size of units, placement and detailing should be appropriate for the building. Synthetic materials such as aluminum or vinyl siding, imitation brick or plastic are inappropriate. Other types of synthetic materials such as split-face concrete block may be approved on a case-by-case basis.
2. **Door and Window Openings:** Among the most important features of any building are its openings – its windows and doors. The size and location of openings are an essential part of the overall design and an important element in the building's architecture. Don't alter or fill-in original openings. Roll down shutters and metal bar systems installed on the exterior of the building that cover door and window openings are not appropriate.
3. **Door and Window Sash:** Repair original doors and window sashes rather than replace whenever possible. If replacement is necessary, the new door or window sash should match the original in material, size and style as closely as possible. Synthetic replacement windows are generally discouraged. Consult with the Historic Conservation Office about acceptable replacement windows.
4. **Ornamentation:** Significant architectural features such as window hoods, decorative piers, quoins, bay windows, door and window surrounds, porches, cast-iron storefronts and other ornamental elements should be preserved. These distinctive features help identify and distinguish the buildings in Over-the-Rhine. Don't remove or replace ornamentation with substitutes that are of a different scale or design or an incompatible material. Make replacement ornamentation match the character of the existing feature closely as possible with respect to type, color, style, shape and texture of material. Some synthetic materials including fiberglass castings may be approved on a case-by-case basis.
5. **Roofs:** Chimneys, dormers or towers and other architectural features that give the roofline of an existing building its identifying character should be preserved. Most of the buildings in Over-the-Rhine have flat or single-pitch roofs. The addition of vents, skylights, and roof top utilities should be inconspicuously placed or screened where necessary. Retain and repair the original roof materials such as slate, which is common on churches, institutional buildings and buildings with mansard roofs, and standing seam metal roofs, which are common on smaller buildings with gable roofs. Do not use wood shakes and plastic roofing products,

which are inappropriate materials in Over-the-Rhine. Simulated slate may be approved on a case-by-case basis.

6. **Cleaning:** Clean exterior surfaces with the gentlest method possible. For masonry structures, begin with scraping by hand or scrubbing with a bristle brush and mild detergent. Some types of chemical cleaning can be used, but test patches should be carried out in inconspicuous areas first. Don't sandblast or use other abrasive cleaning methods that destroy the surface of brick and stone and shorten the life of the building. Don't use wire brushes, because they can also damage masonry surfaces.
7. **Repointing Masonry:** Repoint historic masonry with mortar that matches the existing in color, content and texture and with joints that match in type and thickness. The mortar joints in masonry construction deteriorate for a variety of reasons. Repointing these joints can significantly aid the rehabilitation of a structure. Generally, buildings built prior to 1900 used a lime-based mortar. A typical lime-based mortar has the following formula: 8 parts sand, 2 parts lime, and 1 part portland cement. This mortar is softer than the portland cement-based mortar of today. Hard modern mortar used on historic masonry causes bricks to crack or spall during the freeze-thaw cycle.
8. **Water-Repellent Coatings:** Don't use water-repellent coatings on historic masonry. Most historic structures have survived without the need of water-repellent coatings. Water-related damage on the interior of buildings is usually the result of a failing roof, deteriorated or faulty gutters and downspouts, deteriorated mortar, rising damp or condensation. Water-repellent coatings will not solve these problems and may make them worse.
9. **Painting:** Repaint buildings that were historically painted. Most buildings built before 1890 in Over-the-Rhine were originally painted. Paint is part of the aesthetic design of these buildings and should be maintained. Paint also protects porous nineteenth century masonry and masks alterations and inappropriate repairs. Masonry that has not been painted in the past should not be painted. Because color can have a significant impact on the neighborhood, use paint colors that are appropriate to your building's age and style. Historically, most paint schemes were relatively simple. The Historic Conservation Office can provide owners with color combinations that are appropriate for a building's age and style. Varying the choice of color between neighboring buildings is preferred.
10. **Wood Siding:** Retain and repair original wood siding. When replacement is necessary, the new wood should match the original in size, shape, profile and detail. All wood siding should be painted. Aluminum or vinyl siding is not appropriate for replacing or covering original wood siding. Artificial stone, asbestos, asphalt siding and other similar resurfacing materials are not acceptable. The use of composite cement siding may be approved on a case-by-case basis.
11. **Shutters and other outside attachments:** Original shutters should be repaired and retained. Many buildings in Over-the-Rhine have or had wood shutters for the windows. Reintroducing missing shutters must be based on physical evidence and the shutters must fit the opening and be operable.

Exterior light fixtures should be appropriate to the style of the building. Colonial "coach" lights are not appropriate. Mercury vapor and other streetlights are not appropriate for

attachment to the façade. Exterior light fixtures should be mounted in a way that does not cast undue glare onto neighboring properties.

12. **Storefronts:** Retain and repair the design and materials of storefronts in historic buildings. First-floor storefronts are common in Over-the-Rhine and are found in all types of architectural styles. Detailing and materials vary considerably. Each design should be considered individually and original materials should be retained. If the storefront has been altered or if none of the original materials remain, old photographs may indicate the original design. Original masonry storefront materials should be cleaned with the gentlest method possible (see section on cleaning). Cast-iron storefronts may be cleaned by abrasive methods including sandblasting. Adjacent materials must be protected and the pressure should be less than 100 p.s.i.

Don't reduce the size of storefront openings. Transparency and scale are very important to storefronts and their relationship to the remainder of the building as well as to the streetscape. Don't cover or remove significant elements such as piers, lintels, transoms, original doors or other similar details. Roll down shutters and metal bar systems installed on the exterior of the building are not appropriate.

13. **Signs:** Signs should be designed for clarity, legibility and compatibility with the building or property on which they are located. Signs should be located above the storefront, on the storefront windows or on awnings and should not cover any architectural features. Signs should capitalize on the special character of the building and reflect the nature of the business.

Wall and projecting signs should be located above the storefront or first story and below the second story sills. The size of wall signs shall be limited to one square foot per lineal foot of building frontage. Projecting signs should be no larger than 3 feet, 6 inches in width or height. Small projecting signs such as symbol signs are appropriate. Billboards and internally illuminated signs are not permitted. Neon signs may be approved on a case-by-case basis.

14. **Awnings:** The installation of fabric awnings on storefronts is encouraged. Awnings add color and variety to commercial buildings and highlight the businesses. Awnings should be installed so they do not cover or require the removal of any original architectural feature. Awnings of metal, plastic, vinyl (not vinyl coated fabric) or wood will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis. Internally illuminated awnings are not acceptable.

## Site Improvements

### A. Intent and General Guidelines

1. Site improvements, such as parking lots, parking pads, paving, fences, decks and trees should be in character with the contributing buildings in the district and should respond to the colors, textures, materials and scale found in the area of the improvement.
2. The design of any site improvement should be compatible with district buildings and not detract from the character of the district.
3. The design of site improvements should capitalize on the unique character of the area and could incorporate elements from the district. Site improvements should enhance the experience of pedestrians in the district.

## B. Specific Guidelines

1. **Parking Lots:** Cars in parking lots should be screened from public view. Appropriate screening includes low masonry walls in conjunction with planting areas and landscaping, low masonry walls with wrought iron fencing and planting areas with landscaping and wrought iron fencing. Chain link fence along sidewalks is inappropriate.

Parking lots with a capacity of 10 or more cars should contain trees within the lot as well as around the perimeter of the lot. Concrete curbs, not rolled asphalt bumpers, are appropriate edges for parking lots.

A lot used for surface parking of motor vehicles should be for the exclusive use of owners, occupants and customers of a building located within 300 feet of the lot, and shall be subject to a restrictive covenant to implement this provision.

2. **Parking Pads:** Parking pads (parking for one or two cars) are permitted at the rear of the property, with access at alleys or existing curb cuts whenever possible. Parking pads in areas other than the rear yard shall be judged on a case-by-case basis and judged by their impact on the property and on the district.
3. **Fences and Walls:** Wrought-iron or cast-iron fences are encouraged along the sidewalks of vacant lots or where buildings are setback from the sidewalk. Fencing may be set between wrought iron and cast-iron posts, natural stone posts or pre-cast concrete posts. Fencing may also be set on a concrete curb or on top of a retaining wall. Landscaping in front of a fence is encouraged. Plain board fences (vertical boards nailed side-by-side on horizontal stringers) or wire fences are appropriate at the rear of the property or along the side of the property. Wood fences should be painted or stained but not left to weather naturally. Chain link, stockade, shadow board, basket weave and lattice designs are not appropriate. Masonry privacy walls are not encouraged.

Retaining walls built along the front property line or along street frontage should be built of or faced with fieldstone or limestone. Retaining walls at other locations should be built of fieldstone, limestone, brick or specialized masonry block such as split-face concrete block. Concrete products including cinder block, stucco and unfinished concrete masonry units should not be used as the finish material for any retaining wall.

4. **Decks:** Wood decks should be stained or painted. Rooftop decks should not be highly visible from the principal façade. Metal balconies should not be discouraged.
5. **Paving for sidewalks, patios and other similar areas:** Materials used for paving should have the appearance of individual units to give the surface scale. Appropriate materials include brick, stone, scored concrete and unit pavers. Concrete should be limited to sidewalks and should not be used in large slabs over big areas, such as driveways and parking lots.
6. **Street Furniture and Amenities:** Existing historic elements in the right-of-way such as steps, mounting blocks, fences, paving, natural stone curbs and splash blocks should be retained. Historic materials such as pavers, curbs or steps shall be returned to their same location, even if they are to be paved over, when they are removed to install or repair utilities such as water, sewer, electric, gas, cable, security or for any other purpose. Flower boxes, planters, urns and similar elements are encouraged but should be appropriate to the property

where they are placed and with the district as a whole. The installation of these elements should not cover or require the alteration of any architectural details.

7. **Trees:** Street trees and trees on private property are encouraged. Don't cut down mature, healthy trees.

## Demolition

~~Demolition regulations for designated property in Cincinnati set forth in Chapter, Historic Conservation, of the Cincinnati Municipal Code. See particularly Section 741-13, Regulation of Alterations, Demolitions and Environmental Changes, and Section 741-15, Demolition. Generally, demolition of existing buildings is permitted if one of the following conditions exist: No building or part of a building may be demolished except as provided below:~~

- ~~1. Demolition has been ordered by the Director of Buildings and Inspections for public safety because of an unsafe or dangerous condition which constitutes an emergency. See Section 741-21(e).~~
- ~~2. 1. Inappropriate additions, non-significant portions of a building, and non-contributing buildings may be demolished provided the demolition does not adversely affect the integrity of a contributing building or the character of the streetscape or the district. In reviewing a proposed demolition of an addition, non-significant portion of a building, or non-contributing building and its impact on contributing buildings, the streetscape, and the district, the Historic Conservation Board may consider whether the applicant's plans for new improvements in place of the demolished structure or portion thereof are consistent with the "New Construction" and "Site Improvements" sections of this document, as applicable.~~
- ~~3. The owner can demonstrate to the satisfaction of the Historic Conservation Board that the structure cannot be reused for any use or a reasonable economic return from the use of all or part of the building or from the sale of the property proposed for demolition cannot be realized. See Section 741-13(h)(2).~~
- ~~4. The owner is a non-profit corporation or organization and can demonstrate to the satisfaction of the Historic Conservation Board that the denial of the application to demolish would also deny the owner the use of the property in a manner compatible with its organizational purposes and would amount to a taking of the owner's property without just compensation. See Section 741-13(h)(3).~~
- ~~5. The demolition request is for an inappropriate addition or a non-significant portion of a building and the demolition will not adversely affect those parts of the building which are significant as determined by the Historic Conservation Board.~~

## **Supplemental Demolition Guidelines for the Over the Rhine Historic District:**

- ~~1. The Historic Conservation Board, when acting on any application for a Certificate of Appropriateness seeking approval of demolition, may:~~
- ~~2. Approve the demolition of a non-contributing building or a building of a later period and the demolition will not adversely affect the character of the streetscape or the district as determined by the Historic Conservation Board. A list of the non-contributing buildings is provided below.~~



- ~~3. Approve 2. The demolition if it is necessary to carry out an Urban Design Plan, or an Urban Renewal Plan, approved by Council or a Planned Unit Development (PUD) approved by the City Council.~~
- ~~4. Delay or deny the application if it finds that the reason that the structure cannot be reused for any use or the owner cannot realize a reasonable economic return from the use of all or part of the building or from the sale of the property proposed for demolition is that the owner has failed to provide the minimum maintenance required by Section 741-19(a) through willful action or neglect.~~
- ~~5. New construction on the cleared site will be subject to the guidelines for new construction and site improvements for the Over the Rhine Historic District.~~

## Non-Contributing Buildings

### A. Intent and General Guidelines

1. A number of buildings in the district do not contribute to the historic character of the district. The Historic Conservation Board will review the proposed alteration or demolition of these buildings based on the guidelines in this section. These guidelines encourage changes in the district that will reinforce its historic and architectural character, but acknowledge that some buildings are of a different age or architectural period.
2. Buildings that do not contribute to the historic character of the district fall into two general categories:
3. **Newer buildings:** Most buildings that were built within the past fifty years do not fit the historic or architectural context of the neighborhood. Due to their more recent date of construction, these buildings did not contribute to the development of Over-the-Rhine as an urban, nineteenth-century neighborhood. The majority of these newer buildings differ architecturally from the district's historic buildings, especially in scale, building materials, and detailing.
4. **Significantly altered buildings:** Some older buildings have lost the integrity of their original design due to substantial, incompatible exterior alterations. Buildings in this category not only have been stripped of architectural details, but have been altered completely in their appearance. The basic design, scale and rhythm of these buildings no longer relate to the historic buildings of the district.

### B. Specific Guidelines

1. **Rehabilitation:** The rehabilitation of non-contributing buildings should comply with the guidelines for rehabilitation, as outlined in the "Rehabilitation" section of this document. These rehabilitation guidelines provide a framework for maintaining a building's basic architectural character; they do not suggest that a building be redesigned or altered to appear older than it is. Alterations to a newer building should be compatible with the original architectural character of that structure or should help the building to relate better architecturally to the surrounding historic district. The rehabilitation of an older, altered structure should restore elements of the building's historic character, whenever possible, based on remaining physical evidence, historic documentation, or similar buildings nearby. Alterations to non-contributing buildings should not create a false sense of history. In many cases it is preferable to rehabilitate and reuse a non-contributing building than to have a vacant parcel or parking lot.

2. **Additions:** Additions to non-contributing buildings should comply with the guidelines outlined in the "Additions" section of this document. Additions should be designed to relate architecturally to adjacent buildings and to the building of which they are a part. Additions should not overpower the original building.
3. ~~**Demolition:** Non-contributing buildings may be demolished if the demolition will not adversely affect the character of the district. The Historic Conservation Board's review of an application to demolish a non-contributing building will include an evaluation of plans for the redevelopment of the cleared site, based on the "New Construction" and "Site Improvements" sections of this document.~~

**List of Non-Contributing Buildings:** ~~The following buildings identified on Attachment \_\_\_\_\_, incorporated herein by reference, are deemed to be non-contributing buildings that~~ do not contribute to the historic or architectural character of the Over-the-Rhine Historic District.

~~(See Attached List)~~