

# **Allegheny West Design Guidelines for New Construction Outside of the Historic District**

**NOTE:** *A subcommittee of AWCC's Housing and Planning Committee has drafted the following design guidelines for new construction OUTSIDE of the Allegheny West Historic District to assist developers by providing context sensitive design principles to guide new construction. The following guidelines are largely based on the City of Pittsburgh's Historic Preservation Guidelines (2015) and have been tailored to the Allegheny West neighborhood by providing information on common or contextual aspects of the built environment. These general non-binding guidelines will be discussed and proposed for adoption at the December 11, 2018 general membership meeting.*

## **1. Overview**

Designing a building to fit within the character of a neighborhood requires careful thought. New construction adjacent to a historic district should respect its surroundings and should be constructed in a manner that reinforces the basic visual characteristics of the district. New design should relate to the fundamental characteristics of the historic context. It may do so by drawing upon basic ways of building that make up part of the characteristic of the neighborhood. Such features include the way in which a building is located on its site, the manner in which it relates to the street, and its basic mass, form, and materials. When these design variables are arranged in a new building to be similar to those seen traditionally, visual compatibility results.

These design variables include:

- Building Placement and Orientation
- Architectural Character
- Building Mass, Scale, and Height
- Building and Roof Forms
- Primary Entrances
- Materials
- Windows
- Paint Colors
- Landscaping

## **2. Building Placement and Orientation**

Compatibility with the context is a key principle for the design of new construction in Allegheny West. This typically focuses on buildings in the same block, on both sides of the street, and across an alley. In Allegheny West, buildings were traditionally arranged in consistent development patterns in terms of site plan and orientation. Many residential, commercial, and some industrial buildings align uniformly along streets. This creates a consistent "street wall" that is now a key feature of the neighborhood.

On residential streets, buildings often had zero setback or were minimally set back from the street, providing front yards of a similar depth, which establishes a rhythm of building fronts along the block. Reinforcing these historical development patterns and traditional ways of building orientation is

paramount in designing a new building to fit within the neighborhood and to blend with the Allegheny West neighborhood. New infill should reflect traditional development patterns found in the neighborhood, including façade alignment and uniform building orientation.

- **Maintain the alignment of building fronts along the street.**
  - Locate a new building to reflect the established setback patterns along the block.
  - If existing buildings are positioned at the sidewalk edge creating a uniform street wall (zero setback), then a new building should conform to this alignment.
  - Zero setback in commercial/industrial areas
  - If existing historic buildings are positioned at the sidewalk edge creating a uniform street wall, then a new building should conform to this alignment.
  - Where front yard setbacks are uniform, place a new building in general alignment with neighboring buildings.
  - Where front yard setbacks vary, place a new building within the established range of front yard setbacks on the block.
  - New construction should have the principal façade oriented to the primary street.
  - Lots with Allegheny Commons park frontage should have the primary façade oriented towards the park.
  - Garage doors should only face alleyways.
  - Curb cuts for driveways or garage aprons should only be from alleyways. Provisions for off-street parking should always be incorporated in new construction projects.
- **Maintain the side yard spacing pattern on the block where it exists as a key feature.**
  - Locate a building to preserve the side yard spacing pattern on the block as seen from the street.
- **Maintain the traditional orientation pattern of buildings facing the street.**
  - Locate the primary entrance to face the street and design it to be clearly identifiable.
  - For residential buildings, entry porches stoops oriented to the street are appropriate.
  - For commercial storefronts recessed entries may be appropriate.

### **3. Architectural Character and Detail**

In order to assure that historic resources are appreciated as authentic contributors in the Allegheny West neighborhood, it is important that a new building be distinguishable from them while also remaining compatible with the context. Therefore, new construction should appear as a product of its own time while also being compatible with the historically significant resources of the area.

- **Design a new building to reflect its time while respecting key features of its context.**
  - In Allegheny West, with its high concentration of historic buildings, relating to the context is especially important.
  - In the areas surrounding the Allegheny West historic district where there may be more diversity in the types of buildings and styles, respecting broader traditional development patterns that shaped the area historically is important.
- **An interpretation of a historic style that is authentic to the neighborhood will be considered if it is subtly distinguishable as being new.**
  - Avoid an exact imitation of a historic style that would blur the distinction between old and new buildings and make it more difficult to understand the architectural evolution of the district.

- **Incorporate traditional façade articulation techniques in a new design.**
  - Consider these design elements
    - A tall first floor
    - Vertically proportioned upper story windows
    - Window sills and frames that provide detail
    - Horizontal expression elements, such as canopies, moldings, and cornices
    - Vertical expression elements, such as columns and pilasters.

#### **4. Building Mass, Scale, and Height**

While zoning codes will guide building size, density, and height, it is also important to consider the context of the neighborhood when determining these factors. Each historic building in a in the Allegheny West neighborhood exhibits distinct characteristics of mass, height, and a degree of wall articulation that contributes to its sense of scale. As groupings, these buildings establish a definitive sense of scale. A new building should express these traditions of mass and scale as well, and it should be compatible in height, mass, and scale with its context, including the specific block and the neighborhood as a whole.

Building mass, scale, and height should be considered in these ways:

- 1) As experienced at the street level immediately adjacent to the building.
    - At this level of perception, the actual height of the building wall at the street edge is a key factor. The scale of windows and doors, the modular characteristic of building materials, and the expression of floor heights also contribute to perceived scale.
  - 2) As viewed along a block, in perspective with others in the immediate area.
    - The degree of similarity (or diversity) of building heights along a block, and the repetition of similar features, including openings, materials, and horizontal expression lines, combine to establish an overall sense of scale at this level of experiencing context.
  - 3) As seen from key public viewpoints, inside and outside of the historic district.
    - In groups, historic buildings and compatible newer buildings establish a sense of scale for the entire neighborhood and define the skyline.
- **Convey the traditional size of historic buildings in new construction as it is perceived at the street level.**
    - The height of a new building should appear to be within the height range established in the context, especially at the street frontage. In Allegheny West, this will typically be two or three stories to a maximum of four, depending on the site and adjacent properties.
    - Residential buildings should be more vertical except for stand-alone houses, which tend to be two-story or two-and-one-half-story houses on double lots.
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    - Floor-to-floor heights should appear similar to those of traditional buildings in the neighborhood.
  - **The overall height of a new building should be compatible with the neighborhood.**
    - However, a building height that exceeds the height range established in the context will be considered when:

- It is demonstrated that the additional height will be compatible with adjacent properties and for the neighborhood at large.
  - Taller portions are set back from the street.
  - Access to light and air of surrounding properties is respected.
- **Provide variation in building height when a new building is substantially larger than historic buildings in the area.**
  - In order to reduce the perceived mass of a larger building, divide it into subordinate modules that reflect traditional building sizes in the context.
  - Vary the height of building modules in a large building and include portions that are similar in height to historic buildings in the neighborhood. However, avoid excessive modulation of a building mass when that would be out of character with simpler historic building forms in the area.
- **Maintain the scale of traditional building widths in the context.**
  - Design a new building to reflect the established range of the traditional building widths in the neighborhood.
  - Where a building must exceed this width, use changes in design features so the building reads as separate building modules reflecting traditional building widths and massing. Changes in window design, façade height, or materials are examples of techniques that should be considered.
  - Where these articulation techniques are used, they should be expressed consistently throughout the building, such that the composition appears as several building modules.
- **Establish a sense of human scale in a building design.**
  - Use vertical and horizontal articulation techniques to reduce the apparent mass of a larger building and to create visual interest.
  - Express the position of each floor in the external skin of a building to establish a scale similar to historic buildings in the neighborhood.
  - Use materials that convey scale in their proportion, detail, and form.
  - Design architectural details to be in scale with the building. Using windows, doors, storefronts (in commercial buildings) that are similar in scale to those seen traditionally is appropriate.

## 5. Building and Roof Forms

A similarity of building forms also contributes to a sense of visual continuity. In order to maintain this characteristic, a new building should have a basic form that is similar to that seen traditionally.

- **Use simple, rectangular building forms**
  - Use building forms that appear similar to traditional forms.
  - Use roof forms similar to those seen traditionally in the neighborhood, including mansard, side-gabled, rear ell shed, hipped, and flat (only for commercial buildings).
  - Dormer roofs should be considered for residential buildings.
  - Use a pitched or gable roof form where they exist in the surrounding historic context.

## 6. Primary Entrances

Traditionally, most primary entrances are oriented to the street in Allegheny West, providing visual interest and a sense of scale to each building. Porches, stoops, and entry steps are common on residential buildings and storefronts are common on commercial and some industrial buildings. In all of these examples, the primary entrance is key element. Some warehouses and industrial buildings have more diversity of entrance types, some of which resemble a simplified version of a commercial storefront and others are more utilitarian, with punched openings and modest trim elements. These features are important to the character of each street within the neighborhood.

A primary entrance should be clearly identifiable in a new building and it should be in character with the building and its context. The entrance should include features to signify it as such, and convey a sense of scale.

- **Orient a primary entrance towards the street.**
  - Design the primary entrance to be clearly identifiable.
  - Design entrances to commercial buildings to convey a sense of scale and provide visual interest.
  - For commercial storefronts recessed entries may be appropriate.
  - For residential buildings, entry porches stoops oriented to the street are appropriate.
  - Design a residential porch to be in proportion to the building.
  - Common porch locations in Allegheny West include on front, side, and rear façades.
  - Use porch materials that are similar to those seen traditionally in the neighborhood. Wood balustrades and porch posts or columns (sometimes with brick piers) are common.
  - Awnings can be appropriate on entryways. Awnings materials should be fabric, not vinyl or metal.

## 7. Materials

Traditional building materials include various types of masonry, primarily brick, stone, and concrete, wood trim and siding, and limited use of industrial metals. Today these materials are key to the character of the neighborhood.

Building materials should reflect the range of textures, modularity, and finish of those employed traditionally. They also should contribute to the visual continuity of the neighborhood. They should be of high quality and proven durability in similar applications.

**Using New Materials:** Compatibility with historic materials can be achieved without purely replicating their traditional use. New building materials that convey the essence of modularity and the texture and finish of historic masonry, and that have proven durability in the local climate, are often compatible.

The degree to which alternative materials may be used successfully on a new building will also be influenced by the degree of consistency or variety in material that already exists in the neighborhood.

- **Use building materials that appear similar in scale, color, texture, and finish to those seen historically in the context of the neighborhood.**
  - Use materials that are proven to be durable in the local Pittsburgh climate.
  - Use materials that will maintain an intended finish over time or acquire a patina.

- When possible, use masonry with a modular dimension similar to typical masonry materials.
- Then appropriate, use high quality, durable, materials.
- On the ground level, use materials that will withstand on-going contact with the public sustaining impacts without compromising their appearance.
- **When using horizontal lap siding, ensure compatible application**
  - Use new siding that is similar to the lap exposure, texture, and finish of traditional wood siding.
  - Use trim boards that show depth and typify high quality construction.
  - Do not use a finish that is out of character, such as a raised grain, or rusticated surface.
- **Typical Materials found traditionally in Allegheny West include:**
  - Masonry
    - Brick: should be compatible with other brick in neighborhood. Dark red brick is common, no mottled brick, glazed brick may be used for commercial buildings.
    - Stone: sandstone, limestone, granite.
    - Terra Cotta: typically used in trim elements.
  - Wood
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  - Metal: typically painted
  - Roof Materials
    - Gray/red Slate
    - Tile
    - Asphalt
    - Rubber: typically found on flat roofs such as commercial buildings or garages
    - Metal (flat seam, traditional standing seam, not corrugated metal panels)
- Understanding the character of these materials and the patterns they create is essential to developing new interpretations.
- Inappropriate materials include river stone, perma-stone, corrugated metal, cement board, vinyl siding, aluminum siding, plain-faced concrete block, composite lumber.
- **Trim Elements**
  - Wood brick molds for window and door openings
  - Sills, lintels made of both brick, stone, and wood are appropriate.
  - Window and door hoods made of wood, stone, metal, or in some cases Fiberglas can be appropriate.
- **Lighting**

Lighting should be compatible with the surrounding historic context and should minimize light spill onto adjacent properties and the night sky.

  - Ensure that light fixtures are compatible with the surrounding historic context.
    - Use exterior light fixtures that are simple in design and compatible with architectural and site design elements.
    - Maintain existing spacing patterns between exterior fixtures.
    - Mount exterior fixtures in an inconspicuous manner.
    - Consider installing appropriate exterior lighting above or flanking the front entrance of a building.

- Shield lighting to prevent off-site glare.
  - Use warm light sources
  - Incorporate cut-off shields to direct light downward.
  - Shield fixtures to minimize light spill onto adjacent properties and into the night sky.
  - Ensure that luminaires are not visible from adjacent streets or properties.
- The scale of the light fixture should be appropriate to the scale of the building.
- Where used, include a compatible, shielded light source to illuminate a sign.
  - Do not overpower the building or street edge with lighting.
  - Use a warm light similar to daylight.
  - If halo lighting is used to accentuate a sign or building, locate the light source so that it is not visible.

## 8. Windows

The manner in which windows are used to articulate a building wall is an important consideration in establishing a sense of scale and visual continuity. In traditional commercial building settings, a storefront system was installed on the ground floor and upper story windows most often appeared as punched openings.

These features often align with others in the block and establish a rhythm or pattern of solid and void that visually links buildings along the street. These traditional arrangements may also be interpreted in contemporary designs that complement the established patterns found within the neighborhood.

Window design and placement should help to establish a sense of scale and provide pedestrian interest. Where solid to void patterns are clearly established, as in Allegheny West, this should be maintained. Contemporary and creative design interpretations of window rhythms and patterns that reference, but do not duplicate historic designs are also encouraged.

- **Arrange windows to reflect the traditional rhythm and general alignment of others in the area.**
  - Use appropriate window rhythms and alignments such as:
    - Vertically proportioned, single or sets of windows, “punched” into a more solid wall surface, and evenly spaced along upper floors
    - Window sills or headers that align
    - Rows of windows or storefront systems of similar dimensions, aligned horizontally along a wall surface
    - Maintain the symmetry found within the neighborhood, such as the vertical alignment of openings on center entry houses and three-bay row houses
    - Creative interpretation of traditional window arrangements will be considered.
- **Use durable window materials.**
  - Appropriate window materials include metal and wood frame

- Inappropriate window materials include plastic snap-in muntins and synthetic vinyl.
- **Use traditional glazing patterns**
  - Typical and traditional glazing patterns in Allegheny West include one-over-one light, double-hung wood windows. The use of a header sash over a one-light sash or a double-hung sash is also common. Less common window types include two-over-two-light or multipaned windows
- **A contemporary storefront design is encouraged in commercial settings.**
  - Design a building to incorporate ground floor storefronts in commercial settings.
  - Incorporate the basic design features found in traditional storefronts, such as a kickplate, display windows, transoms, and a primary entrance.
  - In storefront details, use element similar in profile and depth of detailing seen historically.

#### **9. Paint Colors:**

- Research paint colors found in the neighborhood.
- Late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century color palettes are preferred.

#### **10. Landscaping:**

Common landscape elements found in Allegheny West include:

- Fences/Gates fronting primary façade
  - Wrought Iron, cast iron. Not appropriate, wooden fences, chain-link fences, vinyl fencing, split rail.
- Vegetation that does not obscure building, scale, or architectural details
- Landscaping that is scaled to the setback of the building and the space available
- Regularly spaced street trees
- Species that are appropriate to region