

DESIGN GUIDELINES FOR INFILL DEVELOPMENTS AND ALTERATIONS IN  
THE HISTORIC DISTRICTS OF ITHACA, NEW YORK

A Thesis

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by

Sepideh Karimifar

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## ABSTRACT

New construction and alterations in historic districts directly affect the architectural value of the district and it is essential to monitor them. Design guidelines are written standards prepared by the review board staff or other expertise and qualified professionals. They are used by commissions for evaluating the compatibility of proposed changes in historic districts. They provide the characteristics features of an existing historic property and relationships that they represent to make what could be appropriate and what would not be considered desirable. The main purpose of design guidelines is to maintain the character of historic districts through educating and guiding architects, builders, and property owners in planning appropriate repairs, renovations, and alterations to Ithaca's historic built environment.

This work demonstrates the importance of design guidelines, the challenges in developing them, and the process of implementing them. The end presents some suggestions to consider as improvements to design guidelines for the historic districts in Ithaca. These design guidelines are developed to help property owners and design professionals and provide projects that can be approved by the the Ithaca Landmark Preservation Commission (ILPC). They are meant to complement the Secretary of the Interior's Standard for the Treatment of Historic Properties and provide specific guidelines based on unique characters in the historic districts of Ithaca.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Sepideh Karimifar was born and raised in Kerman, Iran. She received an M.A. degree in Urban Design from Shahid Beheshti University in 2014. While studying urban design, she became interested in the design challenges in historic districts which led her to seek further education in the field of Historic Preservation. Prior to pursuing a master's degree in historic preservation, Sepideh worked as an urban designer and cooperated in developing a master plan for a historic street and gained her first exposure to preservation in her home country.

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Lastly, I would like to thank all the family and friends that have stood by me, not only through this process but also as a constant presence at every stage of my life. All of them have shaped me into the person I am today, and for that I will always be in their debt.

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## INTRODUCTION

Preserving the architectural character of historic districts requires not only maintaining existing historic resources but also the consideration of alterations and new construction. These changes affect the historic character of the district so that an appropriate way to consider and review all alterations is needed.

Design guidelines are written standards used by commissions for evaluating the compatibility of proposed new construction and alterations in historic districts. These provide the characteristics features of the existing historic context and relationships that they represent to make them clear and comprehensible. The main purpose of design guidelines is to describe and maintain the historic character of the properties through educating and guiding architects, builders, and property owners who want to make changes in the districts.

In Ithaca, the Ithaca Landmark Preservation Commission (ILPC) is responsible for preserving the historic character of historic districts. It reviews proposals for new construction and alterations. The ILPC compares the proposals to the guidance provided by the Secretary of the Interior's Standard for the Treatment of Historic Properties which provide general guidance and best practices developed over the past 50 years.

This thesis will demonstrate the importance of design guidelines, describe the challenges in developing design guidelines and the process of design review. It also includes a product by developing design guidelines for the historic districts in Ithaca. These design guidelines are developed to help property owners, tenants, and design

professional plan projects that can be approved by the ILPC. They are meant to complement the Secretary of the Interior's Standard for the Treatment of Historic Properties and provide specific guidelines. The design guidelines can help the members of the Ithaca Landmark Preservation Commission (ILPC) when reviewing the proposals for new construction and alterations in historic districts. This thesis also may assist historic preservationists who become involved in developing other design guidelines for historic districts outside of Ithaca. The example presented here could be used samples for the revision in the future.

Information retrieval for this thesis was conducted primarily through archived and previously printed materials. Further information was taken from academic theses at Cornell University. The investigation of historic districts in the city of Boston as well as the previous studies of the historic context of Ithaca provided valuable information. Research into the design review process included interviews and attending the regular ILPC meetings at the City of Ithaca. These interviews were also perfected through telephone conversations and e-mail correspondence during the spring, summer, and fall of 2020.

The first two chapters of this thesis try to cover the literature on design guidelines in historic districts and the process of design review. Chapters three to five examines the historic districts in Ithaca and the current design review process in this city and proposes design guidelines for each historic district.

The first chapter defines a historic district as it is stated in the National Register regulations and specifies how local historic districts differ from National Register districts. Infill development in historic districts and the challenges in designing them are discussed in this chapter. This chapter also demonstrates the

importance of design guidelines, the definition of design guidelines, and their purpose. Then the chapter details the process of developing design guidelines which start with identifying, analyzing, and evaluating the distinctive characteristics of the historic district. After that verbal explanations and graphic illustrations should be developed. Compatibility in new construction and additions and the different approaches to create compatibility are also discussed in this chapter.

The second chapter describes the design review process in historic districts. It begins with the rationale and definition and continues with the challenges that commissions face in the process of design review. Then provisions of the historic preservation ordinance that are relevant to new construction are examined. In the last section of this chapter, the design review administrative process is detailed.

Chapter three focuses on the historic districts of Ithaca, providing a brief history of their development and describing each historic district. In the next chapter, the City of Ithaca Landmark Preservation Ordinance is reviewed. Lastly, the chapter discusses the Ithaca Landmark Preservation Commission and its duties. The last chapter proposes specific design guidelines based on the unique characters of each historic district in Ithaca.

## CHAPTER 1

### Historic Districts and Design Guidelines

#### Historical Context of the Historic Districts

Although aesthetics are important, they are not the only determination issue. History has an important role. The National Register Bulletin defines a historic district as a “district that possesses a significant concentration, linkage, or continuity of sites, buildings, structures, or objects united historically or aesthetically by plan or physical development” (National Register Bulletin, 1995). A district is often composed of a wide variety of resources, but it is a unified entity. It is the interrelationship of its resources that define an identity for a district and reveal a visual sense of the overall historic context. A district must be significant for historical, architectural, archeological, engineering, or cultural values.

Both features that are individually distinctive and those that lack individual distinction may form a district. However, the majority of the components that add to the district’s character must possess integrity and contribute to the district as a whole. A district is a definable geographic area that can be different from surrounding properties in terms of density, scale, type, age, style of the sites, buildings, structures, and objects. Different patterns of historic development can make a historic district distinguished from its surroundings. Therefore, boundaries for historic districts must be based on common features among the properties in the district. A district usually identifies as a single geographic area of contiguous historic resources, but it may be composed of two or more significant areas separated by nonsignificant areas. A

discontinuous district is where the elements are spatially discrete, or space between the elements is not related to the significance of the district or the visual continuity is not a factor in the significance.<sup>1</sup>

Before the enactment of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (NHPA), the development of the historic district was modeled on precedent. Charleston's historic district, the Vieux Carre district in New Orleans, Beacon Hill in Boston, and the island of Nantucket were amongst the first districts established in the U.S. Previous to the NHPA, federal law stipulated that historic resources were sites, buildings, and objects. When the NHPA introduced districts, it drastically shifted the thinking about historic preservation. The NHPA created the National Register of Historic Places and added historic districts as a resource. By doing so, a pipeline linked federal funds to survey activity that led to the creation of historic districts.<sup>2</sup>

It is essential to know that there are two kinds of historic districts: (1) National Register Districts which contain properties of national, state, and local significance and (2) Local historic districts, authorized by local legislation. There are substantial differences between these two designations. An area may be designated as both a National Register District and a local historic district. The National Register district designation is based on federal standards and administered by National Park Service

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<sup>1</sup> National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers; U.S. Department of the Interior. National Register Bulletin: How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Interior National Park Service Cultural Resources, 1995, p. 5-6.

<sup>2</sup> Hamer, D. A. *History in Urban Places: The Historic Districts of the United States*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1998, p. 3-7.

for the Secretary of the Interior. National Register Districts provide formal recognition of the property's significance as well as potential tax incentives for owners of income-producing property and limited protection from state or federally funded projects. This designation places no obligations on the owner to use the property, and there are generally no restrictions or conditions on changing the property unless a state or federal project is providing funding or licensing or unless some other regional or local regulation is in effect. Often nominations to the National Register do not need any local government approval but the state historic preservation office notifies local officials before recommending approval at the state level. Nominations are often introduced by a property owner or by the local historical commission.

In contrast, a local historic district is established by a town or city council vote. This generally provides a regulatory review process for all changes to exterior architectural features visible from a public way.<sup>3</sup> Local districts give officials the legal authority to control the aesthetics of a historically significant area.<sup>4</sup>

### Infill Development in Historic Districts and its Challenges

Most cities and towns are under continuous construction, alteration, and replacement. This means infill development is a permanent process in an active community. The infill or new construction fills the vacant parcel of land, but since it

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<sup>3</sup> Massachusetts Historical Commission. *Establishing Local Historic Districts*. Boston, MA. 2003, Retrieved January 2014, p. 2-3.

<sup>4</sup> Hamer, D. A. *History in Urban Places: The Historic Districts of the United States*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1998, p. 5.

is surrounded by the existing built environment, it is different from “greenfield” development.

During the 1970s, when many historic areas and inner-city neighborhoods were experiencing their first new construction, the term “infill” appeared as a part of the preservation vocabulary.<sup>5</sup> Changes in economics, demographics and the land use pattern of America’s cities have weakened the vitality of many urban neighborhoods. Although each city differs in its physical character, population, social composition, and distribution, one of the most significant changes remains the economic restructuring from manufacturing to service and knowledge-based industries<sup>6</sup>.

The shift to the postindustrial, service-oriented economy has had a significant effect on patterns of urbanization. This shift led to further suburbanization of the population and the relocation of jobs. Because of this outmigration, population density has declined in center cities since 1950. Consequently, racial and economic gaps between cities and suburbs have widened, and central neighborhoods of cities faced continuous deterioration. Revitalizing neighborhoods and improving housing quality in central cities can be achieved through different approaches, most of which involve infill development projects. Vacant properties in neighborhoods impose adverse

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<sup>5</sup> Beasley, Ellen. *Design and Development: Infill Housing Compatible with Historic Neighborhoods*. Washington, DC.: National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1998, p. 8.

<sup>6</sup> Suchman, Diane. *Developing Infill Housing in Inner City Neighborhood: Opportunities and Strategies*. Washington, D.C.: Urban Land Institute, 1997, p. 1.

economic, physical, and social effects on the community, and it often becomes worse in historic neighborhoods.

There are many public benefits in developing infill sites. It can provide more housing and expand homeownership opportunities. It can help the local government to put vacant land back on the tax rolls. It can eliminate eyesores and fuel additional investment and economic activity within the community. Particularly, when the neighborhood consists of historic buildings, infill development can preserve the existing character of the context and retain the historic values<sup>7</sup>.

Infill developments can occur in different sizes from single-family dwellings built on scattered lots to large mixed-use development covering several city blocks. The emphasis that is placed on relating the new design to the existing context distinguishes infill projects from other forms of development.

The city and the neighborhood may take an active role in encouraging infill development or become developers themselves. These collaborative efforts among diverse groups can help achieve both financial commitments and design acceptance for infill projects. It also helps the participants to share an understanding of what is required to gain the common objectives of building new housing compatible with a historic context. The choices and decisions made in the course of infill developments include the program and budget for the project, the ability of the developer to guide

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<sup>7</sup> Suchman, Diane. *Developing Infill Housing in Inner City Neighborhood: Opportunities and Strategies*. Washington, D.C.: Urban Land Institute, 1997, p. 2.

the project, the skill of both the designer and the builder, the level of support for project goals by all parties, and each party's understanding of its role and responsibilities.

To start an infill development, the developers must define the goals of the infill project, and then they need to research the project site and determine the feasibility of the project. Getting this information involves visits to community development, planning, housing, tax, and other city, town, and county offices. Also, the developer should become familiar with zoning and building regulations and design guidelines. These documents define what can be built and what should be built to be compatible with the context.

The success of any infill housing project is directly affected by the viability of the real estate market and the interests of the local community.<sup>8</sup> As with any kind of development, the developer needs to consider the level and nature of likely market demand and to assess how easily and under what condition the land can be acquired.<sup>9</sup> In this regard, much of the necessary information may be available from the city planning department. Other resources might include real estate agents who specialize in older neighborhoods, financial institutions involved in neighborhood revitalization,

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<sup>8</sup> Beasley, Ellen. *Design and Development: Infill Housing Compatible with Historic Neighborhoods*. Washington, DC.: National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1998, p. 10-12.

<sup>9</sup> Suchman Diane. *Developing Infill Housing in Inner City Neighborhood: Opportunities and Strategies*. Washington, D.C.: Urban Land Institute, 1997, p. 17.

and preservation organizations with active real estate programs.<sup>10</sup> In evaluating the feasibility of an infill project, it is essential to remember that sites that have been left vacant are generally idle for a reason. A site might be too small or oddly shaped. Also, unstable soils, steep slopes, poor drainage, or vulnerability to flooding could make development infeasible. Vacant sites in central cities often had some type of structure on them at one time, and it is important to inquire about the type of that structure<sup>11</sup>.

While the developers are collecting background information, they should investigate the organizational structure that can best support the proposed infill project. Generally, infill projects are being developed by the collaboration of public and private, for-profit, and nonprofit interests. Availability of funding is a factor that influences the form of a development team, particularly when public funds are involved.

Design of infill projects begins with an understanding of the physical, social, and economic conditions of the surrounding area. Infill developments occur in an existing historical context; therefore, the design of an infill development should be compatible with the scale and texture of the surrounding context. The final design of an infill development in older neighborhoods results from the interaction of many

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<sup>10</sup> Beasley, Ellen. *Design and Development: Infill Housing Compatible with Historic Neighborhoods*. Washington, DC.: National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1998, p. 13.

<sup>11</sup> Suchman, Diane. *Developing Infill Housing in Inner City Neighborhood: opportunities and strategies*. Washington, D.C.: Urban Land Institute, 1997, p. 39.

different factors and personalities. The design must satisfy the developer, the neighborhood residents, the architect, and the preservation commission.

Reaching an agreement on the final design is a challenging task. It requires balancing design and budget limitations with the expectations of the developer, the financial backers, the neighborhood, and the preservation commission. Therefore, it is essential to have continuous communication throughout the design process. Successful infill projects result from well-defined goals and the willingness of various groups to work together to achieve the goals. The process of an infill development might be prolonged, but considering its economic, social, and visual impact on the neighborhood and community, it is not a process that can or should be hastily concluded.<sup>12</sup>

#### Design Guidelines for Historic Districts

In 1931, Charleston established its historic district and America's first historic review board for protecting the charm and character of a historical neighborhood faced with threats of demolition and intrusive new construction. For this purpose, a five-member Board of Architectural Review, with limited power was created. It consisted of one architect, one member of the Carolina Art Association, one member of the city's Planning and Zoning Commission, an engineer, and a realtor. The Board had no control over demolition but was responsible to evaluate the general design,

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<sup>12</sup> Beasley, Ellen. "Design and development: infill housing compatible with historic neighborhoods" Washington, DC.: National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1998, p. 15-18.

arrangement, texture, material, and color of the building and the relation of these factors to similar features of buildings in the immediate surrounding. However, the board did not consider the relative size of buildings in the plan, interior arrangement, and the features not visible to the public.<sup>13</sup>

Design guidelines are consistent written standards used by commissions for evaluating the compatibility of proposed new construction, alterations, and demolitions.<sup>14</sup> Design guidelines may be strictly enforced or simply advise property owners, but all have a common goal, which is maintaining the character of existing historic districts.<sup>15</sup>

According to Bowsher, there are three general categories for historic district design guidelines: rehabilitation and maintenance of existing buildings, new construction, and signs. In addition to these guidelines, some review boards refer to criteria for deciding the applications involved with demolition or moving of buildings.

The characteristics of the existing historic context are indeed the real guidelines, but it is necessary to translate these features and relationships that they represent into words and pictures to make them clear and comprehensible for people. Properly developed design guidelines can accomplish a variety of functions. These

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<sup>13</sup> Dennis, Stephen Neal. *'The Genius of the Place': Charleston Discovers How to Protect 'The Circumstances and the Locality'*. Preservation Progress, special edition, 1993, p. 21.

<sup>14</sup> Beasley, Ellen. *Reviewing New Construction Projects in Historic Districts: Procedures for local preservation commissions*. National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1986, p. 3

<sup>15</sup> Cox, Rachel S. *Design Review in Historic Districts*. Washington, DC. National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1994, p. 1.

include identifying the most important design review concerns. Providing standards that promote uniformity in the process of reviewing applications and speeding processing. Design guidelines also can inform the residents of a city about the appropriateness of proposed solutions. This can assist by explaining the decisions of the review board.<sup>16</sup>

Design guidelines can help improve and preserve the historic values of a district. However, they cannot guarantee that all architectural changes will be compatible with the historic context. Design guidelines complement a community's preservation ordinance. They are not laws but used to measure the appropriateness of visual changes to the historic districts. How the design guidelines are perceived by the community and enforced by the commission varies.<sup>17</sup>

The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation, a statement of 10 principles drawn up by the federal government for federally funded rehabilitation projects, is used by the majority of commissions as guiding principles. In 2004, Stacey Donahoe conducted research in which sixty-five American cities were surveyed and discovered that most commissions follow:

The basic preservation philosophy of the Standards is included in many ordinances and most go even further by including the Standards verbatim in their

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<sup>16</sup> Bowsher, Alice Meriwether. *Design Review in Historic Districts: A Handbook for Virginia Review Boards*, Washington, DC. National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1978, p. 25-26.

<sup>17</sup> Bowsher, Alice Meriwether. *Design Review in Historic Districts: A Handbook for Virginia Review Boards*, Washington, DC. National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1978, p. 25-26.

guidelines. Several cities depend on the Standards exclusively, without customizing them for their historic resources and needs. The majority use the Secretary of Interior's Standards as a base and add their specific guidelines on top. The study found that outdated versions of the Standards are still being used in many cities, highlighting the failure of cities to keep their guidelines current.

The same survey also acknowledged that fifty-three of the cities would like to have written guidelines that are more specific to their needs.<sup>18</sup> Rachel Cox points out that the design guidelines by which a design review or historical commission assesses proposals for new constructions or alterations may be as simple as the two paragraphs in Charleston's Historic District Ordinance or they may consist of little more than a local adaptation of The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. However, Cox believes that a "truly effective, efficient, and relatively conflict-free" design review process should incorporate "community goals, along with detailed guidelines for achieving them."<sup>19</sup>

### The Process of Developing Historic District Design Guidelines

Developing design guidelines is a complex process and involves the goals of various groups interacting within a political setting. The acceptance of design

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<sup>18</sup> Donahoe, S. *Guiding Additions to Historic Properties: A Study of Design Guidelines for Additions in Sixty-Five American Cities*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Scholarly Commons, 2004, p. 78.

<sup>19</sup> Cox, Rachel S. *Design Review in Historic Districts*. Washington, DC: National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1994, p. 4.

guidelines relies on a community's recognition of shared preservation goals. Defining preservation goals requires examining a web of relationships that involves both the historic structures and the proposed changes that affect them. Every district has its particular historic resources and its own needs. Therefore, before developing design guidelines, it is essential to look at the buildings in the historic district and be aware of the goals and purposes of the regulation.

For example, when there is no vacant land, and the district is under little pressure for development, the guidelines should concentrate on rehabilitation rather than new construction. A district that is recognized by a distinctive landscape feature may want to provide special protection. A commercial district needs guidelines that consider and clarify sign regulation. The scope and the level of generality or specific detail that is most appropriate for a particular district can be defined by the board members.<sup>20</sup>

Because the historic character of the district and identifying the compatible new construction and alteration in context remain the main purposes of design guidelines, the first step is to identify, analyze, and evaluate the distinctive characteristics of the historic district. Determining the characteristics which make a historic district unique and significant is possible through visual evaluation of the district and a survey of historic resources. An architectural survey is an inventory that identifies and describes these character-defining characteristics. In addition, it

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<sup>20</sup> Bowsher, Alice Meriwether. *Design Review in Historic Districts: A Handbook for Virginia Review Boards*, Washington, DC. National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1978, p. 27.

identifies the significance of the district.<sup>21</sup> Surveys can differ greatly in terms of scope and details depending on who is conducting them, how much time and money are available for completing them, and other practical factors. A survey should include clear photographs of each building and additional information about the building and its surrounding.

This includes (a) an architectural description that notes important features, (b) the date of construction (c) and the date of important events that occurred there. (d) Significant people who lived or worked in the community should be noted. (e) Additional information should include the structural condition, describing the authentic parts of the building as well as alterations and additions. (f) Last, but by no means least, the relationship of the building to its surrounding, compatibility of use, and contribution to the historic and visual character of the area are important features.

To be more specific about each of the character-defining features that are essential in the process of developing design guidelines for a historic district, more background information is necessary. The recognition of architectural periods, additional knowledge about the architectural styles and fashions in the United States and in particular in the city's development. A style can be defined as the details and architectural features of each building. These features are required for developing specific guidelines associated with the architectural character of the district.

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<sup>21</sup> Cox, Rachel S. *Design Review in Historic Districts*. Washington, DC. National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1994, p. 5.

The date of construction can be determined in many cases with city directories and maps. City directories are also helpful in creating a list of people associated with a property. The relationships between buildings and the arrangement of buildings in blocks are very important in defining the character of the neighborhood. Façade setbacks, building spacing, and the scale of buildings should be considered in this regard.

Buildings of any architectural period will be categorized by their use, which can be residential, commercial, industrial, or others. Those that define as residential usually require different design guidelines than commercial buildings. The various types of uses within a neighborhood are one of the elements in assessing the character of the area.

Features that are not directly connected to the buildings such as sidewalks, driveways, and natural elements such as open spaces, trees, and yards should also be considered in describing the character-defining features of the district.<sup>22</sup>

After the significant features of the district have been recognized, verbal explanations and graphic illustrations should be developed as draft guidelines. If the review board staff has the capability, it can develop the guidelines. If it does not have the time or expertise and qualified staff is not available, the board can get assistance from other places. Expertise exists in a local preservation group or civic association, or

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<sup>22</sup> Cox, Rachel S. *Design Review in Historic Districts*. Washington, DC. National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1994, p. 6-7.

a nearby college with design or preservation courses might help by developing design guidelines through a class project. Design guidelines can also be developed by a professional consultant who is experienced in design analysis. National organizations, state, and local foundations sometimes help financially by hiring consultants. If the guidelines are prepared by a professional consultant, the review board members should be involved in the process because their knowledge of the district is essential, and they might understand and interpret the guidelines clearly once they are adopted.<sup>23</sup>

It is important to remember that guidelines must protect recognized values and, at the same time, have sufficient flexibility for creative new designs in the historic context. One way to achieve effective guidelines is to focus on the character-defining features rather than prescribing specific solutions. Also, considering the reversibility of a proposed change as a criterion can help make the guidelines more effective.<sup>24</sup> Guidelines that avoid strict principles – use more of “recommend” and “discourage” rather than “require” and “prohibit” – give the review board some freedom in deciding and are less likely to be irritating for designers and owners.

In developing design guidelines, it is essential to remember that they are aids in decision making, not formulas. The feasibility of administering the design guidelines should be considered before they are considered for adoption. Guidelines

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<sup>23</sup> Bowsher, Alice Meriwether. *Design Review in Historic Districts: A Handbook for Virginia Review Boards*, Washington, DC. National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1978, p. 29.

<sup>24</sup> Cox, Rachel S. *Design Review in Historic Districts*, Washington, DC. National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1994, p. 9.

must correspond to other regulations that apply to historic districts such as zoning, sign, and building codes. Guidelines need not be formulated all at once or answer every situation. Similar to other policies and the historic district ordinance, guidelines should be examined and revised when necessary.<sup>25</sup>

### Compatibility in New Constructions and Additions

According to Brolin, new buildings in a historic context may be built in a new form to evoke or even to enhance the visual character of the surroundings, or they may copy architectural elements of an existing property or be something in between. He believes that each of these approaches can be satisfactory as long as it is skillfully done, and a strong and expressive relationship is established between the new building and the context. The difficulty is to decide which relationship is going to be successful.

Most contemporary buildings are not respectful of their historic context. In some cases, they even ignore the context intentionally. In the pre-industrial world, new constructions had some degree of visual integration due to persisting social customs, limitations on the availability of materials, and commonplace construction methods. Each of the styles that today are known as historical was modern in its own time. Unlike today's common practice, many of those modern styles were respectful and related to their older settings. The result of this approach was visually rich and

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<sup>25</sup> Bowsher, Alice Meriwether. *Design Review in Historic Districts: A Handbook for Virginia Review Boards*, Washington, DC. National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1978, p. 30.

integrated streetscapes. The difficulties today's designers face in relating their architecture to the context do not differ from those solved by the predecessors, and the visual problems remain the same regardless of the change in materials and techniques.<sup>26</sup> In designing new additions to historic buildings, Smeallie writes that compatibility is being consciously in the background, never to overwhelm the original building. Compatible additions will offer expansion without competing for design goals. In other words, the first rule in designing respectful addition is that the new portion does not weaken the visual values of the original structure and let the original building presents its primary image.

There are many successful compatible additions to prominent historic buildings throughout the United States. Visual characteristics of a respectful addition are usually the most significant features. However, for achieving a successful addition, factors other than design need to be considered, such as the functional fit and circulation patterns between the old and the new. The choice of materials is also an important element in designing respectful additions. Although cost considerations are an important factor in determining the exterior materials, the original building materials should be appreciated for designing a respectful addition. Materials are a feature that needs to be considered when designing a new addition to provide a transition between the old and the new.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Brolin, B. C. *Architecture in Context: Fitting New Buildings with Old*. New York, NY: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1980, p. 19-20.

<sup>27</sup> Smeallie, Peter H., and Peter H. K. Smith. *New Construction for Older Buildings: A Design Sourcebook for Architects and Preservationists*. New York: Wiley, 1990, p. 3-4.

The relationship of the scale of the addition to the original building is an essential design consideration. A respectful addition should imitate the height and bulk of the original and avoid overwhelming it. In some cases, when extensive amounts of space are required, respectful addition can be considerably larger than the original building, but the mass can be reduced visually by varying forms.

Smeallie also introduced other types of additions that complement the original building. Two of these additional concerns are contrast and abstraction. Contrasting additions use opposing design features like colors and forms in a manner that, if done skillfully, heightens the effect of the whole. Abstract additions use design elements that are apart, but representative of the original. The use of these design techniques aims to draw attention to the new addition and to make a statement about the development, history, image, and uses of the building. These additions are not intended to be respectful to the existing building, but they provide new meanings or associations. However, contrasting and abstract additions must respect the style and intent of the original building and get the fundamental design concepts from them.<sup>28</sup>

Another form of addition that can be compatible under certain circumstances is the imitative addition, which reproduces the architecture of the original building. In this technique, the features of the original building are copied and integrates the addition with the original building so that the entire building is considered as one entity. Imitative additions can be found on many important historic buildings, and it is

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<sup>28</sup> Smeallie, Peter H., and Peter H. K. Smith. *New Construction for Older Buildings: A Design Sourcebook for Architects and Preservationists*. New York: Wiley, 1990, p. 15-16.

almost visually impossible to distinguish between the old and new. This type of addition is usually the only form of addition undertaken on buildings for which the symbolic value of the structure is as important as the building itself. Several practical concerns should be taken into account when applying imitative additions. Having access to the same building materials used in the original building, and the required craftsmanship for constructing the addition are two important considerations. An addition that imitates the original, requires the designer to be aware of matching the color between the old and the new portion of the structure.

According to Smeallie, the construction of a new building amid existing older or historic buildings faces a range of challenges significantly different than those found in building addition designs. Some of these challenges involve the design elements of height, massing, scale, entrances, and materials. In this regard, he defines contextualism as an approach to design that makes a conscious effort to understand how new construction will fit into an existing built environment. The importance of contextual design goes well beyond aesthetic considerations. It is essential to remember that in many cases, there are historical, geographical, and climatological reasons why buildings are designed the way they are, and a good designer must pay attention to these factors. Contextualism is not meant to imply duplication of the existing buildings, but rather it will provide a means of assessing the elements that contribute to a distinctive style or regional form of architecture.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Smeallie, Peter H., and Peter H. K. Smith. *New Construction for Older Buildings: A Design Sourcebook for Architects and Preservationists*. New York: Wiley. 1990, p. 25 & 131.

Designing with sympathy towards the context has been a commonplace occurrence for decades. Brolin believes that in today's architectural practice, the ornament is the least important element in relating the new building to the old. He argues that the general assumption is that establishing usual similarities between new and old such as similar heights, similar materials, and similar massing, will guarantee a compatible new construction. However, these general similarities may be less important than they appear. Ornament and the visual texture and associations it creates often is a surer way to build a sympathetic visual relationship between buildings.

In designing a free-standing building for a historic district, the visual texture, composed primarily of small-scale details (ornament), is usually the critical element. It is generally believed that a building using traditional ornament must be more expensive than if it were modern, and that modern design is economical because it reduces costly ornament. It is important to keep in mind that contemporary ornaments can be expensive, so the expense of the ornaments may not be a factor when considering the relationship between the new and the old.<sup>30</sup>

## Conclusion

This chapter looked at the definition of a historic district and the features that a district must possess to be considered historic. Historic districts were added to the

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<sup>30</sup> Brolin, B. C. *Architecture in Context: Fitting New Buildings with Old*. New York, NY: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1980, p. 37.

historic resources alongside sites, buildings, and objects by NHPA. One of the challenges in maintaining the characteristic values of historic districts is the infill developments. The term “infill” was added to the preservation vocabulary during the 1970s when many historic areas were experiencing their first new construction. Changes in economic structure caused the relocation of jobs and population from inner cities. As a result of this shift, central neighborhoods of cities faced continuous deterioration. Infill developments are a means to improve and revitalize urban neighborhoods. Particularly, when the neighborhood consists of historic buildings, infill development can preserve the existing character of the context and retain the historic values.

Design of infill projects begins with an understanding of the physical, social, and economic conditions of the surrounding area. Since infill developments occur in an existing historical context, the design of an infill development should be compatible with the scale and texture of the surrounding context. Design of an infill development is a challenging task and requires the interaction of many different factors and personalities. The design must satisfy the developer, the neighborhood residents, the architect, and the preservation commission. Infill developments are among the inevitable projects in historic districts and their designers need to have a good knowledge of the historic context and continuous communication throughout the design process with the community and preservation commission.

This chapter also discussed the purpose, definition, and process of developing design guidelines. Ellen Beasley defines design guidelines as consistent written

standards used by commissions for evaluating the compatibility of proposed new construction, alterations, and demolitions. The main goal of design guidelines is to maintain the character of existing historic districts. These guidelines translate the character-defining features into words and pictures to make them clear for people. Although design guidelines can improve and preserve the historic values of a district, they cannot guarantee that all architectural changes will be compatible with the historic district. They are not laws but used to measure the appropriateness of visual changes to the historic district.

Every district has its historic resources and its own needs. Therefore, it is essential to look closely at the buildings in the historic district before developing design guidelines. In other words, the first step in the process of developing design guidelines is to identify, analyze, and evaluate the distinctive characteristics of the historic district. Architectural surveys are a means that streamline this process and help to identify and describe the character-defining features. When these features have been recognized, verbal explanations and graphic illustrations should be developed as draft guidelines.

Some important considerations require attention when developing design guidelines. Guidelines must protect recognized values and, at the same time, have sufficient flexibility to allow creative new designs in the historic context. Therefore, they need to focus on the character-defining features rather than prescribing specific solutions. Also, it is important to remember that guidelines are aids in decision-making, not formulas. The feasibility of administering the design guidelines should be

measured before they are considered for adoption and they must correspond to other regulations that apply to historic districts such as zoning, sign, and building codes.

Compatibility is a challenging concept in designing new constructions and additions in historic districts. Smeallie defines compatibility as being consciously in the background, never to overwhelm the original building. In other words, the new design should not weaken the visual values of the original structure and let the original building presents its primary image. In designing a compatible addition, factors such as design, functional fit, circulation patterns need to be considered. Construction of new buildings amid existing historic buildings has its challenges. Contextualism is an approach that would help to understand how new construction will fit into an existing built environment. It is essential to remember that in many cases, there are historical, geographical, and climatological reasons why buildings are designed the way they are, and a good designer must pay attention to these factors.

## CHAPTER 2

### Design Review in Historic Districts

#### Rationale and definition

There are several reasons for communities to save old buildings and their setting. They include: saving a historical or architectural legacy, improving the cultural identity of an area, stabilizing and increasing property values, and attracting residents, tourists, and more business activities. All of these reasons were discussed to establish the first historic district in Charleston in 1931, followed by New Orleans in 1937. By 1977, more than 500 cities and counties in the United States established designated historic districts and became involved with design review.

These reviews are mainly concerned with changes to the exterior of properties, including demolitions, alterations, and new constructions. Changes around the buildings, such as alterations to the fences and walls, parking lots, landscaping, and exterior lighting are also subject to review by many review boards.<sup>31</sup> Design review differs from most zoning and building regulations in its emphasis on appearance. It is often the major tool that local governments use for improving community appearance, enhancing a unique place, promoting vitality, creating comfortable places for pedestrians, protecting property values, and promoting compatible development.

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<sup>31</sup> Bowsher, Alice Meriwether. *Design Review in Historic Districts: A Handbook for Virginia Review Boards*, Washington, DC. National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1978, p. 9.

According to Nassar, based on a study of 1114 U.S. cities conducted in 1984, more than 90% had architectural appearance controls. A later survey of 369 cities and towns showed most of them had some form of design review, and only 3% had limited design review to historic districts.<sup>32</sup> Another national survey completed by Scheer in 1994, showed that 83 percent of cities had some form of design review and among 370 cities that participated in the survey, only 12 respondents indicated that design review was reserved exclusively for historic structures or districts. Therefore, more than 85 percent of the cities and towns have moved into the area of design review of ordinary, non-historic development projects.<sup>33</sup> Thus, design review is not limited to historic districts, and many American cities use design review to improve the visual character and compatibility of ordinary non-historic projects. For example, many communities review the architecture and landscape design of newly proposed, privately-funded projects in commercial districts.<sup>34</sup>

Scheer defines design review as a “process by which private and public development proposals receive independent criticism under the sponsorship of the local government unit, whether through informal or formalized processes.”<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Nasar, Jack L., and Peg Grannis. “Design Review Reviewed.” *Journal of the American Planning Association* 65, no. 4, 1999, p. 425.

<sup>33</sup> Brenda Case Scheer & Wolfgang F.E. Preiser, eds. *Design Review: Challenging Urban Aesthetic Control*. New York, NY: Chapman & Hall, Inc, 1994, p. 1.

<sup>34</sup> Bowsher, Alice Meriwether. *Design Review in Historic Districts: A Handbook for Virginia Review Boards*, Washington, DC: National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1978, p. 11.

<sup>35</sup> Brenda Case Scheer & Wolfgang F.E. Preiser, eds. *Design Review: Challenging Urban Aesthetic Control*. New York, NY: Chapman & Hall, Inc, 1994, p. 2.

## Design review challenges

The main purpose of historic district review is to maintain the existing character based on a wide range of considerations including architectural history, architecture, landscape appearance, and design. Design review is an important tool in the kit of a historic preservation commission. However, the review is sometimes a difficult and controversial process that needs comprehensive and professional criticism before it is introduced to legislators at the local level on a wide scale. Educating the public and supporting private preservation organizations and historical sectors is crucial for achieving a community's overall goal. In addition, design review boards and historical commissions need to gain the cooperation of other governmental bodies, such as the planning and building departments, zoning board, public works commissions, highway and street department, and others whose decisions affect the appearance of a historic district through property maintenance, and land-use management and tax policies. Developing design guidelines can help to educate these groups about the district's historic character and provide them with specific guidance for protecting it.<sup>36</sup>

Scheer believes that a whole set of problems in the design review process relates to the fact that it may be a new regulatory system. When most people talk about flaws in the design review process, they do not consider power, beauty, justice, or freedom. Instead, they tend to relate the problems to specific difficulties that are

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<sup>36</sup> Cox, Rachel S. *Design Review in Historic Districts*. Washington, DC. National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1994, p. 9-10.

encountered with any form of regulation: it takes too much time, projects are reviewed by supposedly unqualified people, it is expensive, it is too political, the presentation requirements are too strict, and there are too many agencies involved. These can be issues, but they are not overwhelming arguments against design review. It does not mean that these issues are insignificant but rather that practical and obvious solutions exist for each of them.<sup>37</sup>

In practice, the criteria by which a design review board or historical commission assesses proposals for alterations and new constructions may be as simple as the two paragraphs in Charleston's Historic District Ordinance, or they may consist of little more than a local adaptation of The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation, which is a statement of 10 principles established by the National Park Service chiefly for federally funded rehabilitation projects and private projects receiving federal historic rehabilitation tax credits. To obtain a truly effective, efficient, and relatively conflict-free design review, it is helpful to create a more site-specific articulation of community goals and a more detailed guideline for achieving them.

The historic preservation ordinance

The local preservation ordinance is the legal mandate for the designation of historic districts, the establishment of preservation commissions, and the adoption of

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<sup>37</sup> Brenda Case Scheer & Wolfgang F.E. Preiser, eds. *Design Review: Challenging Urban Aesthetic Control*. New York, NY: Chapman & Hall, Inc, 1994, p. 3.

procedures for administering the districts.<sup>38</sup> According to Bowsher, an effective design review begins with a clear understanding of the ordinance that authorized it. The commission obtains its power to regulate design from a local preservation ordinance. It is the ordinance that assigns the rationale and purposes of regulation. The ordinance also specifies the membership, duties, and powers of the regulatory board. Ordinances should be reviewed regularly to check if updating is needed.<sup>39</sup> Usually, a historic preservation ordinance is incorporated into the municipal zoning code, but it is also possible that it could stand alone. Preservation ordinances can be tailored to address the needs of every municipality to establish and maintain historic districts. The historic district ordinance and the political process that shaped it affect the authority of the design review board to take any particular action. Most ordinances provide protection against changes that affect the exterior of a structure and give the property owners the freedom to change interiors as they wish. However, a few ordinances consider restrictions over changes to historic interiors, particularly those with public functions such as theaters or restaurants. Historic district ordinances also control the design of new construction to ensure that they are compatible with the neighboring historic buildings.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> National Trust for Historic Preservation. "Reviewing New Construction Projects in Historic Areas. Information Series 62". Washington, DC: National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1992, p. 3.

<sup>39</sup> Bowsher, Alice Meriwether. *Design Review in Historic Districts: A Handbook for Virginia Review Boards*, Washington, DC. National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1978, p. 13.

<sup>40</sup> Cox, Rachel S. *Design Review in Historic Districts*. Washington, DC. National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1994, p. 9.

Typically, an ordinance should include the following provisions that are relevant to new construction: (a) approval of new construction, both additions, and free-standing buildings; (b) approval of new construction projects that do not depend on the replication of specific architectural styles; (c) approval of alterations or demolition of all buildings in a district, regardless of age; (d) any demolition, giving the commission the authority to deny or to delay it; (e) a section that defines minimum maintenance and demolition by neglect; (f) a requirement that demolition requests include plans for a site; and (g) a section that requires archeological investigation at least on the historically significant sites, if not all the new construction sites.<sup>41</sup>

#### Design review administrative process

In areas with design review, private and public proposals for development must be approved by the design review board to proceed. Clear communication, consistent and well-explained decision-making are characteristics of a good administration. It involves the interaction of four key groups: the review board, staff, applicants, and the public. No matter how carefully the design guidelines are developed, they will eventually provoke resentment if they are poorly administered.<sup>42</sup> Typically, after discussing the proposed scheme with staff, a design proposal is submitted to the local review board and the board may approve it, disapprove it, or ask

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<sup>41</sup> National Trust for Historic Preservation. "Reviewing New Construction Projects in Historic Areas. Information Series 62". Washington, DC: National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1992, p. 2.

<sup>42</sup> Cox, Rachel S. *Design Review in Historic Districts*. Washington, DC. National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1994, p. 9.

for modifications.<sup>43</sup> Members of the review board are trained in architecture, preservation, planning, community development, real estate, law, and related fields. This expertise is usually required by law except in communities where qualified professionals are few. Living within the affected area and/or owning property may be required by some local laws. In addition to having a general knowledge of the area, commissioners can learn about the guidelines and how to use them correctly by attending training programs provided by a state preservation office or the National Alliance of Preservation Commissions. Generally, members serve for terms of three to five years. To maintain a balance between new and experienced members, they should be replaced on a rotating schedule.<sup>44</sup>

The key to working effectively with applicants is having a clear and defined review process and following through on commitments. Both the preservation commission and applicants for new construction projects will benefit from a detailed set of procedures for administering the review process. It is essential to have a clear understanding of a step-by-step outline for the timing of the review process, submission requirements for applications, and a system of maintaining the commission's records. It is helpful if the staff works with the applicants who are property owners, architects, or builders before the board reviews the applications so that any potential problems can be spotted and resolved early in the process.

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<sup>43</sup> Nasar, Jack L., and Peg Grannis. "Design Review Reviewed." *Journal of the American Planning Association* 65, no. 4, 1999, p. 425.

<sup>44</sup> Cox, Rachel S. *Design Review in Historic Districts*. Washington, DC. National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1994, p. 9.

The preservation commission members need to remember that the review process involves people and personalities as well as buildings. The commission represents the public. Its primary responsibility is to make decisions that support and maintain the goals and standards of the law as applied in the historic district. In addition to the applicant, others who may become involved in the design review process can include other design professionals, preservation organization representatives, property owners, neighborhood organization representatives, builders, contractors, lawyers, and elected officials.<sup>45</sup>

Maintaining good relationships between these groups must be a top priority for a successful design review board. This can be achieved through educational programs, including the use of radio, television, and newspaper ads, announcements, and features, and through publication programs that provide local property owners with a clear and concise explanation of design review guidelines.<sup>46</sup> Other possible publications that can help raise the awareness of the public are property owners manuals with maintenance and approved treatments for common problems, a short history of the neighborhood, and a summary of inventory findings. Some commissions offer workshops and training sessions for property owners and board members alike. Newsletter and annual reports are useful for informing the public of board activities. They can also serve as useful records of board activities. Another

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<sup>45</sup> National Trust for Historic Preservation. "Reviewing New Construction Projects in Historic Areas. Information Series 62". Washington, DC: National Trust for Historic Preservation. 1992, p. 5-7.

<sup>46</sup> Cox, Rachel S. *Design Review in Historic Districts*. Washington, DC. National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1994, p. 10.

way to educate residents about the design guidelines is through websites. Sometimes volunteers might make door-to-door visits to district residents, and real estate agents can help to inform the new buyers and renters of their responsibilities.<sup>47</sup>

The decisions that commissions make will be based entirely on what the applicants present verbally and graphically. Therefore, the submission procedure must require enough information to make fair decisions. The requirements should be tailored to the availability of design resources in a community as well as the scope of specific projects. The recommended minimum submission requirements for new construction projects include: (a) the application form and a street map with compass orientation, (b) photographs of the property and (c) the façade elevations, (d) the primary street façade elevations superimposed to scale on a photograph of the streetscape, (e) material samples, often including a sample wall on location, (f) color samples and specifications.

Ideally, submission requirements for new constructions in historic districts should include: (a) a complete set of plans and elevations, (b) scaled drawings of the streets elevations to show the proposed structure in context and all facing streets, and (c) a scaled model in accurate colors showing the proposed building in context.

Where the resources are available in a community, the staff for the commission should provide a three-dimensional computer-generated set of images.

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<sup>47</sup> Cox, Rachel S. *Design Review in Historic Districts*. Washington, DC. National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1994, p. 10.

It is useful if the staff sets up a pre-application workshop or meeting with the applicants who are proposing new construction projects. In these workshops, applicants may display working drawing on a conceptual level and benefit from board members' informal insights. The pre-application workshop will help reduce conflicts that may occur at a formal review meeting when an applicant presents final drawings that the commission has never seen and does not meet the guidelines.

The twenty-first century public hearing often includes broadcasting and internet distribution in video and audio formats. The possibility of remote connections allows more members of the public to become involved. Hence the clarity of presentation slightly is being amplified. It is often helpful to have a thorough understanding of the character-defining details of the historic district explained by a staff member serving the commission and the public before introducing any project for new construction or alterations of a contributing resource. Occasionally this involves the explanation of the non-contributing resources in the district as well.

To have a comprehensive and well-ordered design review meeting, commissions should ask three broad questions that will guide them in making decisions in any review process:

Does everyone understand the application? It is essential to make sure that all aspects of the application are clear to everyone. Written and visual materials should be prepared properly and provide enough information for evaluating the impact of the project on the district. The definition of architectural, technical, and planning terms such as "compatible," "contextual" and "appropriate" should be clear at the outset.

Sometimes the completed new construction project looks like nothing that was expected. Usually, the reason is that in the project files and documents, design details were unclear or unspecified. In such cases, the commission should not hesitate to require more information and request additional materials before approval.

Does the application meet the design guidelines? To judge whether an application meets the design guidelines for the district, commission members must assess if the project supports and maintain the stated goals and respects the character-defining features of the district. As the next step, the commission should evaluate the project in terms of larger design features such as scale, massing, and height, followed by a look at the details including the landscape. When commissions focus on the details first, members might miss sight of the larger issues.

Developing a checklist of the design elements that need to be considered in the review process and, as specified in the guidelines will organize and streamline the review of new construction applications. The checklist should begin with the broader design features such as scale, massing, and height and then cover the details such as materials, openings, and ornamentation. By using this method, the evaluation of the project is more likely to base on the design standards than on personal opinions.

The last question remains what is the decision, and does everyone understand it? Before concluding the application review, it is important to make sure that everyone understands the decision as it relates to the design guidelines. Generally, an application may get approved as presented, approved with modifications, or denied. If modifications are required, the commission should identify and describe them so that

the applicant understands which design elements to rework for the next review. In the case of denial, the commission should explain the appeals process to the applicant.

When the application gets the final approval, the commission should outline the next steps in the meeting to the applicant, such as obtaining a building permit. If applicants want to make any change in the approved design during the construction, they must present it to the commission.

It is important to have a well-organized system for keeping and recording the applications. These will facilitate the administration of a commission and increase its ability to enforce decisions. Minutes should be taken at all meetings, which, ideally, should also be taped or video recorded. They should be clear, particularly descriptions of decisions that should be recorded clearly and comprehensively. Approvals, denials, and alteration, as well as the date, should also be recorded on drawings and other visual materials.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> National Trust for Historic Preservation. "Reviewing New Construction Projects in Historic Areas. Information Series 62". Washington, DC: National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1992, p. 7.

## Conclusion

This chapter looked at the purpose, process, and challenges in design review and the importance of the historic preservation ordinance. Design review is defined as a process by which private and public development proposals receive independent criticism under the sponsorship of the local government unit, whether through informal or formalized processes. Maintaining the existing character of historic districts is the main goal of the design review process. The design review board obtains its power from a local preservation ordinance therefore, understanding the historic preservation ordinance is an essential part of the design review process.

Design reviews involve constant communications between four key groups: the review board, staff, applicants, and the public. To have a successful design review administration, it is essential to have clear communications as well as a consistent and well-explained decision-making process. Preparing a detailed outline for the timing of the review process, submission requirements for applicants, and a system of maintaining the commission's records helps make the process clear for all the involved parties.

The design review process can be sometimes difficult and controversial but some measures can reduce the conflicts and streamline this process. These include learning about the guidelines and how to use them, setting up a pre-application workshop or meeting with the applicants, and maintaining good relationships between applicants and the design review board.

## CHAPTER 3

### A Brief History of the City of Ithaca and the Development of Historic Districts

This chapter provides a brief look at the development of the City of Ithaca to demonstrate how each of the sites and areas that became historically and architecturally significant was built and changed before being designated. The nineteenth-century maps and birds-eye views are used to demonstrate the growth and development of the residential districts and help to document the character-defining features that distinguish the designated properties and districts.

#### Early History

Ithaca's development was largely influenced by the people who had a role in providing the region with the grid of the Military Tract. The city's regular street pattern was originally laid out by Simeon DeWitt, Surveyor-General of the State of New York, in 1806. As Surveyor-General, DeWitt and his commissioner colleagues provided the names for the early cities, villages, towns, and counties of Central New York. Ithaca was laid out in the grid, first called Ulysses. It is shown on the DeWitt's State map of 1802, connected by a road to the south leading into Tioga County. DeWitt owned a considerable amount of land in the Finger Lakes, and his obituary

called him a founder of Ithaca, for having provided the name of the place. After 1828 he retired to his East Hill estate and was buried there.<sup>49</sup>

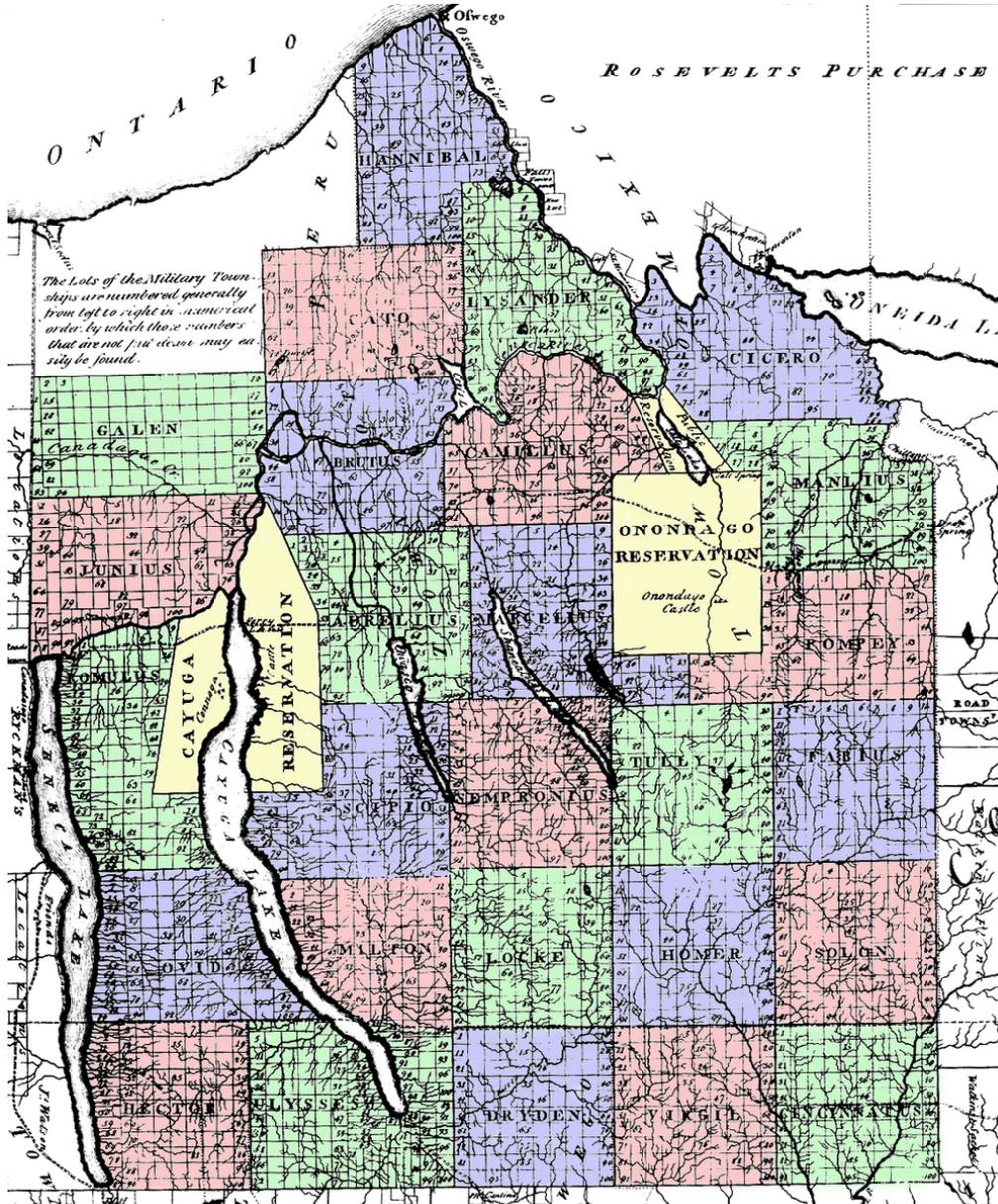


Figure 1- Central New York Military Tract, c 1792-1793.

Source: "Simeon De Witt," Military Wiki, December 3, 1834, [https://military.wikia.org/wiki/Simeon\\_De\\_Witt](https://military.wikia.org/wiki/Simeon_De_Witt).

<sup>49</sup> French, J. H. *Gazetteer of the State of New York: Embracing a Comprehensive View of the Geography, Geology, and General History of the State, and a Complete History and Description of Every County, City, Town, Village and Locality: With Full Table of Statistics*. 6th ed. Syracuse, N.Y.: R. Pearsall Smith. 1860, p. 657.



**Figure 2- State of New York, 1802, by Simeon De Witt, engraved by Gideon Fairman.**  
 Source: "Map of the State of New York.," The Library of Congress, accessed March 16, 2021,  
<https://www.loc.gov/resource/g3800.ct001270>

One of the most notable elements of the early plan of Ithaca is the square that, while owned by the Presbyterian church, was first called the Public Square later, in 1868 renamed Dewitt Park. Also, anchored by the Baptist church and the County Jail, the space has held several activities over the decades.

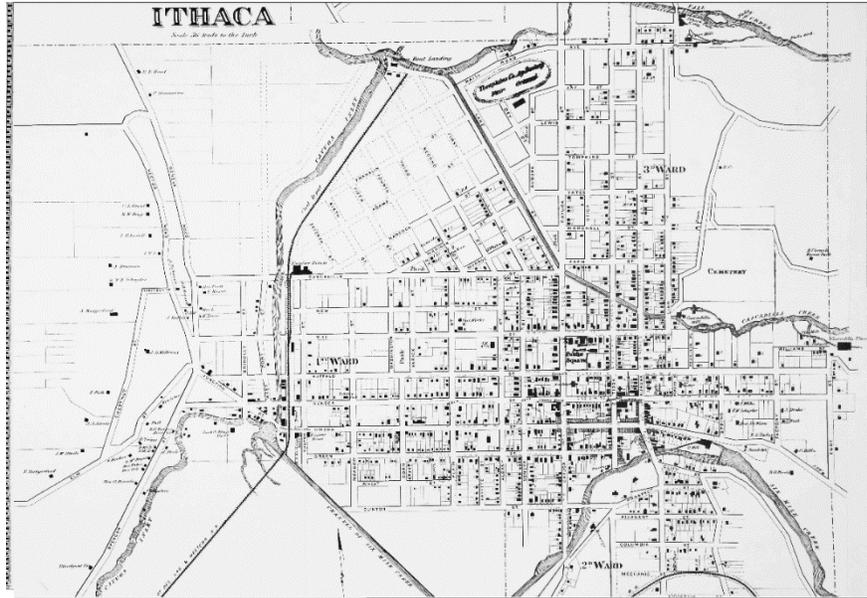
In 1821, Ithaca was incorporated as a village with a population of about 1000. During the first 15 years after incorporation, the core components of the street plan were filled in with more houses, churches, factories, stores, and the village boundaries were extended. In 1835, the boundary was extended up lower East Hill to approximately Stewart Avenue, and the area west of Auburn Street was laid out at a diagonal to the village's original plat.<sup>50</sup> In the late 1840s and early 1850s, major public improvements were constructed including the extension and improvement of the streets.

On October 7, 1868, Cornell University located on East Hill, formally opened and admitted its first class of 412 students. University-related development grew on East Hill. In 1888, Ithaca was incorporated as a city. Changes over the next two

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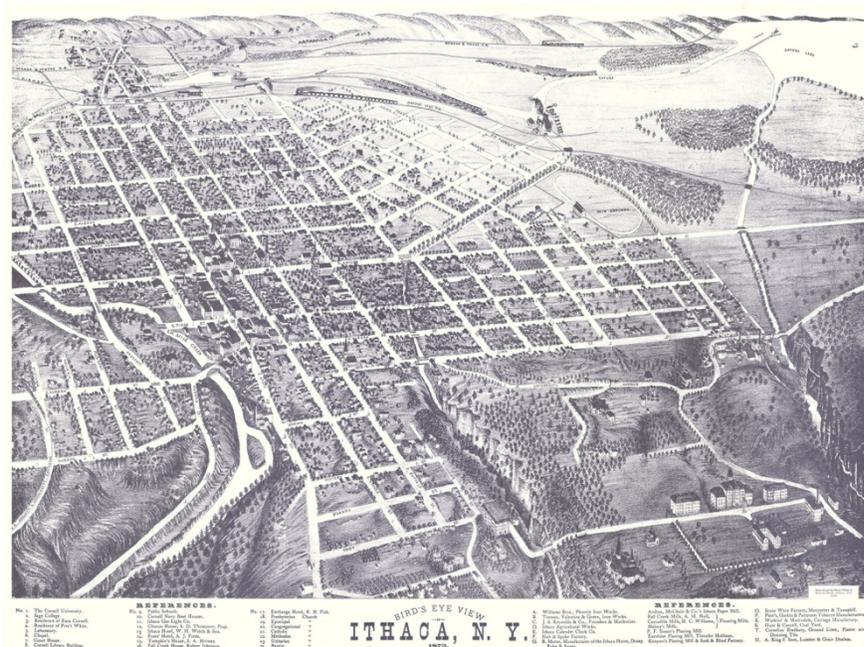
<sup>50</sup> Kammen, Carol. *Ithaca: A Brief History*. Charleston, SC: History Press, 2008, p. 25.

decades transformed the small city into a college town. The growth led to a sustained building boom in Ithaca through the turn of the century.



**Figure 3- City of Ithaca in 1866.**

Source: "A Walk Down Varick Street," Ithacating in Cornell Heights, March 4, 2014, <https://ithacating.com/>



**Figure 4- Bird's eye view of Ithaca, NY 1873. No scale given.**

Source: Cornell University map collection, Class of 1872," Olin & Uris Libraries, accessed March 20, 2021, [https://olinuris.library.cornell.edu/150/map/class\\_1872](https://olinuris.library.cornell.edu/150/map/class_1872)

## Twentieth Century Ithaca

The development of the Agriculture campus at Cornell University signaled the addition of new faculty to the College of Agriculture. These proved important to the suburban developments in Cornell Heights and north of the central campus. A trolley car track up and down East Hill, added additional convenience for faculty, students and staff.

Although the expansion of Cornell provided opportunities for South Hill real estate developments, more important was the growth of Morse Chain, a major producer of chain drives. The company moved from Trumansburg to South Hill in 1906, taking advantage of the railroad tracks. Many of the workers at Morse Chain lived on Hudson, Columbia, and Pleasant streets.

In the 1890s, intensive development began on the hills, first on the East Hill adjacent to Cornell University, then on South Hill, and later on West Hill. Unlike the national trend, Ithaca's economy remained rather stable during the 1930s. Major construction projects including the new Tompkins County courthouse and jail, and what became the Southside Center. During World War II, few new construction projects were completed within the city. Post World War II, Ithaca experienced the return of students and expansion outside the city limits.

Most of the increased demand was addressed through the conversion of large, single-family homes into multi-unit apartment buildings. Ithaca's population declined over the 1950s and 1960s because new housing developed in suburban areas outside of

the city. The downtown business district in Ithaca also changed because of urban renewal movements in the 1960s.<sup>51</sup> Construction of the first large-scale shopping center outside of the city in the early 1960s drew retail businesses from the downtown area. Also, during this period, entire blocks of downtown commercial buildings were leveled, the original City Hall was demolished to provide additional parking. Other activities that changed the downtown include the relocation of Ithaca College and the Ithaca City School District to areas outside of the city. In 1968, Ithaca College's final academic department moved from downtown to South Hill and left several vacant buildings. Also, in 1971, the Ithaca High School building downtown was sold and converted into Dewitt Mall. The loss of Ithaca's first City Hall in 1966 and other architecturally significant buildings led to a strong local preservation movement.<sup>52</sup>



**Figure 5- Old City Hall, c 1890s.**

Source: "50 For 50: Old City Hall," Historic Ithaca, <http://www.historicithaca.org/50-for-50-old-city-hall/>.

<sup>51</sup> A Vision for Our Future, City of Ithaca Comprehensive Plan, City of Ithaca Planning Division. Adopted September 2, 2015, p. 7-16.

<sup>52</sup> Johnson, Julee. "An Examination of Three Historic Preservation Organizations in Ithaca, New York." Ithaca, NY. Cornell University, MA thesis. 1985, p. 123.

In 1974, the Ithaca Commons pedestrian mall was constructed to balance the effects of new large shopping malls located outside of the city. As the demand for housing has increased, new residential development within the city has been largely compact and dense. The increased focus on new development within the city has also initiated discussions on land use, zoning, and other approaches to regulating the built environment. The land area of the city is currently almost fully developed, however, underutilized land remains in the form of surface-level parking lots.<sup>53</sup>

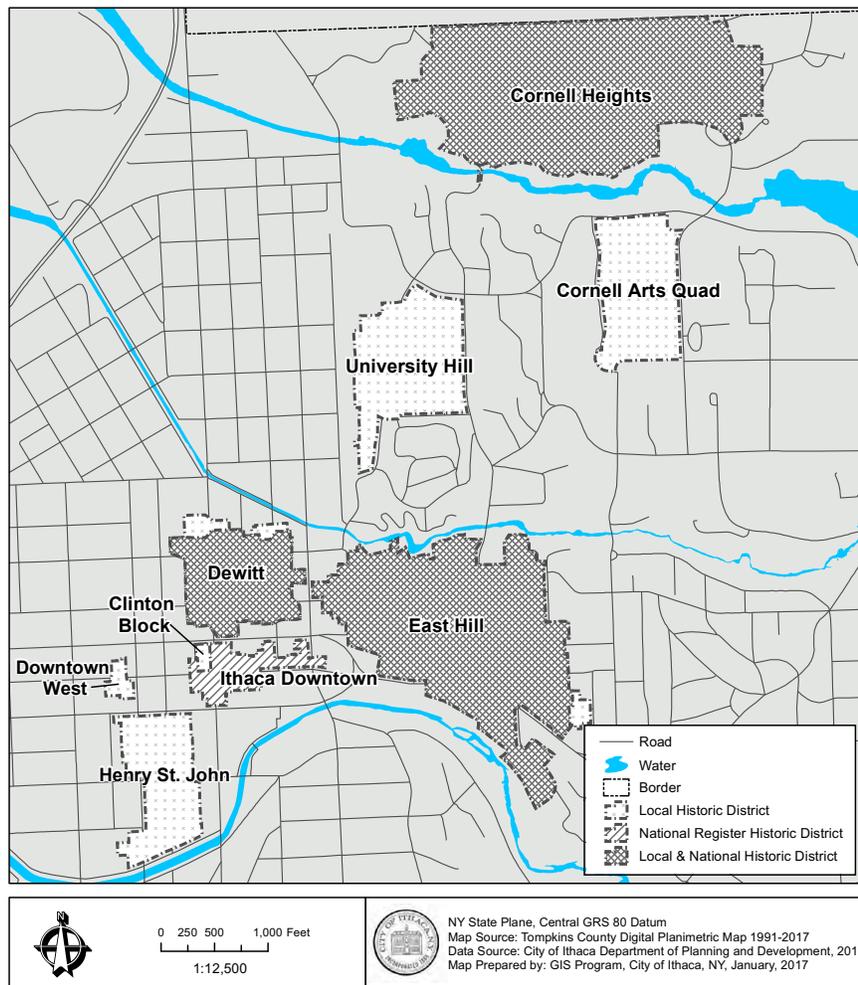
### Historic Districts in Ithaca

The city of Ithaca passed the Landmark Preservation Ordinance in 1971. The ordinance established the Ithaca Landmark Preservation Commission (ILPC) and led to the designation of the DeWitt Park, the first historic district in the city. There are seven historic districts in the city of Ithaca. Each historic district has an established period of significance and the ILPC is responsible to preserve the historic character appropriate to that era when reviewing proposed changes to properties within each district.<sup>54</sup> In the section that follows each of the districts reviewed to determine the character-defining features that are helpful and consistent with the intent of the designation.

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<sup>53</sup> A Vision for Our Future, City of Ithaca Comprehensive Plan, City of Ithaca Planning Division. Adopted September 2, 2015, p. 7-15.

<sup>54</sup> "Historic Preservation," Historic Preservation | Ithaca, NY - Official Website, <https://www.cityofithaca.org/184/Historic-Preservation>.



**Figure 6- Historic districts in Ithaca.**

Source: "Ithaca Landmarks Preservation Commission," Ithaca Landmarks Preservation Commission | Ithaca, NY - Official Website, <https://www.cityofithaca.org/346/Ithaca-Landmarks-Preservation-Commission>.

## DeWitt Park Historic District

DeWitt Park, designated in 1971, was the first local historic district and listed on the State and National Registers of Historic Places in the same year. Its boundaries expanded in 1976 and again in 1979. DeWitt Park is roughly located in the center of the district. The boundaries include Ithaca's religious, educational, and governmental buildings as well as some of the city's oldest surviving residential structures.

Demolition of some historic structures due to fire or urban renewal activities as well as new developments in the district that introduced what were then considered some non-contribution buildings in the 1970s, encouraged advocates to designate these properties. Despite the losses, the district shows more than a century of development. It contains excellent examples of architectural styles from the Federal style to Renaissance Revival style. These buildings reflect shifts in popular taste, changes in culture and society, and building technologies.<sup>55</sup>

The district derives significance through its association with many of Ithaca's leaders and citizens, especially its founder, Simon DeWitt. He was the single most influential person in the community's planning and development. Other significant people include Douglas Boardman, the first dean of the Cornell Law School who was associated with the Boardman House (1866), and prominent bankers who worked at the Bank of Newburgh (during the 1820s).

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<sup>55</sup> "Ithaca Landmarks Preservation Commission," Ithaca Landmarks Preservation Commission | Ithaca, NY - Official Website, <https://www.cityofithaca.org/346/Ithaca-Landmarks-Preservation-Commission>.



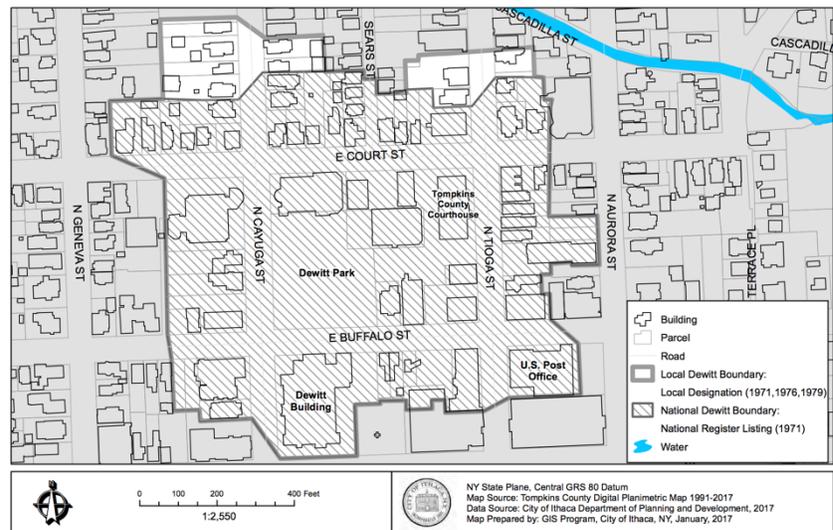
**Figure 7- The Boardman House.**  
Source: Taken by author in June 2020



**Figure 8- The Boardman House.**  
Source: "The Boardman House," PocketSights  
Tour Builder, accessed March 17, 2021,  
<https://pocketsights.com/tours/place/The-Boardman-House-12145> .

The DeWitt Park is an architecturally rich and historically significant downtown area, and its period of significance is between 1820 to 1930. The district forms a distinctly urban setting for the city's commercial, social, political, and religious activities. One of the oldest still-standing buildings, Beebe-Halsey House, is located in this district. It was built in 1820 by Jeremiah Beebe, a prominent banker and

one of three partners who built the Clinton House at 120 N. Cayuga Street. The Park is also the location of several memorials and monuments. These include the veterans' memorial and the white settler's monument (recently removed to the County Historical Society). In 2018, the old public library at 312 N. Cayuga St. in Dewitt Park's historic district was demolished.<sup>56</sup>



**Figure 9- Dewitt Park historic district**

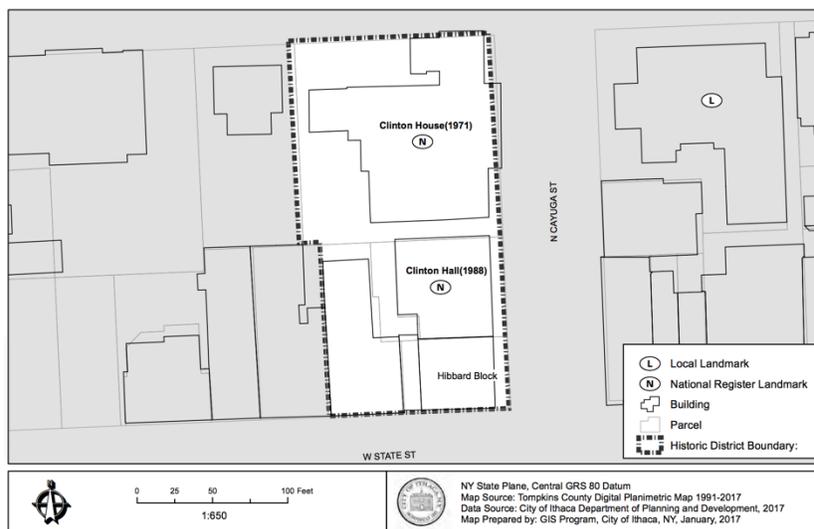


**Figure 10- Beebe-Halsey House.**  
Source: "Beebe-Halsey House," PocketSights Tour Builder, accessed March 17, 2021, <https://pocketsights.com/tours/place/Beebe-Halsey-House-3521>.

<sup>56</sup> "50 For 50: The DeWitt Park Historic District," Historic Ithaca, <http://www.historicithaca.org/50-for-50-the-dewitt-park-historic-district/>

## Clinton Block Historic District

The smallest district, designated in 1980, is the Clinton Block Historic District composed of three buildings, which are the last remaining unified group of commercial buildings in the Greek Revival style popular in the city between 1830 and 1860. The monumental design of the Clinton House (1828-1830) reflects Ithaca's early economic prosperity and the confidence the village would soon become the commercial and industrial hub of central New York State. It was the most imposing hotel from New York City to Buffalo, according to a 1904 guide to the city.<sup>57</sup>



**Figure 11- Clinton Block historic district**

The Clinton House has always been one of the city's most important landmarks buildings. In 1862 many internal and a few external modifications were

<sup>57</sup> Silver, Burdett, & Company. *A Guide Book To Cornell University and Ithaca*. J.J. Little & Co. Astor Place, New York. 1904. Retrieved 1 February 2020, p. 42.

made, but the reputation of the house has never changed.<sup>58</sup> The building went through a renovation following a major fire that destroyed portions of the upper stories and the roof in 1901. The Colonial Revival elements that were added included the gable-end Palladian window and roof balustrade. The significance of the Clinton House is associated with many events and individuals that shaped Ithaca's history.

The other two buildings, Clinton Hall (c. 1843) and the Hibbard Block (c. 1847) were constructed to provide retail outlets for patrons of the Clinton House Hotel. They have contained a variety of offices, studios, and galleries as well as apartments. This district has a period of significance between 1830 and 1901. The latter date to recognize the elements that were added after the Clinton House fire. All three buildings have cast iron elements and the sidewalks are special for accommodating access in a historic manner.<sup>59</sup>



**Figure 12- Clinton House, today.**  
Source: taken by author in June 2020



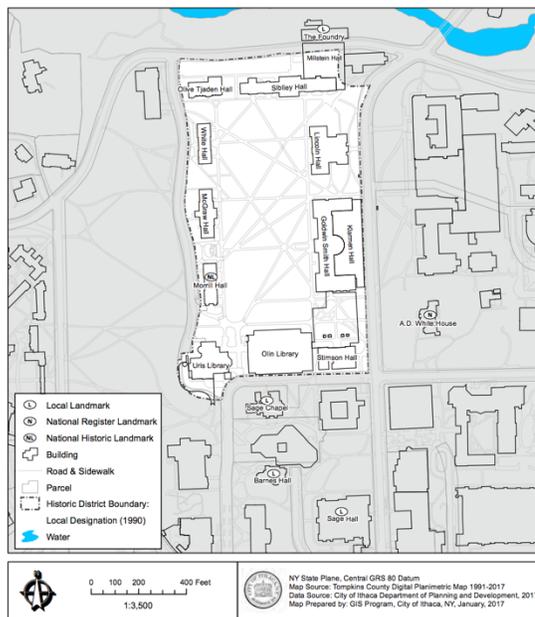
**Figure 13- The original Clinton House around 1866, on the left, the Clinton Block.**  
Source: Ithaca and its Past by Snodderly R. Daniel

<sup>58</sup> Kurtz, D. Morris. *Ithaca and Its Resources*. Ithaca, New York. Ithaca: Journal Association Book and Job Print, 1883, p. 83.

<sup>59</sup> "Ithaca Landmarks Preservation Commission," Ithaca Landmarks Preservation Commission | Ithaca, NY - Official Website, <https://www.cityofithaca.org/346/Ithaca-Landmarks-Preservation-Commission>.

## Cornell Arts Quad Historic District

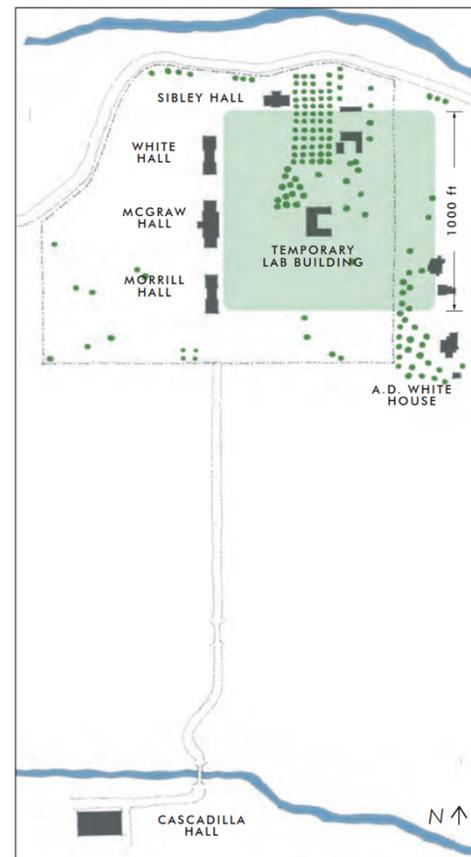
Arts Quad Historic District, designated in 1990, is located on the Cornell campus. Cornell University was established in 1865 under the Morrill Land Grant Act of 1862. Ezra Cornell donated over 170 acres of his East Hill farms as well as a generous endowment. He chose the top of East Hill and fixed the site for the new university. The initial plan consisted of a great square quadrangle of 15 acres which was surrounded by the first stone buildings of the university. However, the original plan was never implemented, and the present Arts Quad covers the approximate western half of the initial concept. As a result, the three buildings of Stone Row: Morrill (1968), White (1869), and McGraw (1869) face west toward a never-completed terrace and thus back onto the



**Figure 15- Art Quad historic district**

**Figure 14- Location of first buildings on campus in 1871.**

Source: Cornell University, Campus Landscape Notebook, Campus planning office, 2005



The Arts Quad historic district consists of eleven buildings. The earliest buildings on campus, Morrill (1868), White (1869), and McGraw Halls (1869), all are built in the Second Empire style and form the west side of the quadrangle plan. Franklin (1882, now Tjaden), West Sibley (1871), and Lincoln Halls (1888) established two sides of the present-day quad and the beginnings of a third. Franklin and Lincoln Hall were designed in the Romanesque Revival Style by Charles Babcock, one of the very first Cornell's Architecture professors. West Sibley was designed in the Second Empire style. In the 1880s, East Sibley was added, and the Sibley dome was erected to connect the two buildings in 1902.



**Figure 16- “The Stone Raw” of (from left to right) Morrill Hall, McGraw Hall, 1871.**

Source: Cornell University: Designing the Campus, accessed March 17, 2021,  
<https://cornellcampushistory-blog.tumblr.com/image/44730412493>

Construction of Uris Library in the Romanesque Revival Style (1891), Stimson Hall (1903), Boardman Hall, and Goldwin Smith Hall (1904, now incorporated an earlier building) on the east and south sides, completed the quad.

The Neoclassical style has been used for these two early 20<sup>th</sup> century buildings. The Arts Quad Historic District also includes statues of Ezra Cornell and

the first president of the university, Andrew Dickson White, Sheldon Memorial Exedra and Sundial (1910), and the class of 1873 water fountain, placed in front of McGraw Hall.<sup>60</sup>



**Figure 18- The water fountain on Art Quad.**  
Source: Cornell University, Campus Landscape Notebook, Campus planning office, 2005



**Figure 17- Ezra Cornell statue.**  
Source: taken by author in June 2020

The landscaping of the Arts Quad is mostly informal and was historically dominated by towering elm trees. After Dutch elm disease swept the campus, a new row of Zelcova trees was planted in the 1970s along the sidewalk on the eastern edge of the quad. The period of significance for this historic district is considered between 1868 to 1919.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>60</sup> Cornell University, “Campus Landscape Notebook”, Campus planning office, Ithaca, NY. 2005, p. 11.

<sup>61</sup> “Ithaca Landmarks Preservation Commission,” Ithaca Landmarks Preservation Commission | Ithaca, NY - Official Website, <https://www.cityofithaca.org/346/Ithaca-Landmarks-Preservation-Commission>.



**Figure 19- Art quad, looking from the southwest corner.**

Source: Cornell University Office of Web Communications, “Arts Quad,” Cornell, accessed March 17, 2021, [https://events.cornell.edu/arts\\_quad](https://events.cornell.edu/arts_quad)

### Cornell Heights Historic District

The Cornell Heights Historic District is an early 20<sup>th</sup>-century example of a planned residential suburban community placed in an outstanding natural setting. Its historical pattern of development represents the ideal residence park developed in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The development of Cornell Heights is associated with a single and local land company that employed the landscape architect William Webster. In 1989, the city supported an effort by Cornell Heights residents to have their neighborhood designated a historic district.<sup>62</sup> It is located along the northern rim of Fall Creek gorge overlooking the City of Ithaca. The curvilinear street plan, lavish

<sup>62</sup> Kramnick, Isaac., Altschuler, Glenn C., *Cornell: A History, 1940–2015*. Ithaca, NY.: Cornell University Press, 2014, p. 272.

landscape features which include spruce trees, maples, oaks, and flowering dogwoods, and dramatic geographical setting are among the district's characteristic features. To make the Cornell Heights Historic District accessible and the development of the subdivision viable, bridges had to be built across the gorge, and trolley lines extended in 1899. Most of the original street plan, lavish foliage, and some early landscape features still exist within the district. Cornell Heights was promoted by its owners as a high-class residential area and remains predominantly residential in character today. The homes were constructed between the years 1898 and 1937 and erected to individualized designs and several are the work of Ithaca's notable early 20<sup>th</sup> century architects.

The Cornell Heights Historic District consists of buildings with a wide range of architectural styles including Queen Anne, Romanesque Revival, Colonial Revival, Spanish Eclectic, Tudor Revival, Prairie, and Craftsman. The development of Cornell Heights is closely linked to the Cornell University's major expansion around the turn of the century. Cornell Heights served as a home for many of the university's professors and students. James B. Sumner (1887-1955) was among the notable Cornell



**Figure 20- Cornell Heights historic district**

faculty members who lived in Cornell Heights and won the Nobel Prize.<sup>63</sup> In 1893, John Henry Comstock (1849-1931) and Simon Henry Gage (1851-1944) founded the Comstock Publishing Company at 126 Roberts Place in Cornell Heights to make textbooks on microscopy, histology, and entomology available at a reasonable price to students. Comstock deeded the company to the university at his death in 1931 and it was eventually absorbed into Cornell University Press, which continues to operate from the Roberts Place address today.<sup>64</sup>



**Figure 21- Former Comstock Publishing Company at 126 Roberts Place.**

Source: taken by author in June 2020



**Figure 22- An example of historic buildings in Cornell Heights (310 Fall Creek).**

Source: taken by author in June 2020

<sup>63</sup> “Ithaca Landmarks Preservation Commission,” Ithaca Landmarks Preservation Commission | Ithaca, NY - Official Website, <https://www.cityofithaca.org/346/Ithaca-Landmarks-Preservation-Commission>.

<sup>64</sup> Gage, Simon Henry. *Retirement of Professor John Henry Comstock*. Ithaca, NY: 1914, p. 227–229.

## East Hill Historic District

The East Hill Historic District was designated under the local district legislation in 1988 and as a National Register district in 1986. It is located on a prominent hill, east of the central business district, southwest of the Cornell University Campus and is surrounded by the Cascadilla and Six-Mile Creeks on the north and south sides. This district is a 29-block neighborhood and in addition to a large number of historic structures. The East Hill Historic District contains the last surviving Ithaca brick street paving, installed in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>65</sup> The East Hill Historic District contains the finest architecturally and historically significant buildings reflecting

Ithaca's growth from 1830 to 1920. The East Hill Historic District presents a record of Ithaca's expansion up East Hill, as well as a great display of popular American architectural styles from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

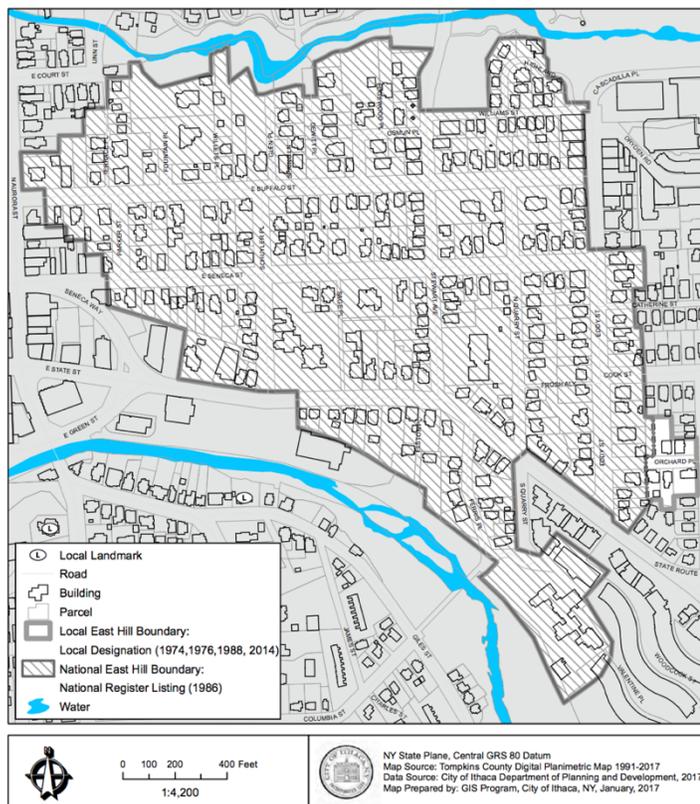


Figure 23- East Hill historic district

<sup>65</sup> "Ithaca Landmarks Preservation Commission," Ithaca Landmarks Preservation Commission | Ithaca, NY - Official Website, <https://www.cityofithaca.org/346/Ithaca-Landmarks-Preservation-Commission>.



**Figure 24- An example of historic buildings in East Hill historic district (499 E Buffalo).**  
Source: taken by author in June 2020

The broad collection of architecturally and historically significant residential, commercial and institutional buildings defines the district's great significance. A wide range of popular architectural styles can be seen in the East Hill Historic District including Greek Revival, Gothic Revival, Italianate, Italian Villa, Second Empire, Shingle, Queen Anne, Romanesque Revival, Renaissance Revival, Colonial Revival, and Arts and Crafts. The earliest buildings on East Hill, built in the 1830s and 1840s, are located in the 400 blocks of East Seneca and East Buffalo Streets. During this period, the character of the neighborhood was primarily rural and suburban as the University gave more development accrued. The East Hill Historic District represents

the major building booms.<sup>66</sup> In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, nearly all of Ithaca's principal streets were paved with brick. Today, only two of them survived and both are located in the East Hill Historic District: the Medina sandstone paving at the intersection of South Quarry Street and Ferris Place and the red clay brick along Stewart Avenue between East State Street and Cascadilla Creek. The district owes a portion of its significance to the works of one of Cornell University's first architecture students, William H. Miller. Several of his apprentices and partners such as Clinton Vivian, Ornan Waltz, and Arthur N. Gibb also contributed to the various architectural designs in the district.<sup>67</sup>



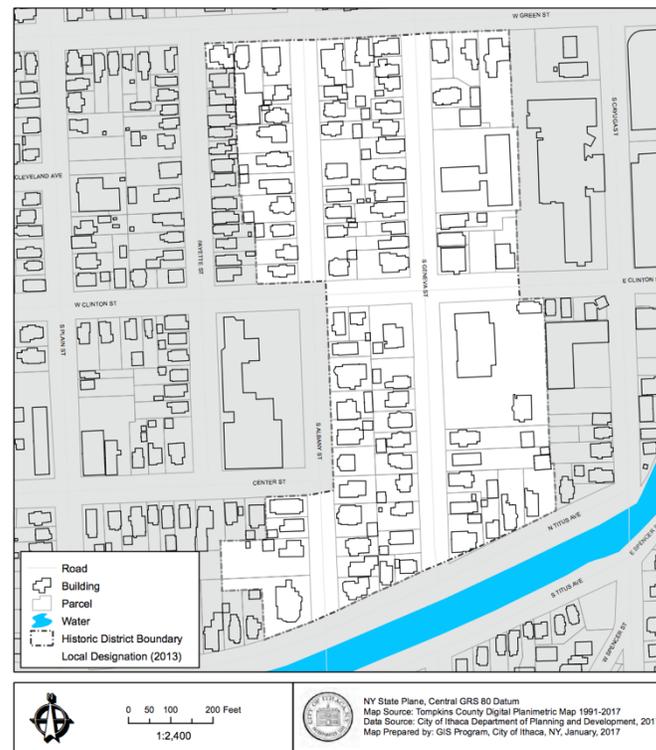
**Figure 25- Brick street paving, intersection of Seneca and Stewart St.**  
Source: taken by author in June 2020

<sup>66</sup> "East Hill Historic District," East Hill Historic District, Ithaca City, Tompkins County, Ithaca NY, [https://www.livingplaces.com/NY/Tompkins\\_County/Ithaca\\_City/East\\_Hill\\_Historic\\_District.html](https://www.livingplaces.com/NY/Tompkins_County/Ithaca_City/East_Hill_Historic_District.html).

<sup>67</sup> "Ithaca Landmarks Preservation Commission," Ithaca Landmarks Preservation Commission | Ithaca, NY - Official Website, <https://www.cityofithaca.org/346/Ithaca-Landmarks-Preservation-Commission>.

## Henry St. John Historic District

This historic district, designated locally in 2013, was named after Henry Ancel St. John, the City's first Superintendent of Public Works, third Mayor, and longtime school board member of a local elementary school with the same name on West Clinton Street, which was built in 1925. The Henry St. John Historic District is mostly a residential neighborhood and developed in two phases. The area between West Green and West Clinton Streets was developed in the first quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.



**Figure 26- Henry St John historic district**

Some of the downtown's oldest homes are located in this area with a variety of architectural styles from Federal and Greek Revival to later styles of Gothic Revival,

Italianate, Second Empire, Stick, and Queen Anne. The other development phase occurred in the area between West Clinton Street and North Titus Avenue. Initially, construction of buildings was not possible in this area because it was too swampy. Charles M. Titus drained and improved the site which attracted the middle class to make their home in the styles popular after 1870, including the Gothic Revival, Italianate, Second Empire, and Stick. Several homes can be seen in the Colonial Revival and Craftsman styles which were added in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century as infill constructions.

The significance of the district derives from its association with Ithaca's early prominent businessmen and politicians and with developer Charles M. Titus. It was one of the most fashionable neighborhoods near the downtown area several Village Presidents and Trustees chose it as their home. The district is also significant because it contains intact 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>-century houses with a variety of styles including Federal, Greek Revival, Gothic Revival, Italianate, Second Empire, Stick, Queen Anne, Craftsman, and Colonial Revival. Many of the properties in this district have original carriage houses or include early automobile garages that are architecturally significant and are among the character-



**Figure 27- An example of historic garages in the Henry St John historic district.**  
Source: taken by author in June 2020

defining features of the district. They also convey the status of their owners.<sup>68</sup>

### University Hill Historic District

The University Hill Historic District, designated locally in 2003, is significant because of its association with two important families in Ithaca, the Cornells and the Tremans. These two families came to Ithaca in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century with no significant financial resources, but by the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, they collected considerable wealth and property. Both families later became benefactors and directors of Ithaca's major financial, civic and educational institutions. The University Hill Historic District was home to these two families. Llenroc, the Ezra Cornell family's estate is located in this historic district. Construction of this property was completed in 1875 about one year after Ezra Cornell's death and since 1911 Delta Phi fraternity occupied the property.<sup>69</sup>



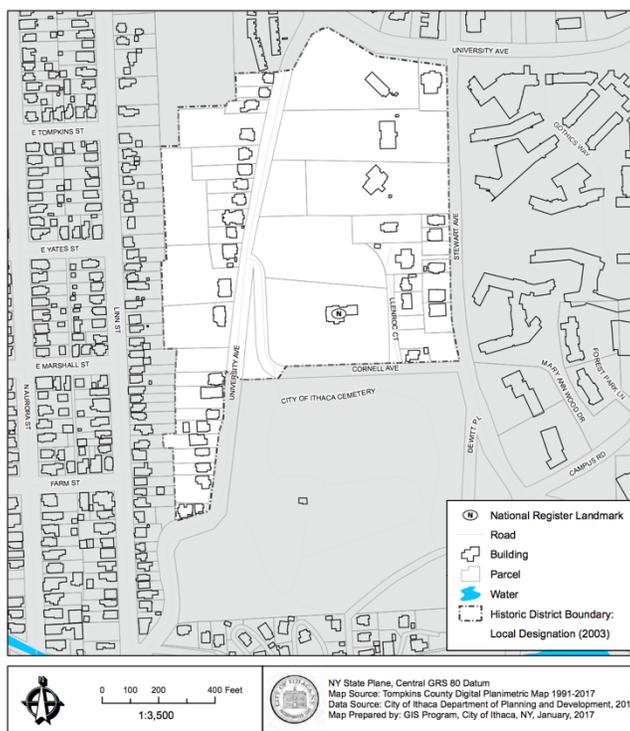
**Figure 28- Llenroc, c. 1913.**

Source: Cornell University Library Digital Collections: Images from the Rare Book and Manuscript Collections

<sup>68</sup> "Ithaca Landmarks Preservation Commission," Ithaca Landmarks Preservation Commission | Ithaca, NY - Official Website, <https://www.cityofithaca.org/346/Ithaca-Landmarks-Preservation-Commission>.

<sup>69</sup> Bishop, Morris. *A History of Cornell*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014, p. 403.

When the Treman family purchased many of the properties by the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, they became the dominant landowners on University Hill. Between 1900 and 1902, Treman siblings Robert, Charles, and Elizabeth built their homes on the lots between Stewart and University Avenues. In the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, the Charles Treman home was demolished following a fire, but the two other homes remain and are now owned by Cornell University. A wide range of American revival and vernacular architectural styles including Gothic Revival, Italianate, Second Empire, Italian Renaissance, Stick Style, Folk Victorian, Queen Anne, Colonial Revival, Tudor Revival, and Craftsman can be seen in this district.<sup>70</sup>



**Figure 29- University Hill historic district**

<sup>70</sup> “Ithaca Landmarks Preservation Commission,” Ithaca Landmarks Preservation Commission | Ithaca, NY - Official Website, <https://www.cityofithaca.org/346/Ithaca-Landmarks-Preservation-Commission>.

## Conclusion

This chapter looked at each of the historic districts in Ithaca and explained their significance and distinctive characteristics. A brief history of the development of the city is provided that shows how each of the sites that became historically and architecturally significant was built and changed before being designated. Then the significance of each of the seven historic districts is discussed.

The primary references for this part are the summary significance statements that are provided by the city of Ithaca for each historic district. Looking at the designation date of these historic districts reveals that existing of significant resources could not be the only factor for designating a district and political and social factors also play an important role in this process. Dewitt Park as the first historic district was designated in 1971 and contains some of the city's oldest surviving residential structures. On the other hand, Henry St. John was designated lastly in 2013 but it also presents a collection of intact 19th and early 20th century houses.

In the process of identifying, analyzing, and evaluating the distinctive characteristics of the historic district, it is essential to consider all the elements of the built environment including secondary buildings as well as the landscape features. These features contribute to the character and the overall integrity of the historic district. Carriage houses and garages that are mentioned in the summary significance statement of Henry St. John Historic District are particularly important in this regard.

Landscape features could also be more elaborate especially in the Arts Quad and Cornell Heights summary significance statements where they are among the character-defining features of the district.

## CHAPTER 4

### A Review of City of Ithaca Landmarks Preservation Ordinance

The landmark ordinance was approved in December 1970 and according to Professor Richard Booth, it is fairly inclusive and compared to cities of similar size or larger, and it is fairly sophisticated with all the standard sections.<sup>71</sup> Its sections include (1) Purpose, (2) Designation of Individual Landmarks or Historic Districts, (3) Certificate of Appropriateness for Alteration, Demolition, or New Construction Affecting Individual Landmarks or Historic Districts, (4) Temporary Improvements, (5) Criteria for Approval of a Certificate of Appropriateness, (6) Certificate of Appropriateness Application Procedure, (7) Expiration of Approval; Extension of Approval, (8) Early Design Guidance, (9) Criteria for a Finding of Economic Hardship, (10) Finding of Economic Hardship Application Procedure, (11) City-owned Improvements, (12) Exceptions for Reasons of Public Safety, (13) Maintenance and Repair Required, (14) Enforcement and Violations, (15) Appeals.

Eight reasons for the enactment of the ordinance are stated in the purpose section. Many of these purposes are related to economics: to protect the value of historic properties and their owners' investment in them, to protect and enhance the city's attractiveness to tourists and visitors, and to support the economy of the city. A secondary purpose is cultural, educational, and aesthetical: to safeguard the city's historic, aesthetic and cultural heritage, to foster civic pride in the legacy of beauty

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<sup>71</sup> Johnson, Julee. *An Examination of Three Historic Preservation Organizations in Ithaca, New York.*, Ithaca, NY. Cornell University, MA thesis. 1985, p. 277.

and achievements of the past, and to ensure the harmonious, orderly, and efficient growth and development.

Section 228-3 of the ordinance contains the procedure of designating the individual landmarks and historic districts including the criteria for designating, noticing the owner or owners of the property or properties proposed for designation, holding a public hearing before the designation of any individual landmark or historic district and filing a copy of recommended designation with the Planning and Development Board and with Common Council within seven days after it has recommended.

In reference to subsection H of Section 228-3, within 60 days of the Commission recommending designation, the Planning and Development Board shall file a report with Common council and the Council shall approve, disapprove, or refer the proposed designation back to the Commission for modification within 90 days.

Section 228-4 of the Landmark Preservation Ordinance explicitly states that the Ithaca Landmarks Preservation Commission is responsible for the approval or disapproval of proposals for exterior changes to a designated historic property. Any change to the exterior appearance of the properties including alterations, restorations, reconstructions, demolitions, moving of an individual landmark as well as new constructions within in historic districts shall first obtaining a Certificate of Appropriateness or Finding of Economic Hardship from the Ithaca Landmarks Preservation Commission.

Section 228-5 simply states that in case of temporary improvements, a Certificate of Appropriateness is not required. Temporary improvements have been defined in this section as those that will be in place for no more than 180 consecutive days and result in no permanent physical alteration of the structure or site.

Section 228-6 of the ordinance specifies the criteria for approval of a Certificate of Appropriateness. The Commission should issue a Certificate of Appropriateness for the proposed work if it will not have a substantial adverse effect on the aesthetic, historical, or architectural significance and value of either the individual landmark or if the proposed work is within a historic district, of the neighboring properties in such district. For determining the effects of proposed projects, the Commission will be guided by the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and by three principles. These principles emphasize the compatibility of alterations and new constructions within a historic district with both the character of the individual landmark and the character of the district as a whole.

In applying the principle of compatibility, the Commission shall consider five factors including the general design and character; the scale and visual compatibility; texture, materials, and color of the proposed alteration or new construction; visual compatibility with surrounding properties such as proportions of the property's façade, arrangement of windows, doors, roof shape, the rhythm of spacing properties along the street; and the importance of historic, physical, and visual features to the significance of the property.

As stated in subsection D of Section 228-6, the Landmarks Preservation Commission shall not consider changes to interior spaces or exterior paint colors.

Section 228-7 of the Landmark Ordinance specifies the procedure of applying for the Certificate of Appropriateness. Subsection A states that prior to the commencement of any work, the owner shall file an application for a building permit with the Building Division and an application for Certificate of Appropriateness with the Commission. The application should contain specific information such as location and photographs of the property, elevation drawings of proposed changes, samples of building materials to be used. Subsection E states that the commission shall hold a public hearing before deciding on any application for a Certificate of Appropriateness. The property owner and any interested party may represent testimony or documentary evidence regarding the proposal at the hearing which will be recorded. Subsection F states that the commission shall decide on an application within 45 days from the completion of the public hearing, except in particular events when the commission requires further time for additional study or when an environmental review of an application is required.

Section 228-8 of the Landmark Ordinance states that a Certificate of Appropriateness is valid for twenty-four months after the date of the approval. If the project will not commence in twenty-four months the Certificate will be expired unless the applicant requests an extension.

Section 228-9 of the Landmark Ordinance contains a discussion of Early Design Guidance that shall apply to large projects which could potentially have a

significant impact on an individual landmark or historic district. Applications subject to Early Design Guidance are required to submit materials for review by the Commission as soon as the design has reached a stage of development that would allow the Commission to understand the basic proposal.

Section 228-10 of the Landmark Ordinance contains the criteria for a finding of economic hardship. Subsection B states that demolition of an individual landmark or a structure located within a historic district shall be allowed only in case of economic hardship. To prove the existence of economic hardship the applicant shall demonstrate several facts including the denial of the Certificate of Appropriateness will prevent the owner from earning a reasonable return on investment, the property cannot be adapted for any other use, diligent efforts to find a purchaser interested in acquiring the property and preserving it have failed, and the claimed hardship has not been created by the previous actions.

Section 228-11 of the Landmark Ordinance discusses the procedure of economic hardship application. Subsection B states that the Commission may hold a public hearing on the hardship application at which the proponents and opponents of the application have the opportunity to present their views. All decisions of the Commission shall be in writing and shall state the reasons for approving or denying the requested finding of economic hardship.

Section 228-12 of the ordinance specifies that all changes to City-owned properties affecting an individual landmark or within a historic district shall be subject to the provisions of this ordinance with the exception of sections 228-10 and 228-11.

Section 228-13 of the ordinance contains the exceptions for the reasons of public safety. In case of an emergency condition that poses an imminent threat to public health, safety, or welfare, the property owner shall immediately undertake temporary work to correct the defect while a permanent solution is sought. Such temporary work shall remain in place no longer than 180 days. Subsection C states that if at the end of the 180 day period, no reasonable solution is found that will achieve the public safety goal, permanent work shall be allowed to be undertaken by the owner that will protect the public health, safety, or welfare without the issuance of either a Certificate of Appropriateness or a Finding of Economic Hardship.

Section 228-14 of the Landmark Ordinance states that nothing in the Ordinance shall be interpreted to prevent the ordinary maintenance and repair of any exterior architectural feature of an individual landmark or property within a historic district that does not involve a change in design, building materials, color, or outward appearance; however, the Commission's Secretary shall determine whether proposed work constitutes ordinary maintenance and repair or requires a Certificate of Appropriateness.

Section 228-15 of the Landmark Ordinance discusses enforcement and violations and states that all work performed pursuant to a Certificate of Appropriateness issued under this chapter shall conform to the requirements included therein. Subsection D states that any violation of any provision of this chapter shall be considered an offense and shall be punishable as provided in Chapter 1 of the Municipal Code, General Provisions, Article I, Penalties.

Section 228-16 of the Landmark Ordinance states that any person aggrieved by any decision by the Commission may apply to the Supreme Court in the State of New York for review under Article 78 of the Civil Practice Law and Rules within 30 days of publication of the decision.<sup>72</sup>

#### The Ithaca Landmark Preservation Commission

The Ithaca Landmark Preservation Commission (ILPC) is composed of up to seven voting members and a Common Council liaison. These members serve for three years and are appointed by the Mayor with the consent of the Common Council as volunteers. The ILPC has regular monthly meetings at which decisions are made in a legal public process. The major duties of ILPC include recommending the designation of local historic resources and reviewing proposed plans for alteration, demolition, new construction, and site work affecting locally designated historic properties. The designation of properties is based on the merit of their importance and integrity. The ILPC may recommend that Common Council designate properties either on its initiative or at the request of an individual and provide a public notice to property owners of any potential designation. The exterior and site alterations to a property that has received local historic designation must be approved by the ILPC.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Chapter 228, Landmarks Preservation Ordinance, Ithaca, NY - Official Website, <https://www.cityofithaca.org>

<sup>73</sup> "Ithaca Landmarks Preservation Commission," Ithaca Landmarks Preservation Commission | Ithaca, NY - Official Website, <https://www.cityofithaca.org/346/Ithaca-Landmarks-Preservation-Commission>

## CHAPTER 5

### Design Guidelines for Historic Districts in the City of Ithaca

#### A Review of Existing Design Guidelines

The City of Ithaca historic district and landmark design guidelines document, adopted in 2013, is the basis for the ILPC's decisions regarding changes to the properties in designated historic districts. It guides the property owners, architects, developers, and tradespeople in planning appropriate repairs, renovations, and alterations to Ithaca's historic built environment. These guidelines were developed on The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and the principles enumerated in the City of Ithaca's Landmarks Ordinance.

The document illustrates the locally designated individual landmarks as well as each historic district and its significance followed by design guidelines which are categorized based on the building materials and features such as roof, windows, and doors, and porches. Each section for guidelines starts with providing general information about the associated feature and the shape and materials that are most common in Ithaca. At the end of each section, a review chart indicates what kind of work may be approved at the staff level and what must be reviewed by the full ILPC at a public hearing. The document also addresses the issues related to the new construction and additions as well as demolition in historic districts.

These guidelines are intended to help property owners understand the basic principles of historic preservation and provide direction about appropriate design and

materials choices for work on locally designated historic properties. This guidance could be more efficient if the guidelines address the specific needs of each historic district and consider the unique character-defining features in developing design guidelines. In addition, historic districts have different geographical features such as slope and landscaping and it is essential to consider them in developing effective design guidelines.

#### Suggested Design Guidelines for Historic Districts in the City of Ithaca

These Design Guidelines are developed to help property owners and design professionals (architects, builders, etc.) plan projects that can be approved by the ILPC. The Secretary of the Interior's Standard for the Treatment of Historic Properties provides general guidance and best practices developed over the past 50 years and these guidelines are meant to complement them and provide specific guidelines based on unique characters in historic districts of Ithaca. Guidelines are organized into five sections: Streetscape, Exterior Changes, New Construction, Relocation, and Demolition.

The collection of buildings along a block creates a streetscape. The size and shape of those buildings, along with their distance from the street and orientation affect the overall look and feel of the neighborhood. To maintain a consistent, compatible streetscape, buildings must be appropriately sized and sited on their lots. Most changes to the exterior of buildings require a Certificate of Appropriateness. However, the ILPC does not review temporary improvements, such as the erection of

tents or canopies for special events, the installation of window air conditioners that do not require a physical alteration to the building and that will be removed seasonally, or the installation of seasonal fencing to protect vegetable gardens.

## DeWitt Park Historic District Design Guidelines

### Streetscape

#### Size

1. For one-story houses, the rear addition shall be no more than one story taller than the original house.
2. Additions to two-story houses should not exceed the height of the existing house.
3. Infill construction must be similar in size to existing homes in the neighborhood.
4. Additions to the side of the house may not be taller than the original house and should be located toward the rear of the house.

#### Massing

1. Maintain traditional building form.
2. Maintain traditional proportions of solid walls to voids (windows, doors, porches).

#### Height

1. Maintain building eave, porch eave, and peak heights within the typical range for the neighborhood.

2. The roof pitch of an addition should match the roof pitch of the existing building.

### Orientation

1. Maintain the front-facing primary façade and primary entry doors.

### Setback

1. New constructions should be consistent with the front setback of existing houses.
2. Where front setbacks vary across a block, new construction's setback should be within the existing range.

### Exterior changes

### Porches

1. Maintain historic porch elements.
2. Keep wooden members painted and repair damage as needed, to avoid replacement.
3. If a porch element must be replaced, it should be duplicated.
4. Replacing porch elements of one architectural style with elements from another architectural style is not allowed.
5. Replacing porch elements with mismatched modern parts is not allowed.
6. Adding new porch elements that are not part of the original design is not allowed.

### Walls

1. Wood siding should be regularly maintained and painted to prevent deterioration.
2. When repairing or replacing wood siding, the size and profile should be matched.
3. Brick masonry shall not be painted.
4. If repointing is required, mortar of the same composition and color should be used.
5. Replacing or covering undamaged wood siding with vinyl, aluminum, or cementitious siding is not allowed.

### Windows

1. Original or historic material shall not be removed, existing openings, sash, glass, lintels, sills, shutter hardware, frames, and surrounds, shall be retained or duplicated in the same material and style if beyond repair.
2. The size and location of the original window shall be maintained.
3. No new opening in facades will be allowed.
4. Decorative shutters shall not be added to houses that have not had shutters in the past.

### Doors

1. All exterior changes to doors and doorways will be subject to review and approval.
2. Original doors and hardware will be retained whenever possible. If replacement is necessary, the new doors will match the original as closely as possible.

3. New doors shall be appropriate to the existing surround in style, material, and proportions.

#### Storm doors and windows

1. Wherever possible, modern aluminum storm doors will be confined to the backs of buildings.
2. Storm windows should be as unobtrusive as possible.

#### Roofs

1. Maintain the size, shape, and pitch of the historic roof.
2. When replacing a roof, similar materials shall be used.
3. Whenever possible, existing dormers, chimneys, parapets end walls, seem from a public way should be retained.
4. New dormers should approximate the shape of the originals. They should be unobtrusive.

#### Stoops and stairs

1. Whenever possible, original materials will be retained and repaired.
2. Wherever possible, original railings will be retained.
3. Ramps required to provide access for the handicapped may be located in the rear and will be as unobtrusive as possible.

## Clinton Block Historic District Design Guidelines

### Streetscape

#### Size

1. Additions to the three buildings on Clinton block shall not exceed the height of the existing buildings and they shall be located toward the rear of the buildings.

#### Massing

1. Maintain traditional building form.
2. Maintain traditional proportions of solid walls to voids (windows, doors, porches).

#### Height

1. Maintain buildings eave, porch eave, and peak heights.
2. The roof pitch of the addition should match the roof pitch of the existing building.

#### Orientation

1. Maintain the front-facing primary façade and primary entry doors.

#### Setback

1. Front setbacks on the existing buildings are not allowed.

## Exterior changes

### Porches

1. Maintain historic porch elements.
2. Keep wooden members painted and repair damage as needed, to avoid replacement.
3. Adding new porch elements that are not part of the original design is not allowed.

### Walls

1. If repointing is required, mortar of the same composition and color should be used.
2. Brick masonry shall not be painted.

### Windows

1. Original or historic material shall not be removed, existing openings, sash, glass, lintels, sills, shutter hardware, frames, and surrounds, shall be retained or duplicated in the same material and style if beyond repair.
2. The size and location of the original window shall be maintained.
3. No new opening in facades will be allowed.
4. Decorative shutters shall not be added to houses that have not had shutters in the past.

### Doors

1. Original doors and hardware will be retained whenever possible. If replacement is necessary, the new doors will match the original as closely as possible.
2. New doors shall be appropriate to the existing surround in style, material, and proportions.

### Storm doors and windows

1. Wherever possible, modern aluminum storm doors will be confined to the backs of buildings.
2. Storm windows should be as unobtrusive as possible.

### Roofs

1. Maintain the size, shape, and pitch of the historic roof.
2. When replacing a roof, similar materials shall be used.
3. Whenever possible, chimneys, parapet end walls, seen from a public way should be retained.

### Stoops and stairs

1. Whenever possible, original materials will be retained and repaired.
2. Wherever possible, original railings will be retained.
3. Ramps required to provide access for the handicapped may be located in the rear and will be as unobtrusive as possible.

### Awnings and canopies

1. If an awning or canopy is necessary, choose a style that has a minimal visual impact on the front of the building and does not detract from or conflict with other architectural features.
2. Maintain awnings and canopies and paint regularly to prevent rust and deterioration.

## Cornell Arts Quad Historic District Design Guidelines

### Streetscape

#### Size

1. Additions to the primary facades of the buildings facing the Arts Quad are not allowed.
2. Additions to the side of the house may not be taller than the original buildings.

#### Massing

1. Maintain traditional building form.
2. Maintain traditional proportions of solid walls to voids (windows, doors, porches).

#### Height

1. Maintain building eave, porch eave, and peak heights of the buildings.

### Orientation

1. Maintain the front-facing primary façade and primary entry doors.

### Exterior changes

### Walls

1. If repointing is required, mortar of the same composition and color should be used.
2. Maintain the original stone walls of the buildings on Arts Quad.
3. Replacing or covering undamaged stone blocks is not allowed.

### Windows

1. Original or historic material shall not be removed, existing openings, sash, glass, lintels, sills, shutter hardware, frames, and surrounds, shall be retained or duplicated in the same material and style if beyond repair.
2. The size and location of the original window shall be maintained.
3. No new opening in facades will be allowed.
4. Decorative shutters shall not be added to buildings that have not had shutters in the past.

### Doors

1. All exterior changes to doors and doorways will be subject to review and approval.
2. Original doors and hardware will be retained whenever possible. If replacement is necessary, the new doors will match the original as closely as possible.

### Storm doors and windows

1. Storm windows should be as unobtrusive as possible.

### Roofs

1. Maintain the size, shape, and pitch of the historic roof.
2. When replacing a roof, similar materials shall be used.
3. Existing dormers, chimneys, and parapet end walls should be retained.

### Stoops and stairs

1. Whenever possible, original materials will be retained and repaired.
2. Wherever possible, original railings will be retained.
3. Ramps required to provide access for the handicapped may be located in the rear and will be as unobtrusive as possible.

### Ornamentation

1. Decorative molding, stonework be retained wherever possible. If such material is missing or so deteriorated as to require replacement, it will be replaced with an element that duplicates the mass and general form of the original.
2. Ornamentation belonging to a different period from the date of the building will not be added.

## Cornell Heights Historic District Design Guidelines

### Streetscape

### Size

1. For one-story houses, the rear addition shall be no more than one story taller than the original house.
2. Additions to two-story houses should not exceed the height of the existing house.
3. Infill construction must be similar in size to existing homes in the neighborhood.
4. Additions to the side of the house may not be taller than the original house and should be located toward the rear of the house.

### Massing

1. Maintain traditional building form.
2. Maintain traditional proportions of solid walls to voids (windows, doors, porches).

### Height

1. Maintain building eave, porch eave, and peak heights within the typical range for the neighborhood.
2. The roof pitch of an addition should match the roof pitch of the existing building.

### Orientation

1. Maintain the front-facing primary façade and primary entry doors.
2. New constructions shall be respectful to the curvilinear street plan of the Cornell Heights Historic District.

### Setback

1. New constructions should be consistent with the front setback of existing houses.
2. Where front setbacks vary across a block, new construction's setback should be within the existing range.

#### Green landscape

1. Much of the character of the district is dependent on the scale and appearance of the green spaces. The general appearance of these green spaces shall be preserved.

#### Exterior changes

#### Porches

1. Maintain historic porch elements.
2. Keep wooden members painted and repair damage as needed, to avoid replacement.
3. If a porch element must be replaced, it should be duplicated.
4. Replacing porch elements of one architectural style with elements from another architectural style is not allowed.
5. Replacing porch elements with mismatched modern parts is not allowed.
6. Adding new porch elements that are not part of the original design is not allowed.

#### Walls

1. Wood siding should be regularly maintained and painted to prevent deterioration.
2. When repairing or replacing wood siding, the size and profile should be matched.

3. Brick masonry shall not be painted.
4. If repointing is required, mortar of the same composition and color should be used.
5. Replacing or covering undamaged wood siding with vinyl, aluminum, or cementitious siding is not allowed.

### Windows

1. Original or historic material shall not be removed, existing openings, sash, glass, lintels, sills, shutter hardware, frames, and surrounds, shall be retained or duplicated in the same material and style if beyond repair.
2. The size and location of the original window shall be maintained.
3. No new opening in facades will be allowed.
4. Decorative shutters shall not be added to houses that have not had shutters in the past.

### Doors

1. All exterior changes to doors and doorways will be subject to review and approval.
2. Original doors and hardware will be retained whenever possible. If replacement is necessary, the new doors will match the original as closely as possible.
3. New doors shall be appropriate to the existing surround in style, material, and proportions.

### Storm doors and windows

1. Wherever possible, modern aluminum storm doors will be confined to the backs of buildings.

2. Storm windows should be as unobtrusive as possible.

### Roofs

1. Maintain the size, shape, and pitch of the historic roof.
2. When replacing a roof, similar materials shall be used.
3. Whenever possible, existing dormers, chimneys, parapets end walls, seem from a public way should be retained.
4. New dormers should approximate the shape of the originals. They should be unobtrusive.

### Stoops and stairs

1. Whenever possible, original materials will be retained and repaired.
2. Wherever possible, original railings will be retained.
3. Ramps required to provide access for the handicapped may be located in the rear and will be as unobtrusive as possible.

### Garages and accessory structures

1. Historic garages and accessory structures shall be preserved and repaired.
2. New garages, carports, and accessory structures may be attached or detached, as long as they are located at the rear half of the lot.
3. Garages shall be constructed in a style and with materials that complement the house.

## East Hill Historic District Design Guidelines

### Streetscape

#### Size

1. For one-story houses, the rear addition shall be no more than one story taller than the original house.
2. Additions to two-story houses should not exceed the height of the existing house.
3. Infill construction must be similar in size to existing homes in the neighborhood.
4. Additions to the side of the house may not be taller than the original house and should be located toward the rear of the house.

#### Massing

1. Maintain traditional building form.
2. Maintain traditional proportions of solid walls to voids (windows, doors, porches).

#### Height

1. Maintain building eave, porch eave, and peak heights within the typical range for the neighborhood.
2. The roof pitch of an addition should match the roof pitch of the existing building.

#### Orientation

1. Maintain the front-facing primary façade and primary entry doors.

### Setback

1. New constructions should be consistent with the front setback of existing houses.
2. Where front setbacks vary across a block, new construction's setback should be within the existing range.

### Street pavement

1. The brick paving of two streets in the district is one of the character-defining features of the East Hill Historic District. These brick paving shall be maintained if possible.

### Exterior changes

### Porches

1. Maintain historic porch elements.
2. Keep wooden members painted and repair damage as needed, to avoid replacement.
3. If a porch element must be replaced, it should be duplicated.
4. Replacing porch elements of one architectural style with elements from another architectural style is not allowed.
5. Replacing porch elements with mismatched modern parts is not allowed.
6. Adding new porch elements that are not part of the original design is not allowed.

### Walls

1. Wood siding should be regularly maintained and painted to prevent deterioration.

2. When repairing or replacing wood siding, the size and profile should be matched.
3. Brick masonry shall not be painted.
4. If repointing is required, mortar of the same composition and color should be used.
5. Replacing or covering undamaged wood siding with vinyl, aluminum, or cementitious siding is not allowed.

#### Windows

1. Original or historic material shall not be removed, existing openings, sash, glass, lintels, sills, shutter hardware, frames, and surrounds, shall be retained or duplicated in the same material and style if beyond repair.
2. The size and location of the original window shall be maintained.
3. No new opening in facades will be allowed.
4. Decorative shutters shall not be added to houses that have not had shutters in the past.

#### Doors

1. All exterior changes to doors and doorways will be subject to review and approval.
2. Original doors and hardware will be retained whenever possible. If replacement is necessary, the new doors will match the original as closely as possible.
3. New doors shall be appropriate to the existing surround in style, material, and proportions.

#### Storm doors and windows

1. Wherever possible, modern aluminum storm doors will be confined to the backs of buildings.
2. Storm windows should be as unobtrusive as possible.

#### Roofs

1. Maintain the size, shape, and pitch of the historic roof.
2. When replacing a roof, similar materials shall be used.
3. Whenever possible, existing dormers, chimneys, parapets end walls, seem from a public way should be retained.
4. New dormers should approximate the shape of the originals. They should be unobtrusive.

#### Stoops and stairs

1. Whenever possible, original materials will be retained and repaired.
2. Wherever possible, original railings will be retained.
3. Ramps required to provide access for the handicapped may be located in the rear and will be as unobtrusive as possible.

#### Awnings and canopies

1. If an awning or canopy is necessary, choose a style that has a minimal visual impact on the front of the building and does not detract from or conflict with other architectural features.

2. Maintain awnings and canopies and paint regularly to prevent rust and deterioration.

## Henry St. John Historic District Design Guidelines

### Streetscape

#### Size

1. For one-story houses, the rear addition shall be no more than one story taller than the original house.
2. Additions to two-story houses should not exceed the height of the existing house.
3. Infill construction must be similar in size to existing homes in the neighborhood.
4. Additions to the side of the house may not be taller than the original house and should be located toward the rear of the house.

#### Massing

1. Maintain traditional building form.
2. Maintain traditional proportions of solid walls to voids (windows, doors, porches).

#### Height

1. Maintain building eave, porch eave, and peak heights within the typical range for the neighborhood.
2. The roof pitch of an addition should match the roof pitch of the existing building.

#### Orientation

1. Maintain the front-facing primary façade and primary entry doors.

### Setback

1. New constructions should be consistent with the front setback of existing houses.
2. Where front setbacks vary across a block, new construction's setback should be within the existing range.

### Exterior changes

### Porches

1. Maintain historic porch elements.
2. Keep wooden members painted and repair damage as needed, to avoid replacement.
3. If a porch element must be replaced, it should be duplicated.
4. Replacing porch elements of one architectural style with elements from another architectural style is not allowed.
5. Replacing porch elements with mismatched modern parts is not allowed.
6. Adding new porch elements that are not part of the original design is not allowed.

### Walls

1. Wood siding should be regularly maintained and painted to prevent deterioration.
2. When repairing or replacing wood siding, the size and profile should be matched.
3. Brick masonry shall not be painted.
4. If repointing is required, mortar of the same composition and color should be used.

5. Replacing or covering undamaged wood siding with vinyl, aluminum, or cementitious siding is not allowed.

#### Windows

1. Original or historic material shall not be removed, existing openings, sash, glass, lintels, sills, shutter hardware, frames, and surrounds, shall be retained or duplicated in the same material and style if beyond repair.
2. The size and location of the original window shall be maintained.
3. No new opening in facades will be allowed.
4. Decorative shutters shall not be added to houses that have not had shutters in the past.

#### Doors

1. All exterior changes to doors and doorways will be subject to review and approval.
2. Original doors and hardware will be retained whenever possible. If replacement is necessary, the new doors will match the original as closely as possible.
3. New doors shall be appropriate to the existing surround in style, material, and proportions.

#### Storm doors and windows

1. Wherever possible, modern aluminum storm doors will be confined to the backs of buildings.
2. Storm windows should be as unobtrusive as possible.

#### Roofs

1. Maintain the size, shape, and pitch of the historic roof.
2. When replacing a roof, similar materials shall be used.
3. Whenever possible, existing dormers, chimneys, parapets end walls, seem from a public way should be retained.
4. New dormers should approximate the shape of the originals. They should be unobtrusive.

#### Stoops and stairs

1. Whenever possible, original materials will be retained and repaired.
2. Wherever possible, original railings will be retained.
3. Ramps required to provide access for the handicapped may be located in the rear and will be as unobtrusive as possible.

#### Garages and accessory structures

1. Original carriage houses and historic garages and accessory structures shall be preserved and repaired.
2. New garages, carports, and accessory structures may be attached or detached, as long as they are located at the rear half of the lot.
3. Garages shall be constructed in a style and with materials that complement the house.

University Hill Historic District Design Guidelines

Streetscape

### Size

5. For one-story houses, the rear addition shall be no more than one story taller than the original house.
6. Additions to two-story houses should not exceed the height of the existing house.
7. Infill construction must be similar in size to existing homes in the neighborhood.
8. Additions to the side of the house may not be taller than the original house and should be located toward the rear of the house.

### Massing

3. Maintain traditional building form.
4. Maintain traditional proportions of solid walls to voids (windows, doors, porches).

### Height

3. Maintain building eave, porch eave, and peak heights within the typical range for the neighborhood.
4. The roof pitch of an addition should match the roof pitch of the existing building.

### Orientation

2. Maintain the front-facing primary façade and primary entry doors.

### Setback

3. New constructions should be consistent with the front setback of existing houses.

4. Where front setbacks vary across a block, new construction's setback should be within the existing range.

#### Exterior changes

##### Porches

7. Maintain historic porch elements.
8. Keep wooden members painted and repair damage as needed, to avoid replacement.
9. If a porch element must be replaced, it should be duplicated.
10. Replacing porch elements of one architectural style with elements from another architectural style is not allowed.
11. Replacing porch elements with mismatched modern parts is not allowed.
12. Adding new porch elements that are not part of the original design is not allowed.

##### Walls

6. Wood siding should be regularly maintained and painted to prevent deterioration.
7. When repairing or replacing wood siding, the size and profile should be matched.
8. Brick masonry shall not be painted.
9. If repointing is required, mortar of the same composition and color should be used.
10. Replacing or covering undamaged wood siding with vinyl, aluminum, or cementitious siding is not allowed.

##### Windows

5. Original or historic material shall not be removed, existing openings, sash, glass, lintels, sills, shutter hardware, frames, and surrounds, shall be retained or duplicated in the same material and style if beyond repair.
6. The size and location of the original window shall be maintained.
7. No new opening in facades will be allowed.
8. Decorative shutters shall not be added to houses that have not had shutters in the past.

#### Doors

4. All exterior changes to doors and doorways will be subject to review and approval.
5. Original doors and hardware will be retained whenever possible. If replacement is necessary, the new doors will match the original as closely as possible.
6. New doors shall be appropriate to the existing surround in style, material and proportions.

#### Storm doors and windows

3. Wherever possible, modern aluminum storm doors will be confined to the backs of buildings.
4. Storm windows should be as unobtrusive as possible.

#### Roofs

5. Maintain the size, shape, and pitch of the historic roof.
6. When replacing a roof, similar materials shall be used.

7. Whenever possible, existing dormers, chimneys, parapets end walls, seem from a public way should be retained.
8. New dormers should approximate the shape of the originals. They should be unobtrusive.

#### Stoops and stairs

4. Whenever possible, original materials will be retained and repaired.
5. Wherever possible, original railings will be retained.
6. Ramps required to provide access for the handicapped may be located in the rear and will be as unobtrusive as possible.

#### New construction

New construction should be appropriately sized to be compatible with the existing neighborhood. It may incorporate traditional materials and features found on historic homes in the neighborhood, but it should be of its own time. New construction does not need to look “historic” and may be made distinct from historic buildings through the use of different materials and construction methods. However, New construction that is over- or under-scaled in comparison to typical width and/or height of contributing houses in the district is not allowed. Infill construction on vacant lots is encouraged and all new construction is subject to review and approval of the ILPC.

### Relocation

Relocation of a building within the historic district or from the district to another location is discouraged, except as an alternative to demolition. Relocation of historic buildings from other areas of the city into the historic district is an acceptable strategy for infill. However, the building being relocated into the district should be similar in scale, style, and material to be compatible with the existing neighborhood and the same criteria to evaluate new construction will be applied to these buildings.

### Demolition

Demolition should be avoided. However, it is permitted when the applicant can establish economic hardship or an unusual and compelling circumstance. When removal cannot be avoided, usable architectural materials, elements, and fixtures shall be salvaged for future use.

## CONCLUSION

Since the inception of the first preservation ordinance establishing a historic district in 1913, little has changed in the process of how local historical commissions and historic district commissions value historic resources. The procedure for making decisions about the significance of the properties, designating them, and how they are treated subsequently has been reasonably consistent. This thesis examined one such historic landmarks commission, in Ithaca, New York, demonstrating how it follows its procedures and examined how the design review process occurs ending with several suggestions for design review.

In the process of developing design guidelines, it is essential to have a clear understanding of the evolutions of historic districts over time. The changes in architectural attitudes from modernism to postmodernism affected the appearance of historic districts. Design guidelines suggest the appropriate design for alterations and additions to the historic properties as well as infill developments in historic districts. These types of developments became prevalent in the 1970s when the relocation of jobs and population from inner cities left abandoned buildings that were eventually demolished. Design of an infill development is a challenging task and requires the designers to know the context and maintain communications with the community and preservation commission throughout the design process.

The main goal of design guidelines is to maintain the character of existing historic districts. They are describing the character-defining features of the historic

district in words and pictures. Every district has unique resources and design guidelines are developed to address the specific needs. Effective design guidelines will protect the historic values of districts and have sufficient flexibility for creative new designs in the historic context. Also, they need to be coordinated with other regulations that apply to historic districts such as zoning, sign, and building codes. Compatibility is a frequently used term when talking about design guidelines and it is important to have a clear understanding of this concept. A compatible new design will let the historic context maintains its primary image and will not destroy its visual values.

Design review is a process that the historic preservation commissions use to evaluate development proposals. It is a complex process and requires constant communication between the review board, staff, applicants, and the public. Design review might be difficult and controversial, and it is essential to maintain a good relationship between all the involved parties. Having a well-defined and clear process, a good knowledge of the guidelines, offering pre-application workshops with applicants, and providing a detailed outline for timing are measures that help reduce the potential conflicts in this process.

To develop design suggestions for seven historic districts of Ithaca, this thesis explained the significance and distinctive characteristics of each. A brief history of the development of the city demonstrates how each of these historic districts developed and gained significance. Also, the City of Ithaca Landmarks Preservation

Ordinance is reviewed and at the end, based on the unique resources of each historic district, several suggestions for design review are provided.

There were a couple of limitations to this thesis. First, there was not enough time. Developing design suggestions requires comprehensive studies of the historic context, identifying, analyzing, and evaluating the distinctive characteristics of the historic district. Architectural surveys for historic resources need to be reviewed to find out the specific character-defining features associated with each district. Due to the limited time given for completing this work, it was not possible to accomplish a thorough study for finding the distinctive characteristics of each historic district.

Another limitation was the situation caused by the global pandemic in 2020 which put barriers on access to some resources and having in-person interviews.

The conversation about new and old architecture and the best way to honor both is ongoing because tastes, perceptions, and knowledge is changing constantly. Therefore, it is important to revise the design guidelines periodically and adjust them according to new changes. Some of the other future works that would complement this thesis include evaluating some examples of completed infill projects in the City of Ithaca, measuring/ evaluating the knowledge base of professionals in the community who should be aware of the procedure, and measuring/evaluating the knowledge of the general public in Ithaca through surveying people, interviewing property owners and residents. The city tells the story of our culture, values, and heritage and the new and old in the city together can reflect the story of the city.

## APPENDIX

### Appendix A: Evolution of Design in Historic Districts

#### From Modernism to Postmodernism

In studying historic districts, it is important to investigate the evolution of aesthetic concepts. Historic districts have been very much affected by modernist ideas over time. In this text, the term modernist refers to the school of twentieth-century design, which grew out of the international style.

Before the advent of modern art in the twentieth century, the concept of space had a different meaning. It was explained by the emptiness between solids, or that a space existed in a building when it was surrounded by the walls. But modernism redefined space as a means to create objects and environments. Modernism advocates believed that buildings should be designed from the inside out, and the front façade was not considered as important as it once was. This attitude formed one of the characteristics of many modern buildings in the United States, which is the similarity between the front and side elevations, and the entrance is not immediately apparent<sup>74</sup>.

In a modernist mindset, if a design does not stand out from its neighbors, it has failed and is not original or creative. Some believers in modern architecture seem to feel that history is irrelevant, suggesting that contemporary architecture must be cut off from the past. It was not a long time ago that modernists argued everyone in the

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<sup>74</sup> Tomlan, Michael A. and David Listokin. *Historic Preservation: Caring for Our Expanding Legacy*. Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2015, p. 228.

world would soon want to live in the same kind of houses and the same kind of modern cities that reflect the spirit of our time. It is not a surprise that, based on this belief, architects for several generations have felt little need to accommodate their work to the older architecture around it. They have been taught to design their building as if they are in a desert with nothing around. The devastating results of this attitude affected every major city and, to a greater degree, the historic districts.

Most of the modernist buildings erected before World War I were considered industrial structures. The compatibility of its mechanistic style with industry was the reason, and few clients took the risk of applying this new architectural fashion to other kinds of buildings. By the mid-1920s, modernism started to be accepted, and it became the popular style in some cities for commercial structures and worker's housing. The concept that function was most important, supported the modernist's viewpoint. This meant that more buildings were designed to stand out from their neighbors. This visual incompatibility was not seen as a problem at that time, but it began to change the appearance of historic districts.

Today it is clear that modernism had limited successes. The economic and social evolution of the cities failed to support only the modernist beliefs. Traditional architecture continues to be constructed awkwardly side by side.<sup>75</sup> In 1977, modernism "failed" and was declared "dead." In the years that immediately followed, there was

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<sup>75</sup> Brolin, B. C. *Architecture in Context: Fitting New Buildings with Old*. New York, NY: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1980, p. 10-11.

not a specific term that could apply to the styles and manners that were used. In 1978, the first monument of the "postmodern" movement was claimed by the proposed design of the AT&T Building in New York. It was a different building from other skyscrapers because it re-introduced historical aspects in a new way. It was the first building "to teach" the public about postmodern architecture. Afterward, a wide range of historical styles was accepted and adopted, and traditional elements of regionalism, popular culture, and urban context became acceptable again.<sup>76</sup>

The shift from modernism to postmodernism happened chiefly because of the change in taste or fashion of designers, which accepts something one year and rebels against it the next. What the public had thought to be inevitable changed and was again seen as the consequence of simple aesthetic choice.

Robert Stern, an architect and writer, believed that post-modernists share a common interest in three areas. One is "Contextualism," which he defined as the possibility of the future expansion of a given building and the desire to relate it to the immediate surroundings. Second is "Allusionism" which refers to the history of architecture, which somehow goes beyond eclecticism to a somewhat vague category called the relationship between form and shape and the meanings that particular

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<sup>76</sup> Tomlan, Michael A., and David Listokin. *Historic Preservation: Caring for Our Expanding Legacy*. Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2015, p. 229.

shapes have assumed over time. The last is "Ornamentalism," and that is the simple pleasure in decorating architecture.<sup>77</sup>

Although some modernist-minded architects criticized the use of historical references in new designs, many designers willingly explore the new sources that were ignored. The importance of considering the shape, size, scale, mass, and materials in design was revalued and helped designers to make creative use of traditional architectural references. In the early 1980s, postmodernism became the most accepted norm in both the city and suburb. For the first time in generations, architects and designers could explore an approach that was respectful to the existing context, and that is why historic preservationists embraced postmodernism ideas. Not all postmodern designs were considered good, but the change increased the opportunities for discussing better alternatives. The advent of postmodernism also led to renewed interest in saving modern architecture so that by the 1980s context was beginning to be redefined to include works of international style. Modernism became a part of the tradition and was accepted as a style alongside other types.<sup>78</sup>

New trends such as postmodernism are the result of normal changes in architectural fashions. Brolin believes that in the postmodernism era there was a

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<sup>77</sup> Brolin, B. C. *Architecture in Context: Fitting New Buildings with Old*. New York, NY: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1980, p. 15.

<sup>78</sup> Tomlan, Michael A. and David Listokin. *Historic Preservation: Caring for Our Expanding Legacy*. Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2015, p. 230.

general uncertainty about which aesthetic approach is the proper one. This results in giving equal weight to a variety of styles, including modernism.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Brolin, B. C. *Architecture in Context: Fitting New Buildings with Old*. New York, NY: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1980, p. 15.

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