

# **DRAFT Compatible New Construction Policy**

## **CITY OF ST. LOUIS PRESERVATION BOARD**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The City of St. Louis has engaged in design review within local historic districts since the 1970's. Until recently there was a consensus among the Cultural Resources Office, architects, developers and neighborhood organizations that new buildings would be deferential to the historic context in which they were built. Often, designs were abstracted versions of the older, more ornate buildings that contribute to the character of local historic districts. This design approach resulted in highly compatible new buildings within the existing historic fabric; but it also gave streetscapes a false historic appearance and restricted architectural creativity. In recent years the consensus has been fractured as a greater interest in differentiation between old and new buildings has been desired by some; while others have continued to desire the strong emphasis upon compatibility and making new designs as deferential to the historic structures as possible.

The City of St. Louis' design review process is based upon standards, including new construction. Our standards are devised for each individual local historic district, although similarities between the district standards are common, based upon the time when they were created and the design philosophies of those writing the standards. Often the standards simultaneously express the desire for compatibility and differentiation:

**From the Central West End Standards:**

**“When new construction is proposed, consideration of the “streetscape” and compatible relationships between the new structures and existing ones are of the utmost importance.”**

**“It is not the intention of these regulations to discourage contemporary design that, through careful attention to scale, materials, siting and landscaping, is harmonious with the existing structure. The historic character of the historic district is not enhanced by new construction that attempts to mimic the historic.”**

**From the Benton Park Standards:**

**“Model Example:**

**Offered to Prove That:**

- **A design proposed for constructing a new building will result in a building compatible with its architectural environment;...**

**In the case of proposed new construction:**

- **The Model Example Concept is not intended to preclude contemporary designs, but to assure they are compatible with the environment.”**

## **PURPOSE**

**The purpose of this policy is to explicate a process and rules clarifying when there is a desire by the applicant to maintain strict adherence to compatible design, or, when there is a desire to incorporate differentiated components that emphasize the contemporary nature of a building's design. New structure design cannot diminish the fundamental character and experience of St. Louis's local Historic Districts and National Register Districts, when the Cultural Resources Office/Preservation Board has review authority. New construction buildings must be designed to recognize the importance of relating to the districts' historic buildings. It is also true that historic districts are dynamic, changing environments. By allowing only appropriate contemporary design, the fundamental character of the historic districts can be maintained while benefitting from carefully executed contemporary design.**

**Clearly, historic district status means there is to be greater control on building design than would be allowed in an undesignated area. However, historic district status should not keep new construction from making a meaningful design statement. This policy has two components:**

### **A) Process**

**The process ensures full vetting of the design and inclusion of the concerns of neighborhood organizations in order to allow for the creation of well designed, contemporary buildings, while ensuring an inherently necessary level of compatibility;**

**And**

### **B) Design Rules**

**To identify aspects of design that ensure compatibility and that differentiate the new construction in a distinctive way, allowing for contemporary buildings that "hold their own" in comparison to historic structures.**

## **PROCESS**

When new construction is proposed the applicant will identify if their approach is compatibility or contemporary design.

If the approach is compatibility then the proposal will be reviewed by strict adherence to the standards through an informal process of communication between the developer team and CRO staff, with the opportunity for neighborhood comment.

Compatibility means that all elements of the design are based upon the designs of the buildings adjacent to the proposed structure, or, on the same block, including both sides of the street.

These elements are:

- Scale
- Set back
- Massing
- Color
- Material
- Fenestration

- Ratio of Solid to Void
- Decorative details
- Roof configuration, and potentially roof materials

If the approach is to include differentiated design elements, then the review process must conform to the following requirements in seeking approval:

#### **A. Small Projects**

A small project is defined as having all of the following characteristics:

- Not located on a corner
- The primary façade comprising 19% or less of the primary façade block face
- If residential, 6 units or less (Including attached town houses)
- Three stories or less in height

#### **Step 1**

- Completion of an Initial Application that includes the following:
  - Elevation drawings
  - Floor Plans
  - “Streetscape Study” that demonstrates the relation of the primary facades with those of adjacent properties
  - Completion of the Compatibility/Differentiation Form which expressly affirms that no more than two the following elements are expressly designed to be differentiated from the historic design pattern, and which elements those are:
    - Material
    - Color
    - Fenestration
    - % of solid to void
    - Decorative elements

#### **Step 2**

- A meeting with CRO staff that includes an opportunity for neighborhood representatives to attend (if they choose to attend),
- Discussion regarding the proposal;

#### **Step 3**

- Written feedback to the developer from CRO staff and neighborhood representatives within 7 days of the Initial Meeting;

#### **Step 4**

- An optional second meeting is held at which point the developer team shows any revisions to the original design in response to the feedback from the first meeting;

#### **Step 5**

- Written feedback to the developer from CRO staff and neighborhood representatives within 7 days of the Second Meeting.

## **Step 6**

- The applicant is free to request Preliminary Review at the Preservation Board, or, there can be more conversation about the design in an effort to achieve consensus

### **A. Large projects:**

A large project is defined as having one or more of the following characteristics:

- A corner building
- The primary façade comprises 20% or more of the primary façade block face
- If residential, more than 6 units (Including attached town houses)
- Greater than three stories in height

## **Step 1**

- Completion of an Initial Application that includes the following:
  - Elevation drawings
  - Floor Plans
  - “Streetscape Study” that demonstrates the relation of the primary facades with those of adjacent properties
  - Completion of the Compatibility/Differentiation Form which expressly affirms that no more than two the following elements are expressly designed to be differentiated from the historic design pattern, and which elements those are:
    - Material
    - Color
    - Fenestration
    - % of solid to void
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## **Step 2**

- A meeting with CRO staff that includes an opportunity for neighborhood representatives to attend (if they choose to attend),
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- Written feedback to the developer from CRO staff and neighborhood representatives within 7 days of the Initial Meeting;

## **Step 4**

- An required second meeting is held at which point the developer team shows any revisions to the original design in response to the feedback from the first meeting;

## **Step 5**

- Written feedback to the developer from CRO staff and neighborhood representatives within 7 days of the Second Meeting.

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- The applicant is free to request Preliminary Review at the Preservation Board, or, there can be more conversation about the design in an effort to achieve consensus..

## **RULES**

### General

The following components are divided into two categories:

- **Required compatibility**

These elements must be very closely related to both properties immediately adjacent to the proposed structure and within the same block as the proposed structure

- **Allowed differentiation**

At least one element is allowed which is intended to break with the traditional design pattern on the block, although that element(s) must have a rationale that ensures the design does not appear to be haphazard or too incongruous with immediately adjacent properties or those on the block.

**These rules do not supersede any regulations in existing or future historic district standards that have been approved as an ordinance of the City of St. Louis.**

## **REQUIRED COMPATIBILITY**

### **Height (Height is measured to the cornice line)**

For blocks that have buildings 3 stories or less in height, the new structure cannot be more than 2 feet shorter or taller than buildings on the block.

For blocks with buildings 4 stories or taller, the new structure must be within 15% of the height of immediately adjacent structures.

### **Massing**

On blocks where buildings are 1-3 stories on narrow lots, the width of new structures must not be more than three feet wider or narrower than structures on the block.

On blocks with fewer, larger buildings, new structures cannot be more than 20% wider than existing structures without having a vertical plane break. For buildings more than 50 feet wide there must be a vertical plane break every twenty to twenty-five feet.

### **Setback and Block Face**

Where there is a single setback on a street, the new building must conform to that setback. Where setbacks are varied, the new building setback must be the average of the two immediately adjacent buildings.

### **Street-Facing Façade Composition**

Street façades must not have large, unbroken expanses of solid walls.

A street façade must not include street visible garage doors in residential buildings, if there is an accessible alley.

A street façade must incorporate architectural elements that have a human scale and reflect interior and exterior patterns of use.

**Windows and Doors**

Window and door openings shall relate to interior and exterior patterns of use.

The main entrance shall be placed in the street façade or on a side façade near the front corner of the building.

**Materials on Street Visible Facades**

There can be only one primary material and it must be used on a minimum of 75% of the main or primary façade.

Exterior insulated finish systems (EIFS) and vinyl siding are not allowed on portions of buildings visible from streets in the historic district as they are sufficiently different in appearance and quality as to detract from the historic fabric.

Materials for visible roofs of the main block of a building shall be a single material and color.

Building may not have a main or primary façade of one material, and three walls of another material, unless the main façade material returns a substantial distance on the side elevations and terminates at a logical point, such as a vertical plane break or rear wing. Changes of materials shall relate to the articulation of the building with vertical or horizontal plane breaks and reflect interior and exterior patterns of use.

**Solar Panels**

Solar panels may be installed if they meet the requirements for visual compatibility in the Solar Panel Installation Policy adopted by the Preservation Board.

**Mechanicals/Utilities**

HVAC condensing units, communication devices, electrical meters, gas meters, and vents of any kind shall not be visible from a sidewalk or street.

**Ancillary Buildings**

Ancillary buildings shall be subject to these rules and process unless they are not visible from a street or sidewalk.

**Site**

No site work shall deviate from the design form that is extant on the street where the building is constructed.

## Allowed Differentiation

By expressly differentiating some elements of building design, the character of an historic district can be enhanced. The differentiated elements create a reference contrasting with historic structures' craftsmanship, materials and design. Differentiated elements will enliven streetscapes by integrating the most interesting elements of contemporary design in a way that will imprint new buildings with a lasting legacy of quality design from our own era. If differentiated elements detract from the character of the historic buildings on the block, they will not be approved. These design rules only apply to street visible facades.

- **Material**

**Allowed materials are:** Stone, brick, terra cotta, stucco, cementitious panels, stucco-like material, cast concrete panels and metal panels

**Disallowed materials are:** EIFS, Siding (vinyl, metal or cementitious), and CMUs

When a differentiated material is the primary façade choice, the color must match extant structures on the block.

Use of the allowed materials above does not mean there will be inherent approval of a design just because they are the primary exterior material.

- **Color**

The color choice must enhance the visual appeal of the overall streetscape. If a non-traditional color is chosen, the material choice must be the same as 40% or more of structures on the existing block

- **Fenestration**

The pattern of openings need not match the pattern on the block. The pattern must reflect the use within the building and there cannot be "false" windows, which do not function as such. The fenestration must enhance the design of the proposed building. Differentiated fenestration patterns cannot detract from the historic character of the block.

- **Percent of solid to void**

The ratio must result on a cohesive design and must not detract from the historic character of the block.

- **Openings**

- **Windows**

Windows need not operate in the fashion of the historic windows extant on the block.

The color of windows which are differentiated from those on the block must be dark.

Differentiated windows cannot detract from the historic character of the block. Windows that are not clear glass will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

- **Doors**

**Disallowed doors:** All metal security doors, faux historic doors with imitation leaded or stained glass.

**Allowed doors:** Must have a notable design element and cannot detract from the historic character of the block.