

**HISTORIC PRESERVATION  
REHABILITATION AND DESIGN GUIDELINES  
Gainesville, Florida**

**DESIGN GUIDELINES FOR NEW CONSTRUCTION**  
*University Heights Historic District North and South*

## **MAINTAINING THE CHARACTER OF THE UNIVERSITY HEIGHTS HISTORIC DISTRICTS—NORTH & SOUTH**

New construction should complement historic architecture. Through sound planning and design, it can respect and reinforce the existing patterns of a historic district. Good infill design does not have to imitate demolished or extant buildings to be successful. Rather, it utilizes significant patterns, such as height, materials, roof form, massing, setbacks and the rhythm of openings and materials to insure that a new building fits with the context.

While the Secretary of the Interior's Standards are oriented toward rehabilitation of existing historic buildings, Standards 2, 3, and 9 apply to new construction in historic districts and near individual landmarks. Under Standard 2, the setting of historic buildings should be preserved when new construction is undertaken. The relationship of new construction to adjacent buildings, landscape and streetscape features, and open spaces should also be considered. New construction adjacent to historic buildings can dramatically alter the historic setting of neighboring buildings or the district. Such construction should not create a false sense of historical development through the use of conjectural features or stylistic elements drawn from other buildings under Standard 3. Under Standard 9, new construction is appropriate as long as it does not destroy significant historic features, including designed landscapes, and complements the size, color, material, and character of adjacent buildings and their historic setting. This allows for considerable interpretation in the design of new structures.

Part of the delight of the Gainesville historic districts is their diversity, which can vary considerably along streets and blocks. This diversity makes the design of new structures a challenge for designers, builders, staff and the review board. Since almost every street in the University Heights Historic Districts has a different pattern of building, it is impossible to have a single standard for new construction that will apply the same way in every location. To encourage diversity, the design guidelines set up a way of thinking about compatibility rather than a set of stylistic recipes.

## **SPECIAL AREA PLAN**

The University Heights Special Area Plan overlay encompasses the area of the University Heights Historic Districts. As was discussed under HISTORIC CONTEXT, the goal is to encourage new development in University Heights and to create a pedestrian friendly public realm, goals that will clearly impact the historic character of the neighborhoods that make up the historic districts. New infill construction and some new patterns of land use are expected in this area as market forces spur new development.

The Special Area Plan, which encourages historically compatible new design, has established specific design requirements for landscape design, building placement, parking, signage, and architectural design criteria for a number of building types. The Historic Preservation Design Guidelines for New Construction do not seek to supplant the existing regulations. Rather, they attempt to work with the existing regulatory structure to ameliorate the impact of new construction on existing historic properties, and through the Rehabilitation Guidelines to protect the identified historic resources of the districts.

Building additions are regulated by the Special Area Plan. Contributing structures in the historic districts also must comply with the Rehabilitation Guidelines, which address similar issues but are more specific concerning the various strategies for placing and designing additions.

The Design Guidelines for New Construction provide specific recommendations for design compatibility, and use amelioration strategies to reduce the impact of new larger-scale development on historic structures.

## **DEFINING THE CRITERIA**

Without careful attention to overall design, materials, scale, massing, and set-backs, contemporary construction in an Historic District can threaten the coherence of the historic context. As often the case, context has been sacrificed through ignorance, indifference, and the effort to make new projects absolutely cost efficient.

The following criteria are used to evaluate the compatibility of new construction proposed for the historic districts. These criteria should be considered during the design process to ensure compatibility and avoid unnecessary conflicts in the review process. The terms are adapted from the eleven standards of visual compatibility found in the City's Land Development Code. Note that "Scale" is broken up into two parts, Scale of the Street and Scale of Buildings, emphasizing the importance of these two related but very different scale.

1. *Rhythm of the Street*. The relationship of the buildings, structures and open spaces along a street that creates a discernible visual and spatial pattern.
2. *Setbacks*. The size of buildings, structures and open spaces and their placement on a lot relative to the street and block.
3. *Height*. The overall height of buildings and structures related to those sharing the same street or block.
4. *Roof Forms*. The shape of a building or structure roof system in relationship to its neighbors.

5. *Rhythm of Entrances and Porches*. The relationship of entrance elements and porch projections to the street.
6. *Walls of Continuity*. Appurtenances of a building or structure such as walls, fences, landscape elements that form linked walls of enclosure along a street and serve to make a street into a cohesive whole.
7. *Scale of Building*. Relative size and composition of openings, roof forms and details to the building mass and its configuration.
8. *Directional Expression*. The major orientation of the principle facade of a building or structure to the street.
9. *Proportion of the Front Facade*. The width of the building, structure, or object to the height of the front elevation in relationship to its immediate context.
10. *Proportion of Openings*. The width and height relationship of the windows and doors in a building or structure to the principle facade.
11. *Rhythm of Solids to Voids*. The pattern and overall composition of openings such as windows and doors in the front facade.
12. *Details and Materials*. The relationship of details, materials, texture and color of building facades, structures, objects and landscaped areas to the existing context.

#### **RECOMMENDED**

1. Encourage rehabilitation and adaptive use of existing structures and landscapes.
2. Design new buildings to be compatible in scale, size, materials, color, and texture with the surrounding buildings.
3. Employ contemporary design that is compatible with the character and feel of the historic district.
4. Employ amelioration strategies with new larger scale infill construction to protect adjacent historic structures.
5. Employ design strategies that use proportional relationships of facades, shapes of openings, solid/void ratios and the directional typology of historic structures to link new buildings with the historic context.
6. Use of fences, walls or landscape materials to reinforce the continuity of the street edge in a neighborhood.

### **NOT RECOMMENDED**

1. Designing new buildings whose massing and scale is inappropriate and whose materials and texture are not compatible with the character of the district.
2. Imitating an earlier style or period of architecture in new construction, except in rare cases where a contemporary design would detract from the architectural unity of an ensemble or group.

### **RHYTHM OF THE STREET**

New construction should add to the existing rhythm of streets and blocks. This rhythm is a complex layering of many features that add up to what is described generally as “character.” Spacing between buildings, divisions between upper and lower floors, porch heights, and alignment of windows and windowsills are examples of such rhythms. New construction in historic districts should try to maintain or extend these shared streetscape characteristics in blocks where they appear.

Where new building types such as row houses or apartment buildings are introduced that are not in scale with the traditional single-family housing that historically occupied the area, new rhythms of building and open space along the street will evolve.

To help ameliorate the impact of these new more massive building forms, special attention should be paid to the articulation and massing of the new building street facades, avoiding the introduction of large unbroken masses of building.

Finding the street rhythm in wall fenestration, eave heights, building details, and landscape features such as fences or walls can help ameliorate the larger building masses and “connect” the new building to its neighborhood and street.

### **SETBACKS**

The careful placement of buildings on lots is essential to maintaining the building patterns of each district. The distance a building is located from its property lines is referred to as “setbacks” or, more recently, “build-to” lines. Buildings in historic districts often share a common front and side setback although these setbacks vary from block to block and street to street, even within the same district. In locating new buildings, the front side setbacks should be maintained and be consistent with the facades of surrounding historic buildings.

Where the Special Area Plan encourages placement of buildings closer to the street than the historic uniform front yard setbacks along a block, adjustments are recommended to ameliorate

the impact of the new building setbacks on adjacent contributing buildings in the historic districts. This adjustment strategy is desirable to help create a cohesion among the neighborhood buildings as a whole, and to avoid fracturing the neighborhood fabric by changing abruptly the building-street relationships.

Front yard build-to/setback lines would stay within the ranges set forth in the Special Area Plan requirements. When new construction abuts a contributing building located within 20 feet of a shared side yard boundary, the new construction must “step back” from the build-to line.

The “step back” is a compromise half way between the minimum build-to line allowed by the Special Area Plan, and the setback of the existing contributing structure, and in no case to step back further than the maximum build-to line established by the Special Area Plan.

In the event that the new construction is a multi-family row house or apartment building, only the first bay, adjacent to the contributing structure should be required to “step back.”

## **HEIGHT**

The height of new construction should ideally be compatible with surrounding historic buildings. Building height has a significant impact on the scale and character of a neighborhood.

The Special Area Plan allows new buildings to be significantly taller than the 1-story and 2-story single-family residential buildings that occupy the historic districts. To avoid abrupt scale juxtapositions that fragment a neighborhood and adversely impact historic structures, a “step down” amelioration strategy would be applied to new construction that is adjacent to a contributing structure located within 20 feet of a shared side yard boundary.

The new construction should not be more than 1 1/2 stories taller than the contributing structure. A half story is defined as an attic space within the roof utilizing dormer windows or gable-end windows.

In the event the new construction is a multi-family row house, apartment building, or a larger scale structure, only the first bay or set of spaces on the end of the building adjacent to the contributing structure should be required to “step down.”

## **ROOF FORMS**

Similar roof form and pitch are characteristics of buildings in many historic districts. Most residential buildings in the districts have pitched roofs with the gable or hip roof as the predominate type. Gambrel, pyramidal, and clipped gable (jerkinhead) are also found in the districts. A small number of Mediterranean influenced structures with flat roofs concealed behind parapets exist.

Repetition of historic roof forms is a strategy that new construction can employ to achieve compatibility with older structures, particularly when there is a widely used roof convention in a neighborhood.

### **RHYTHM: ENTRANCES & PORCHES**

The relationship of entrances and projections to sidewalks of a building, structure, object or parking lot shall be visually compatible to the buildings and places to which it is visually related. New porches, entrances, and other projections should reflect the size, height, and materials of porches of existing historic buildings found along the street and contribute to a continuity of features.

Porches are strongly encouraged and should have sufficient size to accommodate outdoor furniture and easy accessibility. Their widths and depths should reflect that which can be found on other historic buildings in the district.

### **WALLS OF CONTINUITY**

Appurtenances of a building or structure such as walls, fences or landscape elements that form linked walls of enclosure along a street serve to make a street into a cohesive whole.

New infill construction should be encouraged to align walls, fences or landscape elements (hedges) with adjacent property owners to create uniform street walls. Partially open edges are preferred to promote social connection from street (public domain) to porch (semi-private domain).

### **SCALE OF THE BUILDING**

Scale, although related to objective dimensions, is more open to interpretation and is ultimately a more important measure of a good building. Proper scale is a critical issue in determining the compatibility of buildings within an historic context. It has two general meanings: its scale to context and its scale relative to ourselves. Intuitively, we judge the fit of a building at different scales of measurement in order to assess its relative size or proper scale in a given context.

Many issues affect the perception of scale such as placement on the site, overall massing, building type, style, combinations of materials and detailing to name but a few. Every building in the University Heights Historic Districts is also measured against its neighbors for degrees of similarity and difference. The result or “fitness” of a building is a delicate balance between these seemingly contradictory aspects of context. From far away, we note the profile of a structure on the skyline. On the streetscape: its distance from the road and its neighbors. Up close, we look for familiar things that tell us its relationship directly to our body, i.e., stairs,

railings, doors and windows, and modular materials such as brick, blocks or wood. Most importantly, we sense that all these individual elements must have an overall order to achieve proper scale. Scale changes are evident from district to district and from street to street.

Scale for new construction speaks to both the relationship of the building to its neighbors, and the scale of the building to the person, which is influenced by the massing (large unbroken masses vs. smaller collection of masses), materials, the size and proportion of openings, the articulation of surfaces, the ratio of void to solid, and details like handrails, doors and windows.

New infill may be larger in size (not in physical scale with its neighbors) and yet still feel compatible in scale if the building form has been articulated with a number of scaling strategies.

### **DIRECTIONAL EXPRESSION**

New buildings should relate to adjacent buildings in the directional character (orientation) of its facade. In a historic district there is usually a typology of entry and connection to street shared by the neighborhood buildings that helps create a consistent fabric.

University Heights buildings almost without exception have primary entries that face the principal street. The facade facing the principal street is clearly recognized as the building “front,” and porches or stoops create a transition from street to interior.

New construction should recognize these shared conventions and enhance compatibility by becoming part of the neighborhood fabric.

### **PROPORTION OF FRONT FAÇADE**

All buildings have a proportional relationship between the width and height of the front facade which is independent of physical size. In a district as complex as University Heights with many different building styles, there can be a number of facade proportions. New construction should consider the facade proportions of the historic structures in the immediate neighborhood to determine if a common proportion can be found in nearby structures. Compatibility can be enhanced if neighborhood proportions can be integrated into the design of new buildings, even if they are of a larger physical scale.

### **PROPORTION & RHYTHM OF OPENINGS**

In many historical styles, the height to width proportion of windows is an important element of the design, along with the way windows are configured by muntins. New construction should consider the proportion and rhythm of fenestration in nearby historic structures to enhance compatibility.



In University Heights, vertically proportioned windows predominate with many examples of group windows, especially in the numerous Craftsman/Bungalow style buildings. Consistent use of muntins is another recognizable fenestration characteristic.

Similarly, many historic structures have highly detailed doors and entryways, even when facades are simple and undetailed.

### **RHYTHM OF SOLIDS TO VOIDS**

Like the proportioning of openings, the relative ratio of openings to solid wall area is also a characteristic of architecture that can be exploited to seek compatibility with nearby historic structures. Architectural style in historic buildings is a factor which influences the solid to void ratio. The ratio can also vary between primary and secondary elevations as windows have often been a status symbol and used on front facades to express wealth or social status.

### **DETAILS AND MATERIALS**

Due to the varied architectural styles in University Heights, there is a broad range of materials used on historic buildings, including brick, wood siding, wood shingles, stucco, cut stone and the unique use of local field stone and brick in the buildings locally known as "Chert Houses." Roofs also use a range of materials including asphalt shingles, asbestos shingles, crimped and standing seam metal, tiles and stone.

New construction should consider looking at the pallet of materials used on nearby historic structures to pursue compatibility at the neighborhood level.