

2. Building Massing and Form

Why is this Important?

New construction that is designed with a scale, mass, and form that is dramatically different when compared to historic buildings can appear out of place and detract from the district's character.



The new structure (right) utilizes a scale, mass, and form that complements the historic home at left and other historic homes along the block.



The compatibility of the new structure (left) is accomplished through the use of a similar scale and mass as the nearby historic structures (right) and the use of similar proportion of windows to wall area.

Guidelines

A. SCALE AND MASS

- i. **Similar height and scale**—Design new construction so that its height and overall scale are consistent with nearby historic buildings. In residential districts, the overall height and scale of new construction should not exceed the height that of adjacent or nearby the majority of historic buildings by more than 50% one-story when measured from similar elevation points such as the ground plane and the highest ridge line of the roof regardless of roof pitch or form.
Incorporating additional height into half stories or within traditional roof forms is strongly encouraged. In commercial districts, building height shall conform to the established pattern. In commercial districts, building height shall conform to the established pattern. If there is no more than a 50% variation in the scale of buildings on the adjacent block faces, then the height of the new building shall not exceed the tallest building on the adjacent block face by more than 10%.
- ii. **Transitions**—Utilize step-downs in building height, wall-plane offsets, and other variations in building massing to provide a visual transition when the height of new construction exceeds that of adjacent historic buildings by more than one-half story.
- iii. **Foundation and floor heights**—Align foundation and floor-to-floor heights (including porches and balconies) within one foot of floor-to-floor heights on adjacent historic structures.

B. ROOF FORM

- i. **Similar roof forms**—Incorporate roof forms—pitch, overhangs, and orientation—that are consistent with those predominantly found on the block. Roof forms on residential building types are typically sloped, while roof forms on non-residential building types are more typically flat and screened by an ornamental parapet wall.

C. RELATIONSHIP OF SOLIDS TO VOIDS

- i. **Window and door openings**—Incorporate window and door openings with a similar proportion of wall to window space as typical with nearby historic facades. Windows, doors, porches, entryways, dormers, bays, and pediments shall be considered similar if they are no larger than 25% in size and vary no more than 10% in height to width ratio from adjacent historic facades.

8. Medium-Density and Multifamily (New Section)

Why is this Important?

Urban neighborhoods have historically provided a variety of housing opportunities. Even historic districts that appear predominately single-family were developed to include duplexes, four-plexes, and detached accessory dwelling units. Encouraging healthy infill which incorporates a variety of housing options contributes to affordability and can achieve density at a comfortable, human scale.



Medium-density residential properties can be found in many historic neighborhoods. Often an increase in scale can be found at corners or as a buffer between the neighborhood and a commercial corridor. Deep residential lots and alley access also provide opportunities for added density at the rear of a property. These well-established building forms and types should be considered when designing new infill projects.

Using This Section

San Antonio's Historic Districts offer a wide variety of building types, sizes, and development patterns. Although opportunities for medium-density or multifamily infill are not common in all districts, successful projects play a critical role in maintaining the continuity and adaptability of a neighborhood.

This section was added in 2022 to provide new guidance for infill projects having **two or more** attached or detached units on a single parcel or two or more detached single-family dwellings developed as part of a platted subdivision in residential historic districts. This section shall also apply to projects requiring a change in zoning which requires review and approval of a site plan.

Additional guidelines in this section address site selection and development, façade orientation and entrances, building massing and form, and parking and access. Projects reviewed under this section shall be reviewed for consistency in these areas in addition to Sections 3 and 7 of this chapter.

Appendix A of the Unified Development Code includes application requirements for projects reviewed under this section. Using the infill development worksheets required under Appendix A, establish the appropriate **context area** for your project. Existing historic properties within the context area must be considered during design development of a multi-family project.

Guidelines

A. SITE SELECTION & DEVELOPMENT

- i. **Location & Context** – The size, depth, and accessibility of lots varies from district to district, and block to block. Regardless of allowable density by zoning, the existing development pattern will inform what building forms and sizes are achievable under the Historic Design Guidelines. Consider lots that historically featured higher density or commercial uses as opportunities for multifamily infill, or lots that allow for the addition of larger building forms or groupings away from the public realm.
- ii. **Building Separation & Groupings** – Incorporate multiple dwelling units into historically-common building sizes and forms within the established context area. For example, in context areas having larger buildings, four units may be appropriately combined into a single, two-story building form. In context areas with smaller buildings, a more

appropriate response would be to separate the units into smaller, individual building forms.

- iii. **Preservation of Open Space** – As multiple buildings are proposed for a site, they should be separated and scaled in a manner that preserves open space consistent with the established context area. For example, if the context area predominately consists of a primary structure separated from a rear accessory structure by a common distance, then the proposed development should follow a similar pattern. Preserved open space may be used for common areas, amenity space, or uncovered parking.

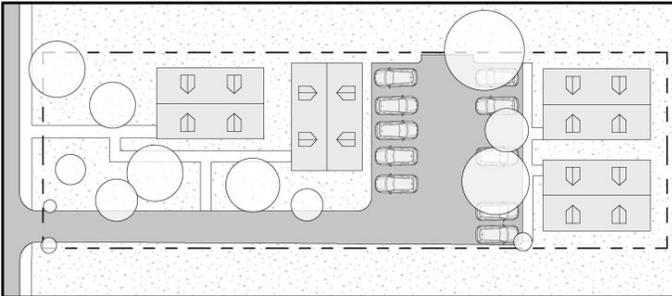
Filling in the Gaps

Historic aerials or Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps are a great resource for identifying historic development patterns where buildings no longer exist. There are a variety of free online resources available:

[University of Texas Sanborn Collection](#)

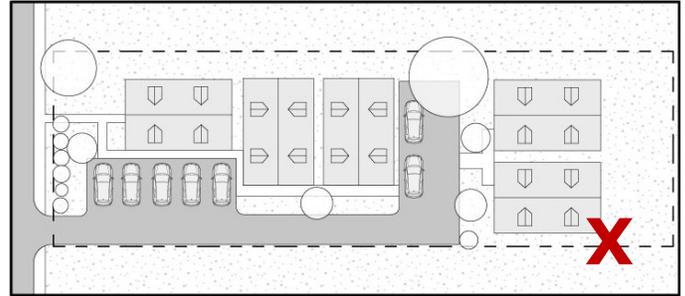
[San Antonio Library Sanborn Collection](#)

This



Utilizing a deep lot, this project accomplishes four, detached units with a shared interior space for parking.

Not This



This iteration of the same proposal overcrowds the site. A fifth unit restricts the ability for open space and requires that the traditional front lawn space be utilized for parking.



This proposal includes an increase in building scale at a corner location and appropriately responds to each street frontage. The buildings are separated into masses that are compatible with other buildings in the context area.



This iteration of the proposal to the left is less successful. The lack of building separation results in a mass that is incompatible with other buildings in the context area.

B. FAÇADE ORIENTATION & ENTRANCES

- i. **Setbacks**—Align front facades of new buildings with front facades of adjacent buildings where a consistent setback has been established along the street frontage. Use the median front setback of buildings within the established context area where a variety of setbacks exist.
- ii. **Orientation**—Orient the front façade of new buildings to be consistent with the predominant orientation of historic buildings along the street frontage. Street-facing facades that are void of fenestration or a street-facing entrance are strongly discouraged.

C. SCALE, MASSING, AND FORM

- i. **Building Footprint** - New construction should be consistent with adjacent historic buildings in terms of the building to lot ratio. Using the established context area as reference, limit the total building footprint for new construction to no more than 50 percent of the total lot area, unless adjacent historic buildings establish a precedent with a greater building to lot ratio. Similarly, individual building footprints should not exceed the average building footprint of primary structures in the established context area by more than 50%.
- ii. **Impervious Cover** - In addition to building footprints, other areas of impervious lot coverage (such as parking pads or driveways) should be minimized. Developments with building footprints that meet or exceed 50% of the total lot area should utilize pervious and semi-pervious paving materials and stormwater retention strategies wherever possible.
- iii. **Building Height**—Design new construction so that its height and overall scale are consistent with historic buildings in the established context area. In residential districts, the overall height of new construction should not exceed the height of adjacent or nearby historic buildings by more than 50% when measured from similar elevation points such as the ground plane and the highest ridge line of the roof regardless of roof pitch or form. Buildings that exceed the height of immediately adjacent historic buildings by any amount should utilize the following strategies:
 - (a) **Half Stories** - Incorporating additional height into half stories or fully within traditional sloped roof forms is strongly encouraged.
 - (b) **Transitions** - Utilize step-downs in building height, wall-plane offsets, and other variations in building massing to provide a visual transition to the neighboring properties.

(c) **Roof Form** - Utilize roof forms that reduce visual prominence when viewed from the street such as hip, side gable, or hip-on-gable (jerkinhead).

- iv. **Traditional Forms and Spatial Relationships** - In residential districts, there is often an established pattern of a larger, primary structure facing the street with smaller, accessory structures located at the rear of the property. Design and site new buildings to be consistent with this development pattern where evident within the established context area.
- v. **Foundation and floor heights**—Align foundation and floor-to-floor heights (including porches and balconies) within one foot of floor-to-floor heights on historic buildings within the established context area.

Strategies for Reducing Visual Impact

Architectural design plays an important role in mitigating the visual dominance of infill construction in sensitive neighborhoods. The example below accomplishes a relatively high density through sensitive design. Consider the following design strategies for reducing visual impact:



- 1) Step back the uppermost floor or incorporate into a half-story
- 2) Change the materials or color between floors or architectural bays
- 3) Establish a hierarchy of primary and secondary roof forms
- 4) Design porches and balconies to relate to a comfortable, pedestrian scale and provide shadow lines
- 5) Use façade separation to create pattern and repetition at a traditional scale
- 6) Avoid large, uninterrupted wall planes

This



This development is successful in achieving density by incorporating a number of strategies: reduced height at the street, separation of buildings into traditional sizes and forms, and preservation of open space in what would traditionally be a backyard space.



This project incorporates a porch form and secondary roof line which compliments the neighboring building forms.



Utilization of a half-story is an effective strategy for gaining square footage while maintaining a compatible scale.

Not This



This development does not address the street through appropriate fenestration or a street-facing entrance. Incompatible roof forms and a poor ratio of solids to voids contribute further to an inappropriate design solution.



The incompatible height of this development is worsened by roof forms which increase visual prominence from the street.



These attached, front-loaded garages are not consistent with the Historic Design Guidelines.

D. ARCHITECTURAL FORMS

- i. **Primary Roof Forms** - Incorporate roof forms—pitch, overhangs, and orientation—that are consistent with those found in the established context area. Flat or shed roofs are not typical of primary structures in San Antonio’s residential historic districts and should be avoided.
- ii. **Porches** – Utilize traditional front porch depths and forms to establish a pedestrian scale along the street frontage. Porch designs should be similar in dimension and form as those found on historic buildings within the established context area.
- iii. **Bays** – Separate building massing into distinguishable architectural bays consistent with historic buildings within the established context area. This is best accomplished through a change in wall plane or materials, or by aligning appropriately-scaled fenestrations.

E. RELATIONSHIP OF SOLIDS TO VOIDS

- i. **Window and door openings**—Incorporate window and door openings with a similar proportion of wall to window space as found within the established context area. Windows, doors, porches, entryways, dormers, bays, and pediments shall be considered similar if they are no larger than 25% in size and vary no more than 10% in height to width ratio from adjacent historic facades.
- ii. **Window Specifications** – All windows used in new construction should adhere to adopted guidelines and policy for windows in terms of type, materials, proportions, profile, and installation details. A summary is provided on this page for reference.

F. PARKING AND ACCESS

- i. **Location** – Site parking areas centrally within a development or to one side of the proposed structures. Limiting on-site parking to the traditional front yard space is strongly discouraged.
- ii. **Parking Surfaces & Design** – Pervious or semi-pervious surfaces are strongly encouraged. Incorporate parking opportunities into a comprehensive landscaping and hardscaping plan that is consistent with the Historic Design Guidelines.
- iii. **Garages** - Attached garages, especially front-loading garages, are strongly discouraged. Detached garages designed to be consistent with this chapter may be considered where lot coverage allows. Uncovered surface parking is encouraged when the recommended building-to-lot ratio has been exceeded.

- iv. **Driveways and Curb Cuts** – A single, 10-foot driveway at one street frontage is recommended. Projects should first attempt to utilize historic curb cuts where extant. Additional entry points may be considered where there is alley access. The addition of driveways should not confuse or alter the historic development pattern. Do not introduce wide, shared driveways that appear visually similar to a street.

Windows for New Construction

Consistent with the Historic Design Guidelines, the following recommendations are made for windows to be used in new construction:

GENERAL: Windows used in new construction should be similar in appearance to those commonly found within the district in terms of size, profile, and configuration. While no material is expressly prohibited by the Historic Design Guidelines, a high quality wood or aluminum-clad wood window product often meets the Guidelines with the stipulations listed below.

SIZE: Windows should feature traditional dimensions and proportions as found within the context area.

SASH: Meeting rails must be no taller than 1.25”. Stiles must be no wider than 2.25”. Top and bottom sashes must be equal in size unless otherwise approved.

DEPTH: There should be a minimum of 2” in depth between the front face of the window trim and the front face of the top window sash. This must be accomplished by recessing the window sufficiently within the opening or with the installation of additional window trim to add thickness. All windows should be supplied in a block frame and exclude nailing fins which limit the ability to sufficiently recess the windows.

TRIM: Window trim must feature traditional dimensions and architecturally appropriate casing and sloped sill detail. Paired windows should be separated by wood framing and trim (mullion).

GLAZING: Windows should feature clear glass. Low-e or reflective coatings are not recommended for replacements. The glazing should not feature faux divided lights with an interior grille. If approved to match a historic window configuration, the window should feature true, exterior muntins.

COLOR: Wood windows should feature a painted finish. If a clad or non-wood product is approved, white or metallic manufacturer’s color is not allowed and color selection must be presented to staff.

This



These windows feature a traditional profile, installation depth, and proportions that are consistent with the Guidelines.

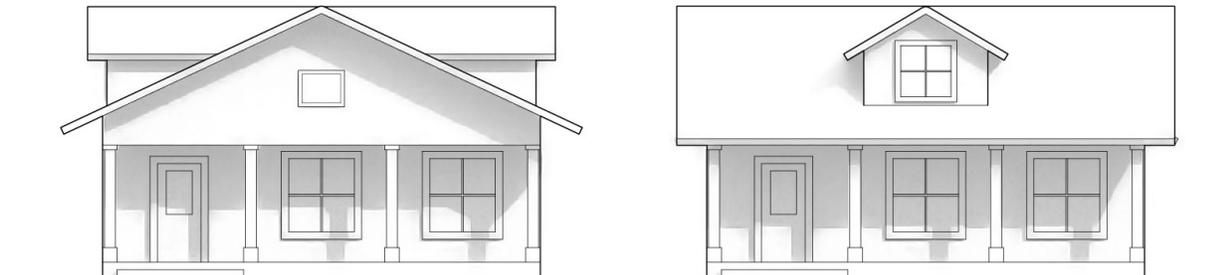
Not This



Windows that are not consistent with the Guidelines negatively impact a project's ability to appear compatible within a historic district.

Roof Form Comparison

A building's roof form can have a significant impact on how its mass is perceived. The Guidelines encourage roof forms that reduce visual prominence when viewed from the street such as hip, side gable, or hip-on-gable (jerkinhead). In the example below, two very similar homes have been designed with identical footprints and overall ridge heights. In elevation, they appear similar in mass and scale:



However, when viewed from the street in true perspective, the front-gabled home appears taller and more prominent. By utilizing roof forms that slope away from the public realm, the mass and scale of the side-gabled home appear to be less:

