

2.2 Building Site, Structures & Additions

The relationship between a historic building, outbuildings, and landscape features within property boundaries, or the building site, helps to define the character of the property and should be considered an integral part of overall planning for a rehabilitation project.

St. Charles’ oldest neighborhoods were established and laid out prior to use of the automobiles. The houses were oriented toward the street and access by the pedestrian, not the automobile. Barns or carriage houses were often located behind or to the side of the house. When automobiles and garages became common, most were built detached behind a house, or were accessed from an alley behind the house.

Today, vehicular access to St. Charles’ historic buildings is by driveways off the street or through rear alleys. The addition of garages and parking places in areas other than rear yards is thus not consistent with traditional streetscape design.

Building Site

Recommended

- ✓ Protect and preserve known archeological material in place whenever possible.
- ✓ Retain the historic relationship between buildings, landscape features, and open space.
- ✓ Periodically evaluate the overall condition of materials and structures to determine whether more than protection and maintenance are required.
- ✓ Identify, retain, and preserve the character defining features of the site including structures, driveways, walkways, lighting and fences.
- ✓ Remove non-significant buildings, additions, or site features which detract from the historic character of the site.
- ✓ Repairing features of buildings and the site by reinforcing the historic materials. Repair will also generally include replacement in-kind, with a compatible substitute material of those extensively deteriorated or missing parts of features where there are surviving prototypes such as fencing and paving.

Not Recommended

- ❑ Radically changing the character defining feature of the site.
- ❑ Removing or relocating character defining historic buildings or landscape features.
- ❑ Moving buildings onto the site, thus creating a false historical appearance.
- ❑ Failing to maintain site drainage so that buildings and site features are damaged.
- ❑ Lowering the grade level adjacent to a building to permit development of a formerly below-grade area, such as a basement, in a manner that would drastically change the historic relationship of the building to its site.
- ❑ Failing to survey the building site prior to the beginning of rehabilitation project work so that, as a result, important archeological material is destroyed.
- ❑ Stripping features from buildings and the site such as wood siding, iron fencing, or masonry balustrades.

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Recommended Continued.....

- ✓ Providing continued protection of masonry, wood, and architectural metals which comprise building and site features through appropriate surface treatments.
- ✓ Designing and constructing a new feature of a building or site when the historic feature is completely missing, such as an outbuilding, terrace, or driveway. It may be based on historical, pictorial, and physical documentation; or be a new design that is compatible with the historic character of the building and site.
- ✓ Designing new exterior additions to historic buildings which are compatible with the historic character of the site and which preserve the historic relationship between a building or buildings, landscape features, and open space.
- ✓ Designing new onsite parking, loading docks, or ramps when required by the new use so that they are as unobtrusive as possible and assure the preservation of character-defining features of the site.

Not Recommended Continued.....

- ❑ Replacing an entire element of the building or site such as a fence, walkway, or driveway when repair of materials and limited replacement of deteriorated or missing parts are appropriate.
- ❑ Using a substitute material for the replacement part that does not convey the visual appearance of the surviving parts of the building or site feature or that is physically or chemically incompatible.
- ❑ Removing a feature of the building or site that is unrepairable and not replacing it; or replacing it with a new feature that does not convey the same visual appearance.
- ❑ Creating a false historical appearance because the replaced feature is based on insufficient historical, pictorial, and physical documentation.
- ❑ Placing parking facilities directly adjacent to historic buildings where automobiles may cause damage to the buildings or landscape features or be intrusive to the building site.
- ❑ Introducing new construction onto the building site which is visually incompatible in terms of size, scale, design, materials, color and texture or which destroys historic relationships on the site.

Driveways, Parking, and Paving

Access to properties in St. Charles is generally from driveways added along side lot lines from the street or from rear alleys. Within the districts, original driveway materials such as concrete should be preserved and new driveways should be designed with traditional materials and placement.

Recommended

- ✓ Maintain the pavements original design, materials, and placement.
- ✓ Construct driveways in the front or side yards with brick, concrete, or concrete tracks (narrow strips). Asphalt or textured concrete designed to look like brick pavers are also appropriate materials.
- ✓ Locate parking areas in the rear yard nearer the alley than the building.
- ✓ Screen parking area with shrubs, trees, or fences.
- ✓ Locate commercial parking in rear lots.

Not Recommended

- ❑ Placing driveways of semi-circular or drive-thru design in front yards.
- ❑ Locating the parking area closer than the front wall of the building.



A detached garage located behind a house, with limited visibility from the street. The walk from the front door leads directly to the sidewalk, not the driveway.



A circular driveway which provides access to a port cochere is a significant feature. The original layout and pavement should be preserved.

Sidewalks and Walkways

Sidewalks and walkways in St. Charles' historic districts are primarily of concrete construction. Many of these were poured in the early 20th century and remain in good condition. The use of concrete is traditional and appropriate and the repair, replacement and addition of concrete walkways is recommended. Materials such as brick pavers and aggregate for walkways, though not as appropriate as concrete, may be used.



Recommended

- ✓ Original sidewalks should be preserved.
- ✓ Sidewalks installed for a dwelling should be smooth concrete in details, dimensions, and placement like original or early sidewalks.
- ✓ Limit the use of asphalt to driveway pavement.
- ✓ Brick pavers are acceptable alternatives.
- ✓ Connect entry walks leading from the front door directly to the public sidewalk.

Not Recommended

- ❑ Using asphalt, aggregate or pebble surfaced concrete used in front yards or areas of high visibility from public right of way.
- ❑ Connecting entry walks directly to the driveway, without providing a walk linking to the public sidewalk.

Points to Consider

When paving your driveway you may have to choose between asphalt or concrete. Some considerations and techniques include embossing, and/or staining asphalt to represent historic material. Additional consideration is the need to maintain asphalt with annual seal coating.

Grade Changes

The addition or removal of ground material on the site is known as a grade change. This should be avoided unless restoring the historic original grade. In addition to changing the visual character of the property, a grade change may also result in damage to the structure, or erosion and drainage problems on the property or the one adjacent to it.

Recommended

- ✓ Maintain or restore the original grade of the property.
- ✓ Make minor grade changes that directs water runoff away from the structure.

Not Recommended

- ❑ Changing the grade so it obscures or conceals a dwelling.
- ❑ Changing the grade so it changes the character of the streetscape or the relationship of buildings to their sites.

Fences

Wood or woven wire fences were used in St. Charles' residential areas to separate lots, outline front yards, and enclose domestic animals and keep unwanted pests out. Cast iron was also used in the city's residential areas, however, few original cast iron fences remain standing.

Historic fences should be preserved and maintained. The construction of new fences based upon historic designs and materials is appropriate. Many Victorian era wooden front yard fences were essentially ornamental and open. Fence posts were usually thick, often measuring eight inches square or more.

Most of the classic picket and baluster fences built through the 1930s feature a continuous horizontal bottom board or baseboard, which is seldom part of modern picket fence designs today. This baseboard is a wooden imitation of a stone base, called a plinth, which is a feature of many iron and stone fences. The baseboard is an easy way to enhance the design of a simple picket fence as well as to add strength. Visually, a baseboard is desirable since it gives a fence a much more solid, architectural appearance.



Wood Picket Fence

Recommended

- ✓ Maintain and preserve original materials.
- ✓ Use traditional plantings such as hedges and shrubs as alternatives for fences.
- ✓ Pickets or spindles should be no wider than four inches, and be set between a top rail and a bottom baseboard and rail.
- ✓ Use privacy fences only in rear or side yards not adjacent to public right of way.

Not Recommended

- ❑ Using chain link, louver, split rails, concrete block, basket weave, horizontal board, stockade or shadow-box designs.
- ❑ Using solid board fences in front yards.



Cast Iron Fence



Wood Fence with Bottom Rail



Stone wall and piers with fence

Garbage Collectors

Garbage collectors (cans, dumpsters, etc.) should be located at the rear of dwellings or along alleys. Large garbage collectors at the rear of office buildings, churches, or apartments should be screened with landscaping or wood panel fences.

Recommended

- ✓ For institutional, commercial, and multi-family buildings, garbage collectors should be located at the rear of buildings and be screened from the street view with shrubbery and fencing.
- ✓ Store collectors in least visible area.
- ✓ Use landscaping and/or fence to aid in concealment.

Not Recommended

- ❑ Permanently storing collectors in front yard or areas of high visibility.

Landscaping

St. Charles' shade trees are important to the character of the locally designated districts and existing trees should be regularly pruned and cared for. New trees should be planted where they will not obscure the front of a dwelling.



Recommended

- ✓ Prune trees regularly.
- ✓ Contact the city if trees in the tree bank (parkway) need trimming.
- ✓ Plant new trees in parkways which are indigenous or traditional to the historic districts (a permit is required).
- ✓ Consult with a tree specialist and the city tree commission for appropriate tree species.

Not Recommended

- ❑ Planting trees or shrubbery too close to the structure.
- ❑ Allowing trees and shrubbery to overgrow and conceal, obscure, or damage a dwelling.
- ❑ Constructing berms along a public right of way.

Swimming Pools

The installation of an in ground or above ground swimming pool in rear or side yards is acceptable, as long as they are effectively fenced and screened when viewed from the public right of way at the front elevation.

Recommended

- ✓ Locate in rear yards and screen from the street view by fencing and landscaping.

Not Recommended

- ❑ Using chain link fencing.

Mechanical Systems

Today's air conditioning and heating units often require condensers and other mechanical units to be placed within a few feet of the exterior walls of a dwelling. Heating and cooling units should be placed at the rear or sides of dwellings not readily visible from the street. The placement of these units at the front of dwellings is not appropriate and should be avoided. Screening of these units on side or rear facades through shrubbery is highly recommended. In some instances, screening with fencing or latticework is also acceptable.

Recommended

- ✓ Locate units where they are not readily visible from the street.
- ✓ Screen with shrubbery, fencing, or lattice when in areas of high visibility.
- ✓ Locate electrical conduits, gas meters, cable TV connections, satellite dishes, and other mechanical equipment on the rear or side of a building.

Not Recommended

- ❑ Placing window units in front of structure
- ❑ Locating ground-mounted mechanical units in front of the house.
- ❑ Removing or modifying the original window sash and trim to install a window unit.

Garages, Carriage Houses and Outbuildings

St. Charles' historic neighborhoods contain a wide variety of outbuildings, including carriage houses, garages, and sheds. These add to the neighborhoods defining character and many have significant architectural value.

The carriage house, the predecessor of the garage, was used in the pre-auto period to house horses, tackle and horse drawn vehicles. These structures are generally larger than auto garages and often resemble a small barn. They were located at the rear of the lot, often with alley access. Some carriage houses were designed to resemble the architectural style of the main dwelling.

Most 19th century Carriage Houses have been converted to use as auto garages. Early 20th century garages were generally small, single bay structures located in the rear of the lot. Some were modified with bump-outs and additions to accommodate the larger post WWII autos. Most modern garages are multi-bay with additional space for seasonal storage.



Recommended

- ✓ Preserve and maintain the character defining features that are original to the outbuilding.
- ✓ For new outbuildings use construction techniques and roof form style which matches the general character of the main dwelling.
- ✓ When retrofitting or updating, preserve original materials.
- ✓ Maintain original doors to the greatest extent possible, and if desired, retrofit them with modern hardware and door openers.

Not Recommended

- ❑ Moving or relocating original structure off the property or to another part of the lot.
- ❑ Changing the original style and character defining features to something not compatible with adjacent structures.
- ❑ Constructing new outbuildings which are out of scale and proportion relative to the existing dwelling.

Carriage Houses/Barns



Early Auto Garages



Outbuilding



Building Additions

Historically additions were added to homes as the need for additional space demanded. Often the additional space was for bedrooms, bathrooms and kitchens, with such additions being simpler in design than the original part of the home. Although they may not exactly match the original home's architectural design, many additions still have significance to the home's history.

Property owners of landmarks and buildings in Historic Districts are often concerned that they will be unable to enlarge their home. Additions are allowed and are encouraged to insure homes continue to be functional and provide adequate space. Adding an addition to make a home more functional is a better alternative than having the home demolished. The key to an addition is to make sure the addition is compatible with the original home, in size, scale, materials and architectural style.

Recommended

- ✓ Preserve and maintain the character defining features that are original to the home.
- ✓ Use construction techniques and roof form style which matches the general character of the main dwelling.
- ✓ Maintain original doors and windows to the greatest extent possible. If some windows and doors need to be removed to make way for the new addition consider reusing them in the new addition.
- ✓ Although you may want to differentiate between the addition and the original home to make it visible where the addition is, key items like window size and patterns, materials and architectural style should match the existing home. The use of simpler decorative elements is a great way to differentiate the new from the old.
- ✓ Locating an addition to the rear of the house or to the side of the house. Side additions should be stepped back from the front elevation to blend the appearance of the addition from the street.

Not Recommended

- ❑ Using a different architectural style for the addition.
- ❑ Making the addition more dominant than the original home, in terms of proportion, visual mass or overall height.
- ❑ Using different materials that do not compliment the existing home.
- ❑ Locating a significant addition on or immediately adjacent to the front elevation of the house

Recommended Building Additions

Sensitivity to Location

Additions to smaller houses require careful planning to ensure that the addition does not visually overwhelm the existing house. The house shown below is located on a corner lot with significant visibility. The existing street-facing elevations were maintained and the addition was located at the rear corner of the building. The addition includes matching materials, window types, roof type and roof pitch.



Flexibility for Rear Additions

Additions to the less visible rear of a home offer a greater opportunity to add square footage to an existing house without negatively affecting the existing building. This addition utilizes similar architecture and details to blend with the existing house. Although taller and more massive than the older original portion of the house, the use of similar roof form and roof pitch are sensitive to the original house.



Recommended Building Additions

Sensitivity to Setting and Scale

Buildings located in prominent locations can be expanded without detracting from the composition of the original architecture. The building shown below was expanded by connecting a one-story rear wing of the house to a new two-story addition set back and off to the side of the original house. The smaller scale of the addition and sensitivity to roof height and pitch relative to the house ensures that the original significant elevation of the house remains the most prominent feature.



Connecting “wing”



Similar but simpler architecture

Window size and patterns, materials, and architectural style all match the house, however, the details are more simplified. Following these principles will prevent the addition from visually competing with the original building.