

CHAPTER 2:
INTRODUCTION TO DESIGN REVIEW



DESIGN GUIDELINES FOR CENTRAL CITY

Chapter Cover Photograph:

Central City as photographed by H.H. Jackson between 1880-89.

CHAPTER 2: INTRODUCTION TO DESIGN REVIEW

This chapter explains the philosophical basis for the design guidelines and presents the city's goals for the district, which are the prime directives that the guidelines are written to achieve. The basic organization and format of the guidelines are also described.

The influence of the natural setting on settlement patterns

Central City exhibits a distinctive character that reflects a response to strong environmental influences during the mining boom period. Massive mountain ridges that frame the town, swift-flowing creeks and veins of precious metal all played their part in shaping the city into the settlement patterns that are unique to Central City. In essence, the mountainous topography played a major role in defining the character of the community during its period of historic significance and many of these defining features survive today.

Major streets followed established drainages, primarily Gregory Gulch and Spring Creek, where roads were comparatively easy to construct. The commercial core of town, located along Main and the western portion of Gregory, was sited at the major crossroads to maximize exposure to passing traffic. The road between Central City and Black Hawk followed Gregory Gulch as the line of least resistance, and linked residences and businesses that were located there. The gulch had a variety of uses, including housing, stores, social halls, stables, a couple of mines and even a stamp mill.

Steep slopes mandated that secondary streets wind along hillsides, following the dominant topography. The High Streets (including Third through Eighth) that reflect the contours of the hillside north of downtown are evidence of this settlement pattern. Level building sites were constructed by laying stone retaining walls and filling behind them; the result is the series of terraces that dot the hillsides, primarily in the residential areas. Residential neighborhoods fanned out from the core of town to the west, east and south, but the largest neighborhood was to the north. In part, this may have been because these lots faced the sun, which was an important consideration in all Rocky Mountain mining towns.

Railroads also shaped the town. The laying of track was limited to a grade that could be negotiated by the steel wheels of the locomotives, which often meant that a rail grade had to wind hundreds of feet horizontally in order to gain only tens of feet vertically. These lines wound their way to major mines, mills and depots that served the settlements in the region. In Central City, a depot was located south of Bridge Street, between Spring and Nevada Streets, and warehouses flourished nearby, primarily along lower Spring Street; most were cut into the hillside, with the rail line feeding them from above and customers being served from below.

Throughout the settled areas, mines sprang up wherever precious metals were accessible. As a result, even relatively homogeneous residential areas were occasionally punctuated by a mine shaft on the horizon. The majority of the mines, however, lay outside the core of the city, often along secondary drainages and higher on the hillsides overlooking town.

The concept of "neighborhoods" within the historic district

All of these "natural forces," combined with the aspirations of energetic miners to shape Central City, set the stage for the diverse collection of architecture and site features that emerged. As a result of this variety of forces, the city itself is not uniform in character but is, in fact, heterogeneous. It is a collection of distinct neighborhoods, each with its own unique characteristics. The commercial core, for example, is dominated by rectangular masonry blocks that are built to the sidewalk edge with prominent display windows at the sidewalk level. This contrasts sharply with the residential neighborhood to the north of downtown, where single family houses are the dominant building forms.

What is important to note, therefore, is that even though all of Central City is "historic," not all types of historic buildings are uniformly distributed throughout the town. Building types vary with the neighborhoods, and thus the scale and character of building varies throughout the city. A primary goal for the historic district is to preserve and reinforce the distinction among neighborhoods as seen historically. Therefore the recognition that Central City is composed of neighborhoods is the foundation of the city's design guidelines.

The concept of "visual continuity" in neighborhoods

Each of Central City's neighborhoods has a distinct visual character. Many of these areas exhibit a sense of visual continuity because of the similarity of building types and siting characteristics found there. For example, in most residential neighborhoods, small cottages are evenly spaced along the street, creating a rhythm of buildings and open spaces. By contrast, the warehouses along Spring Street have massive masonry fronts and align at the sidewalk edge, creating a strong sense of visual continuity. Preserving and enhancing this visual continuity within each neighborhood is also a primary goal of the guidelines.

By contrast, a few of the neighborhoods are not homogeneous within themselves, but are diverse architecturally. These generally contained a variety of land uses, which is reflected in the mix of building types found there. Historically, this was true of the Gregory Gulch, which contained a variety of building types in a mix of sizes that were randomly sited throughout the area. In such neighborhoods, the goal is to sustain, even reinforce, this diversity.

The concept of "compatibility" in the district

Another goal for the historic district is to have new construction be compatible with its historic context. In general, buildings similar in character to those seen in the neighborhood historically will be compatible. This similarity is achieved through the use of similar elements of site designs, building forms, materials and details. It is also essential that new buildings exhibit a strong reference to structures in the area seen historically. This concept of "historic reference" means new building designs should accurately draw upon historic precedents. It does not mean, however, that historic styles must be meticulously copied. Subtle distinctions between old and new buildings are welcomed, in order to aid in interpreting the evolution of the district.

In developing the guidelines, the city drew upon the historic character of the community as a base of reference for many policies and, in general, those features known to exist in the period of historic significance are considered appropriate elements for new designs. There are some cases, however, where an historic feature is not considered appropriate for new building because of health and safety codes or concern for durability. Tar paper, for example, is not considered an appropriate cladding material, even though it was used in the past.

In other cases, use of a certain material is discouraged because it appeared in limited amounts historically and its extensive use would alter the character of the district. For example, exposed concrete foundations were used historically, but less so than rock and therefore rock is preferred for new foundations in order to maintain the predominance of this material.

The relationship of design review to the city's zoning ordinance

The city's zoning ordinance clearly stipulates that any development in the city is subject to review by the Historic Preservation Commission, even for "Use by Right" development that otherwise meets the stipulations of the zoning ordinance. The zoning ordinance establishes basic limits on development for each land use zone in the city, primarily focusing on setbacks and building heights. It is important to note, however, that these are maximums, or in some cases minimums, that in theory can be met, but must be reviewed on a case-by-case basis by the Historic Preservation Commission to determine their appropriateness in the immediate context. However, the HPC does not itself rule on zoning issues and the guidelines are not intended to allow a more lenient interpretation of zoning regulations.

This is specifically noted in the zoning ordinance with respect to Special Review Uses. These uses, which include gaming, are allowed only upon special review, "...so that the community is assured that such uses are compatible with their locations and surrounding land uses." (Section 5.1, zoning ordinance). The ordinance further states that the criteria for considering a special review use shall include consideration "...that such use/development will (be) compatible with character of any surrounding established areas..." (Section 5.7(1) (b)) and that the approving agency may impose modifications or conditions on the project that may include "...size and location of the site, internal traffic circulation, fencing screening, and landscape separations, including open space, building bulk and locations and signs..." (Section 5.7 (2))

The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation

Central City's design guidelines, specifically those for the rehabilitation of historic buildings, are modelled in part on the Secretary of the Interior's *Standards and Guidelines for Historic Preservation Projects*, including the standards and guidelines for the rehabilitation of historic buildings. The Secretary's

standards, and supplemental information that may be published by the National Park Service to assist in interpreting them, are relevant information that the Historic Preservation Commission may also consider in making its determination of the appropriateness of a proposed project. These basic principles, as set forth by the Secretary of the Interior, are adapted and expanded in the city's guidelines.

In general, the guidelines for rehabilitation ask that, to the greatest extent possible, all historic features of a structure be preserved as is; when preservation is not feasible, repair should occur; when repair of the historic feature is not possible, then replacement in kind is appropriate. Note that only rehabilitation work proposed by the applicant is subject to review.

With respect to new construction, the Secretary of the Interior's standards generally encourage designs that are compatible and yet distinguishable as being a product of their own time. In Central City, a goal is to develop buildings that appear similar to those seen historically in the neighborhood, although subtle distinctions that would aid in interpreting the history of the street are allowed.

The Americans with Disabilities Act

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), signed into law on July 26, 1990, extends comprehensive civil rights to individuals with disabilities. The ADA requires equal opportunity for persons with disabilities in employment, State and local government programs, telecommunications, transportation, and places of public accommodation (which includes commercial businesses). Public accommodations are obligated to remove barriers when alterations are made, and when alterations are not planned, to remove barriers when it is "readily achievable." To the greatest extent possible, historic properties must be made as accessible as non-historic properties. However, Congress recognized the national interest in preserving significant historic properties, and established alternative requirements for buildings and facilities that cannot be made physically accessible without threatening or destroying their significance. These alternative minimum requirements are undertaken in consultation with the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO). For example, one accessible entrance must be provided. If it is not possible to make the public entrance accessible, then an alternative, unlocked entrance is acceptable. Directional signage at the primary entrance and a notification system at the accessible entrance must be provided. Further, if it is

determined in consultation with the SHPO that compliance with the alternative minimum requirements would also threaten or destroy the significance of an historic building, alternative methods of access may be used. For example, an alternative method of accessibility in a small historic house museum may be to provide audio-visual materials and devices to show inaccessible areas of the historic property. (See "Preserving the Past and Making it Accessible for People with Disabilities," National Park Service, October, 1992). The Historic Preservation Commission will take these conditions into consideration in evaluating design proposals, and when it is appropriate, will coordinate reviews with the State Historic Preservation Officer.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES FOR THE HISTORIC DISTRICT

The city holds the following goals for the historic district, with respect to actions that may affect preservation of historic buildings and the character of new building and site design:

1. **The primary goal for the historic district at large is to preserve the integrity of the National Historic District.**
2. **The primary goal for preservation of existing historic buildings is to preserve the integrity of all surviving historic structures and sites.**
3. **The primary goal for new construction is to reinforce the historic character of the district.**

The city also holds the following objectives for the district:

General objectives:

- **Respect the period of historic significance (from 1859 to 1918) and, for the core area, the post-fire period of 1874 to 1903 in particular.**
- **Strengthen visual continuity within each neighborhood as it is seen from the public way.**

Objectives for Historic Preservation

- Preserve the integrity of the National Historic Landmark District.
- Preserve all contributing historic structures.
- Preserve all sites with historically significant events or structures.
- Preserve historic site features, including catwalks, bridge walkways and stairways as a part of the character of Central City (where safety codes allow).

Objectives for New Construction

- Existing land forms are to be considered in future development.
- New construction in existing neighborhoods should reflect the historical development patterns of filling and terracing.
- Historic drainages and creeks should be respected in future development, where feasible.
- New construction should be integrated into the existing context.
- New construction should exhibit references to historic buildings in the neighborhood and be consistent in style.
- New building should reflect the traditional lot coverage patterns of the neighborhood and traditional setbacks should be respected.
- Historic and scenic view corridors should be respected.

The city does not seek to take the district back in time.

Colonial Williamsburg is an example of reconstructing the past. Only a few of the original buildings survived when John D. Rockefeller began the restoration of the town in the 1930s. Numerous buildings were reconstructed, based on extensive research, and the facility now serves as an outdoor history museum. In some cases, later "historic" buildings that did not fit within the period of reconstruction were removed.

When embarking on the reconstruction approach, a difficult question is determining to which date to restore the district. Since the district was dynamic, even during its period of significance, selecting a date would be difficult. Some sites in Central City have had more than one structure on the site. Which of these buildings, if it were to be reconstructed, would accurately express the community's heritage? This approach, therefore, is not espoused in Central City.

Nationally, most preservationists frown on the "reconstruction approach" as a district-wide policy, because it erases significant portions of the district's history, losing years in which change did occur. When applied on a broad scale in the district, this can create confusion about the city's genuine history and the evolution of the street would be difficult to read. However, there may be special cases, on individual sites for example, where a building is such a strong social icon that its reconstruction may be merited. It is important to note, however, that even a reconstruction is not an historic building, and therefore does not contribute to the historic integrity of the district. Although it would almost certainly be visually compatible, it would not have historic significance. An alternative to an exact reproduction is to build a compatible structure of similar mass and scale on the site, but have it be distinguishable from the earlier structure in the details of its design.

The Design Review Process

The Historic Preservation Commission consists of seven members who are appointed by the Mayor of Central City with the consent of a majority of the City Council; all share an interest and knowledge in historic preservation, building or design. The Historic Preservation Commission holds the following duties and powers:

- To conduct surveys of structures - interior and exterior - for the purpose of determining those of historical and/or architectural significance; to maintain and periodically revise detailed listings of such historically and/or architecturally significant structures and areas; and to classify the information with respect to national, state, regional, or local significance, as to period or field of interest.
- To recommend to the City Council the alteration of the boundaries of the Historic District for the purposes of preserving and enhancing the Historic District.
- To establish an appropriate system of markers for historic structures and areas.

- To recommend to the City Council amendments to the Design Guidelines of Central City.
- To issue Certificates of Appropriateness prior to the issuance of a building permit for erection, interior and exterior demolition, moving, reconstruction, or restoration. For properties designated as "Victorian Landmarks," designated portions of building interiors are also reviewed.
- To advise the Planning Commission, the City Council, the Building Inspector, and other public agencies in matters involving structures and areas of historical and/or architectural significance.
- To advise owners or residents of historically and/or architecturally significant structures or areas regarding problems, restoration techniques, and resources available for historic preservation.
- To prepare and publish maps, brochures and descriptive material about the city's structures, and areas of historical and/or architectural significance.
- To assist and encourage organizations or persons who desire to protect, enhance, or perpetuate the use of structures and areas of historic and/or architectural significance.
- To encourage educational and cultural programs, tours, and events to advance the Commission's purposes.
- To report annually to the City Council. The report shall include a review of the Commission's decisions rendered during the year, a general survey addressing the appearance and condition of buildings in the City and comments on community trends.

How to Develop a Design Proposal

The City of Central has adopted official application procedures for submitting projects to be reviewed. These procedures are available at City Hall, separate from the Design Guidelines. The submittal procedures provide for a series of review sessions that begin with informal discussions with staff and Historic

Preservation Commission (HPC), then progress to a formal review of conceptual plans, then move to final design review. The following steps are general milestones in the process and should be followed in order to complete the review and approval process in the most timely and efficient manner possible. Applicants should also review the official application procedures as well, because details of the process may be amended from time to time.

Follow these steps:

Step 1: Review the design guidelines.

The intent of the review process is to ensure a high quality design that is compatible with the city's historic buildings, and to ensure that existing historic structures are preserved. The design guidelines form the basis for making determinations about appropriateness, and therefore no design work should begin without reviewing the guidelines and identifying the relevant chapters, including the special neighborhood guidelines.

Step 2: Study the context of the building site.

The HPC is concerned with the visual impact of a project on its setting. Whether one is renovating an older building, adding to an existing one or planning a new structure, a site visit is essential. Identify those significant features, both natural and historic, that are found in the immediate vicinity and the neighborhood at large, that define the context for the project. Many of the guidelines focus on respecting this existing context, and therefore clearly defining its character is essential.

Step 3: Discuss the project with city staff.

Prior to filing an application to the HPC, it is required that the applicant and/or architect, engineer or designer meet with the Historic Preservation Administrator in order to obtain information about the review process and the general guidelines. Preliminary reviews by the Commission are important, especially on larger projects. Applicants are therefore urged to schedule an informal discussion at the earliest stage of concept development.

A large and complex project may require a longer review period with intermediate steps of approval, while smaller, simpler projects may require only one submittal and a short review period. The application may request that the Commission grant a preliminary approval for all or part of the proposed project. However, a Certificate of Appropriateness shall only be granted after approval of the final plans.

Step 4: Develop the design using the guidelines.

Applicants should use the guidelines in this book to develop the design. Since the guidelines form the basis for the HPC's determination of appropriateness. Applicants will be asked in formal review sessions to describe how the proposed project meets the design guidelines. In some cases, applicants may feel that they can meet the general policies in a means other than that defined in the guidelines and may place such an argument before the commission. In such circumstances, the burden is upon the applicant to demonstrate how the proposed project meets the broader goals, objectives and policies that drive the guidelines.

Step 5: Submit the design for formal review.

Design documents must be filed in advance of formal HPC meetings to allow the commission members and the public at large adequate time to view the materials. Be certain that adequate information is provided and that all the pertinent details of the design are clearly presented. Many applications are delayed because the applicant does not clearly and concisely represent the project concepts. Specific submittal requirements are also defined in the application procedures (available at City Hall).

In general, submittal documentation should include:

1. Photographs of the existing structure and/or site, showing all sides of a structure and the street where the structure is located, and
2. A site plan on a sheet 24" x 36" and drawing at a scale of 1/8" = 1' including:
 - a. the layout of the entire project and its relation to surrounding properties and existing buildings thereon;
 - b. the location of points of entry and exit of motor vehicles, the circulation pattern and parking;

- c. preliminary building plans which show any existing structure;
- d. type and color of all exterior materials, including samples of the materials and paint chips;
- e. a statement describing the scope of the project, the design intentions, and the project's visual impact on its surroundings;
- f. a map indicating the existing topography and any proposed grade changes; and
- g. all changes to the site, including but not limited to: landscaping, walls, fences, exterior lighting, and the type and placement of signs.

Step 6: Present the design at a meeting of the HPC.

The HPC will hear comments on proposed projects at its regularly scheduled meetings. Documents used at the meeting should match those filed earlier. The Historic Preservation Commission, in accordance to Section 5.02, "Certificates of Appropriateness, Ordinance No. 286," shall review all plans for the erection, movement, demolition, reconstruction, restoration or alteration pursuant to Section 4.05 before a building permit is issued. In reviewing an application for a Certificate of Appropriateness, the HPC shall use the design guidelines and consider the various aspects of design with emphasis on the following:

- if the proposed changes would negatively impact the historic and architectural features of Central City;
- to what extent existing historic and architectural features are maintained and enhanced; and
- how the proposed change(s) relates to adjacent buildings and areas within Central City.

The HPC shall conduct the review and approve or disapprove the application within thirty (30) days after the hearing. The HPC shall submit, in writing, its decision to the Building Inspector along with the application, and if approved, a Certificate of Appropriateness.

Step 7: Revise the design based on Historic Preservation Commission comments.

In preliminary reviews, the HPC may indicate areas of concern, and in later formal reviews when the commission takes action, it may determine that a project does not adequately meet the design guidelines. In both cases, applicants may modify their designs based on commission comments and submit them for reconsideration.

The Appeals Process

If the Commission denies an application, or approves with conditions that the applicant feels are unacceptable, the applicant shall have the right to appeal to the City Council. Appeals by the Applicant must be filed with the City Clerk within thirty (30) days of the Commission's decision, and the basis of appeal shall include, but is not limited to:

- A. failure of the Commission to comply with the purposes and objectives defined in this Ordinance;
- B. undue interference with the design integrity of the proposal;
- C. economic hardship;
- D. considerations by the Commission of irrelevant information; and
- E. prohibition or unwarranted restriction of building type, material, or method.

The City Council shall then hear and decide any appeals within thirty (30) days of filing. The City Council may affirm, affirm with conditions, or reverse the HPC's decision.

ORGANIZATION OF THE DESIGN GUIDELINES

The Central City Design Guidelines are organized into chapters that correspond to a variety of different types of construction work. First, a section of "General Design Guidelines" applies to all projects in the city, including new construction and alterations. Second, a chapter on "Streetscape Design" is presented, which applies to projects in the public way. A third chapter addresses rehabilitation of historic buildings. This is followed by eleven chapters that provide guidelines for each of the designated design review neighborhoods of Central City.

Each of the neighborhood chapters begins with a statement of design goals for the neighborhood. The guidelines seek to maintain and enhance the unique and historic qualities that exist in the area. Following the initial goal statement for the neighborhood, a present day (1992) description of the neighborhood is provided, along with an historic description that refers to the neighborhood's physical appearance during the period of significance (1859-1918). These descriptions help to define the overall neighborhood context to which the individual guidelines respond. The specific neighborhood design guidelines themselves are organized into three sections: The first part addresses "Building Design Guidelines," the second section provides "Site Design Guidelines," and a final segment addresses issues related to overall "Neighborhood Character and Views."

Throughout each chapter in the book, the official Design Guideline statements are listed in numerical order in **bold type**. Some guidelines are prefaced with a statement *in italics* that describes a significant feature of the neighborhood and establishes a relevant policy that is consistent with the guideline statement that follows.

Each of the bold face guideline statements is followed by specific descriptions, which are presented as a list of "bulleted" sentences amplifying the interpretation of the design guidelines. These sentences are usually presented in a standard order. First, details of appropriate design concepts are listed, followed by concepts that are inappropriate. Finally, if any special conditions apply to one neighborhood differently from the general conditions, these are described. Illustrative drawings and photos accompany the text and aid in interpreting the intent of the written statements. These are considered a part of the guidelines as well.

A special note is needed about the relationship of the general guidelines to the neighborhoods. Many of the general guidelines state that a certain policy should be met, based on the context of the neighborhood. The context is defined in the descriptions of the architectural, site design and overall neighborhood characteristics provided at the beginning of each neighborhood chapter. These descriptions will be used by the Historic Preservation Commission when it considers how the general guidelines apply to individual settings. All of this information, including the general goals for the district, will be used by the Historic Preservation Commission to determine the appropriateness of proposed projects.