

C H A P T E R  
**1**  
PURPOSE OF  
DESIGN GUIDELINES



**This chapter presents the following topics:**

- Background of Design Guidelines p. 5
- The Historic Landmarks Commission p. 6
- Design Review in San Jose p. 6
- The San Jose Historic Resources Inventory p. 7
- Basic Principles for Historic Preservation p. 8
- Benefits of Preserving Historic Houses p. 9
- Choosing an Approach p. 10
- Planning a Preservation Project p. 11
- Design of Alterations p. 11
- Basic Principles for Site Design and Infill p. 11
- Religious and Institutional Structures p. 12



# PURPOSE OF DESIGN GUIDELINES

Historic preservation is an established part of city planning in San Jose. Over the past decades, the community has initiated preservation initiatives to protect the many historic houses that remain as reminders of the past. While the City remains dynamic and change continues to occur in response to varying community goals and economic conditions, preserving San Jose’s heritage remains a primary goal of the community. These design guidelines are written for use by property owners, residents, the Historic Landmarks Commission, City staff and others to foster the preservation of historic houses. They also provide useful information that may be applied in other preservation projects.

## Background of Design Guidelines

### What are Design Guidelines?

The guidelines convey general policies about the design of alterations to existing structures, additions, new construction and site work. However, they do not dictate solutions. Instead, they define a range of appropriate responses to a variety of specific design issues.

### Why Have Design Guidelines?

The Design Guidelines help establish a common understanding of preservation design principles and standards. Maintaining a high quality of life and retaining the charm and character that exists are important goals identified by the City and its residents. Therefore, these guidelines and the design review process through which they are administered promote preservation of the historic, cultural and architectural resources that reflect the history of San Jose. These resources are fragile and finite, and are vulnerable to inappropriate alteration and demolition. Recognizing this, the City of San Jose has established these design guidelines.

While the design guidelines are written for use by the layperson, property owners are strongly encouraged to enlist the assistance of qualified design and planning professionals, including architects and preservation consultants.

## Policy Base for Design Guidelines

The *San Jose 2020 General Plan* and the Historic Preservation Ordinance, Chapter 13.48 of the Municipal Code, contain goals and policies which encourage and promote historic preservation.

The General Plan is the “... adopted statement of policy for the physical development of a community. As such, it represents the official policy regarding the future character and quality of development” (*San Jose 2020 General Plan*, Page 1). “The Major Strategies of the General Plan provide a basic framework for planning. The Urban Conservation/Preservation Strategy states, in part, that “Preservation of specific structures or special areas is a part of the urban conservation strategy.... Historic and architectural structures add inestimable character and interest to the City’s image” (Page 40). The General Plan also includes a **Historic, Archaeological and Cultural Resources Goal** which is the:

Preservation of historically and archaeologically significant structures, sites, districts and artifacts in order to promote a greater sense of historic awareness and community identity and to enhance the quality of urban living (Page 92).

This section is supported by eleven historic preservation policies. In addition, historic preservation objectives are integrated throughout the document. Some specific goals and policies from the General Plan include:

- **Urban Conservation Policy #2:** The City should encourage new development, which enhances the desirable qualities of the community and existing neighborhoods (Page 48).
- **Community Identity Goal:** Enhance the sense of community identity in San Jose (Page 48).
- **Neighborhood Identity Policy #3:** Public and private development should be designed to improve the character of existing neighborhoods. Factors that cause instability or create urban barriers should be discouraged or removed (Page 48).
- **Urban Design Policy #1:** The City should continue to apply strong architectural and site design controls on all types of development for the protection and development of neighborhood character and for the proper transition between areas with different types of land uses (Page 63).
- **Discretionary Alternate Use Policies:** An objective of which is to: “Foster and encourage the implementation of such General Plan goals and policies such as the production of affordable housing, the preservation of historic structures, or the development of high quality and well designed projects (Pages 220-221).”

## The Historic Landmarks Commission

The Historic Landmarks Commission (HLC) is a seven-member advisory body appointed by the City Council. The Commission maintains the Historic Resources Inventory. The Commission also makes recommendations to the City Council on proposed City Landmarks, and to the Director of Planning on Historic Preservation Permits and other proposals which may affect historic structures, sites, or objects. The Historic Landmarks Commission is staffed by the Planning Division and holds regular public meetings on the first Wednesday of each month. For more information regarding these meetings, contact the Planning Division at (408) 277-4576.

## Design Review in San Jose

Follow these basic steps to understand the design review process in San Jose.

### Step 1. Consider professional design assistance.

Property owners are encouraged to engage licensed architects and other design and planning professionals to assist them in developing their concepts. Doing so may help facilitate the review process.

### Step 2. Check other City regulations.

The guidelines are a supplement to other adopted City regulations. The Planning Division, of the City of San Jose Department of Planning, Building and Code Enforcement, can provide information about certain regulations, which also may affect the design character of a project. Examples include:

- The City of San Jose 2020 General Plan
- The City of San Jose Municipal Code
- The City of San Jose’s Zoning Ordinance
- The City of San Jose’s Historic Preservation Ordinance
- The California State Historic Building Code (SHBC)

### Step 3. Become familiar with the design guidelines.

Review the basic organization of this guidelines document and determine which chapter(s) will apply to a project.

### Step 4. Review the site context.

Consider immediately adjacent properties and also the character of an entire block. In many cases, the character of an entire historic district is also an important consideration.

### Step 5. Develop a design concept using the guidelines.

The guidelines form the basis for the design review process.

**Step 6. Prepare and submit a complete application packet for formal review.**

An application packet should be prepared and submitted to the City for projects subject to review. Adequate documentation is essential to provide a complete understanding of the work proposed.

As the sketches on this page illustrate, if a drawing is to be included in the submittal package, it should be drafted to scale and executed in a manner that clearly depicts the character of the proposed work.

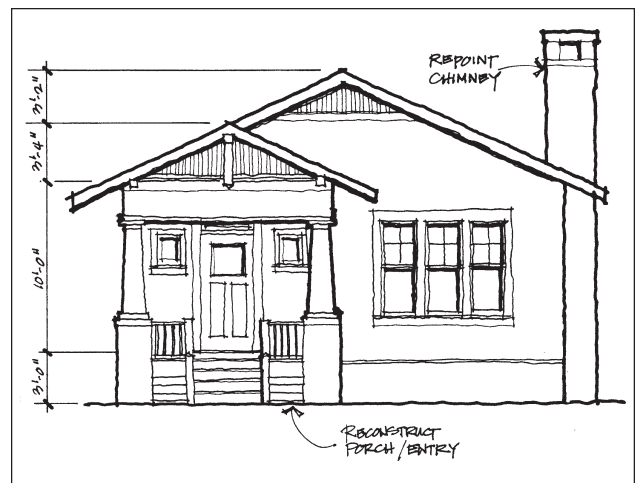
For a complete list of required submittal documents, contact the Planning Division.

**The San Jose Historic Resources Inventory**

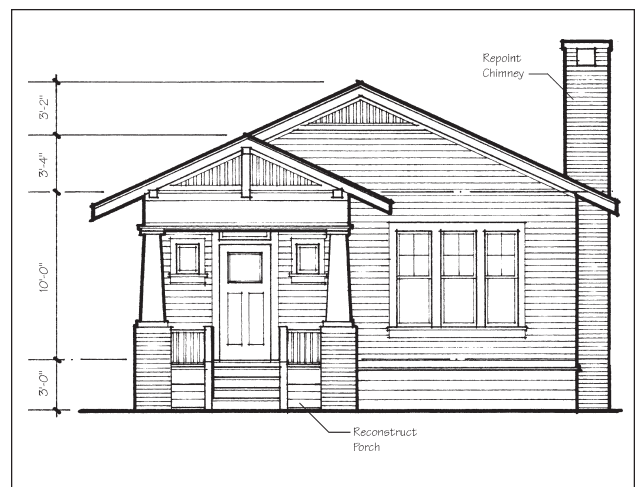
The City’s Historic Resources Inventory is a database of known and potential historic properties. It is a resource for designating future City Landmarks and Historic Districts. The Inventory is used as a reference guide for land use and development planning. Listing in the Inventory allows property owners to utilize the State Historic Building Code.



*Inappropriate drawing: the scale and character are not clearly conveyed, nor are there any dimensions.*



*Appropriate drawing: while in free-hand, this drawing does adequately convey the scale and character of the proposed work.*



*Appropriate drawing: mechanically drafted to scale, this drawing best conveys the character of the proposed work.*

## Basic Principles for Historic Preservation

These design guidelines incorporate principles set forth in *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties*. The Secretary of the Interior's Standards are general rehabilitation guidelines established by the National Park Service. These standards are policies that normally serve as a basis for more detailed design guidelines. The City of San Jose uses *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation* as a basis for these guidelines. The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation appear in Appendix A.

### The Concept of Historic Significance

What makes a property historically significant? It is generally recognized that a certain amount of time must pass before the historical significance of a property can be evaluated. The National Register, for example, suggests that a property be at least 50 years old or have extraordinary importance before it may be considered for listing.

The City of San Jose Historic Preservation Ordinance states that properties may be significant where:

- Its character, interest or value as part of the local, regional, state or national history, heritage or culture;
- Its location as a site of a significant historic event;
- Its identification with a person or persons who significantly contributed to the local, regional, state or national culture and history;
- Its exemplification of the cultural, economic, social or historic heritage of the City of San Jose;
- Its portrayal of the environment of a group of people in an era of history characterized by a distinctive architectural style;
- Its embodiment of distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type or specimen;
- Its identification as the work of an architect or master builder whose individual work has influenced the development of the City of San Jose;
- Its embodiment of elements of architectural or engineering design, detail, materials or craftsmanship which represents a significant architectural innovation or which is unique.

### *The Basic Principles for Preservation in San Jose*

While the guidelines provide direction for specific design issues, some basic principles of preservation form the foundation for them. The following preservation principles apply in San Jose:

#### **1. Respect the historic design character of the building.**

Don't try to change a building's style or make it look older than it really is. Confusing the character by mixing elements of different styles is not appropriate.

#### **2. Protect and maintain significant features and stylistic elements.**

Distinctive stylistic features or examples of skilled craftsmanship should be treated with sensitivity. The best preservation procedure is to maintain historic features through proper maintenance from the outset so that intervention is not required. This includes rust removal, caulking, limited paint removal and reapplication of paint.

#### **3. Preserve key, character-defining features of the property.**

Key features are those that help convey the character of the resource as it appeared during its period of historic significance. These may include the basic structural system and building materials, as well as windows, doors, porches and ornamentation. Typically, those features that are on the front of a building or that are highly visible from a public way will be most important.

#### **4. Repair deteriorated historic features, and replace only those elements that cannot be repaired.**

Maintain the existing material, using recognized preservation methods whenever possible.



## Period of Significance

Every historic house has a *period of significance*—or the time span during which it gained architectural, historical or cultural importance. A property is significant because it represents or is associated with a particular period or specific date in history. Frequently, this period of significance is its construction date and may also include the dates of subsequent additions or alterations. Portions of the building fabric that date from the period of significance typically contribute to the character of the structure.

Although more recent buildings may be considered significant, most historic houses in residential neighborhoods in San Jose date from a time that spans approximately 90 years (1860-1950s), from the time of the earliest surviving buildings, through the Arts and Crafts movement, through the development of the Mid-Century Modern style. Throughout this period, the city witnessed construction of a number of buildings and alterations that have become significant.

## Concept of “Integrity”

In addition to being historically significant, a property also must have integrity—a sufficient percentage of the structure must exhibit characteristics from the period of significance. The majority of the building’s structural system and its materials should date from that time and its key character-defining features also should remain intact. These may include architectural details, such as dormers and porches, ornamental brackets and moldings, materials such as exterior siding, as well as the overall mass and form of the building. It is these elements that allow a building to be recognized as a product of its time.

## Alterations

Many historic houses have experienced alterations over time, as design tastes changed or need for additional space occurred. In some cases, an owner would add a wing for a new bedroom, or to expand the kitchen. These early alterations typically were subordinate in scale and character to the main building. Alterations were often executed using materials that were similar to those in use historically.

Some early alterations may have taken on historic significance of their own. One constructed in a manner that was compatible with the original building and that is associated with the period of significance may merit preservation in its own right.

In contrast, more recent alterations usually have no historic significance. Some later additions detract from the character of the building and may obscure significant features, particularly enclosed porches. Removing such additions or alterations may be considered.

This tradition of alterations is anticipated to continue. It is important, however, that new alterations be designed in such a manner that they preserve the historic character of the primary structure.

## Benefits of Preserving Historic Houses

### Construction Quality

Lumber used in early San Jose came from mature trees, was properly seasoned and typically was milled to “full dimensions,” which often yielded stronger framing. These houses also were thoughtfully detailed and the finishes were generally of high quality—features that owners today appreciate. The high quality of construction in historic houses is therefore a “value” for many people.

### Livability and Quality of Life

When groups of houses occur together in their historic context, they create a street scene that is “pedestrian friendly,” which encourages walking and neighborly interaction. Decorative architectural features also contribute to a sense of identity, an attribute that is rare and difficult to achieve in newer areas of the city. This physical sense of place can also reinforce desirable community social patterns and contribute to a sense of security.

### Incentives

Owners of historic properties also have access to the California State Historic Building Code which allows more flexibility in some design or rehabilitation approaches. City Landmark properties can also apply for property tax reduction through a historic property contract with the City and enjoy an exemption from construction taxes.

## Economic Benefits

Historic houses are finite and cannot be replaced, making them precious commodities that many people seek. Therefore, preservation adds value to property. Rehabilitation projects also contribute more to the local economy than do new building programs because each dollar spent on a preservation project has a higher percentage devoted to labor and to the purchase of materials available locally. By contrast, new construction typically has a higher percentage of each dollar spent devoted to materials that are produced outside of the local economy and to special construction skills that may be imported as well. Therefore, when money is spent on rehabilitating a building, it has a higher “multiplier effect,” keeping more money circulating in the local economy.

Rehabilitating a historic house also can cost less than constructing a new one. In fact, the design guidelines presented in this document promote cost-saving measures, in that they encourage smaller and simpler solutions, which in themselves provide savings.

## Adaptability

Owners also recognize that the floor plans of historic houses easily accommodate changing needs. Rooms are frequently large, permitting a variety of uses while retaining the overall historic character of a structure’s exterior. Open space often exists on a lot to accommodate an addition in the rear, if needed.

## Responsibility of Ownership

Ownership of a historic property carries both the benefits described above and also a responsibility to respect the historic character of the property and its setting. While this responsibility does exist, it does not automatically translate into higher construction or maintenance costs. Ultimately, residents and property owners should recognize that historic preservation is a long-range community policy that promotes economic well-being and overall viability of the City at large.

## Choosing an Approach

Preservation projects may include a range of activities, such as maintenance of existing historic elements, repairs of deteriorated materials, the replacement of missing features and construction of new additions. When planning a preservation approach, consider the definitions of the following terms:

1. **Preservation.** The act or process of applying measures to sustain the existing form, integrity and material of a building. Some work focuses on keeping a property in good working condition by repairing features as soon as deterioration becomes apparent, using procedures that retain the original character and finish of the features. Property owners are strongly encouraged to maintain properties in good condition.
2. **Rehabilitation.** “Rehabilitation” is the process of returning a property to a state that makes a contemporary use possible while still preserving those portions or features of the property which are significant to its historical, architectural and cultural values. Rehabilitation may include a change in use of the building or additions.
3. **Renovation.** To “renovate” means to improve by repair, to revive. In renovation, the usefulness and appearance of the building is enhanced. The basic character and significant details of a building are respected and preserved, but some sympathetic alterations may also occur.
4. **Restoration.** To “restore,” one reproduces the appearance of a building exactly as it looked at a particular moment in time. This process may include the removal of later work or the replacement of missing historic features.
5. **Remodeling.** To change the historic design of a building is to “remodel” it. The appearance is altered by removing original details and by adding new features that are out of character with the original. Remodeling is inappropriate.
6. **Reconstruction.** To “reconstruct” a building means rebuilding a structure that no longer exists exactly as it appeared historically. For most instances in San Jose, the exact reconstruction of an extant historic house is inappropriate.



## Planning a Preservation Project

The first step in planning a preservation project is to identify any significant features and materials of the structure. Retaining such details will greatly enhance the overall quality of the project. If they are in good condition, then selecting an appropriate treatment will provide for proper preservation. In making the selection, follow this sequence:

1. **Preserve:** If a feature is intact and in good condition, maintain it as such.
2. **Repair:** If the feature is deteriorated or damaged, repair it to its original condition.
3. **Replace:** If it is not feasible to repair the feature, then replace it with one that is the same or similar in character (e.g., materials, detail, finish) to the original one. Replace only that portion which is beyond repair.
4. **Reconstruct:** If the feature is missing entirely, reconstruct it from appropriate evidence.
5. If a **new feature or addition** is necessary, design it in such a way as to minimize the impact on original features.

In essence, the least level of intervention is preferred. By following this tenet, the highest degree of integrity will be maintained for the property.

## Design of Alterations

Alterations may be considered for historic houses, however, these changes should occur in a manner that will not affect the integrity of the property. Because no two buildings will have the same design solution consider the following basic guidelines:

1. **Design any alterations to be compatible with the historic character of the property.**
  - Avoid alterations that would hinder the ability to interpret the original design character of the house.
  - Alterations that seek to imply an earlier historic period than that of the building are inappropriate.
2. **Avoid alterations that would damage historic features or materials.**

## Basic Principles for Site Design and Infill

Designing a building to fit within a traditional neighborhood or historic district requires careful thought. First, it is important to realize that, while a historic district conveys a certain sense of time and place associated with its history, it also remains dynamic, with alterations to existing structures and construction of new buildings occurring over time.

### *The Basic Principles for Site Design and Infill*

While the design guidelines for new construction provide direction for specific design issues, some basic design principles form the foundation for them. The following principles apply in San Jose:

#### **1. Respect the design character of the nearby historic properties.**

Don't try to make a new building look older than it is. The copying or exact duplication of architectural styles or specific historic buildings is discouraged. Often, a contemporary interpretation of those architectural styles seen historically will work best.

#### **2. Maintain the setbacks and alignments of buildings in the surrounding context.**

A new building should be set back a similar distance from the street as those nearby historic buildings and incorporate a landscaped area that is in keeping with the neighborhood. Other alignments, such as those seen from similar eave heights, porch heights and the relative alignment of window and door moldings, are also important.

#### **3. Relate to the scale of nearby historic buildings.**

A new building should relate to the general size, shape and proportions of those buildings seen historically. It is equally important for a new building to use similar primary building materials, at least in appearance.

#### **4. Relate to the size of the lot.**

A new building should be in proportion with the overall size of its lot. Generally, smaller homes are built on smaller lots, and larger homes are reserved for larger lots. Although many of the lots and the traditional scale of single-family houses in the historic districts are smaller than current tastes support, a new building should, to the greatest extent possible, maintain the established scale.

Design guidelines help assure that, when new building occurs, it will be in a manner that reinforces the basic visual characteristics of the area. This does not mean, however, that new buildings must look old. In fact, imitating historic styles found in San Jose is generally discouraged; historians prefer to be able to “read” the evolution of the street, discerning the apparent age of each building by its style and method of construction. They do so by interpreting the age of a building, placing its style in relative chronological order. When a new building is designed to imitate a historic style, this ability to interpret the history of the street is confused.

Rather than imitating older buildings, a new design should relate to the traditional design characteristics of a neighborhood while also conveying the stylistic trends of today. New construction may do so by drawing upon some basic building features—such as the way in which a building is located on its site, the manner in which it relates to the street and its basic mass, form and materials—rather than applying detailing which may or may not have been historically appropriate. When these design variables are arranged in a new building to be similar to those seen traditionally in the area, visual compatibility results. Therefore, it is possible to be compatible with the historic context while also producing a design that is distinguishable as being newer.

Some people may be confused about this concept; for many, the initial assumption is that any new building should appear to be old. On the contrary, the design guidelines for site design and infill presented later in this document encourage new buildings that can be distinguished as being of their own time. At the same time, they do promote new building designs that would relate to the more fundamental similarities of traditional buildings.

## Religious Institutions and Civic Buildings

The design guidelines presented in this document focus on principles for rehabilitation and infill of residential projects that reinforce the historic building fabric and enhance the pedestrian experience. To do so, they draw upon principles established in traditional residential buildings. While these represent the majority of property types that occur in the area, civic facilities also are a part of the mix.

Civic facilities include churches, schools, libraries and governmental offices. Traditionally, these buildings contrasted with the framework of houses. They stand apart from the rows of houses and are framed by a large, formal lawn as a foreground. Their entrances are more prominent, and often grand in scale. While they stand apart as individual structures, they are a part of the community. Religious and civic buildings often function as a gathering place, and can be designed to complement the surrounding neighborhood.

Consider these basic principles for the design of religious and civic buildings:

1. **Locate civic institutions such that they encourage pedestrian traffic and convey a sense of human scale.**
2. **Design civic institutions to reinforce the system of streets and sidewalks.**
3. **Provide edges of a civic property that are inviting to pedestrians.**
4. **Provide outdoor spaces designed for public use.**
5. **Convenient pedestrian connections should link abutting civic institutions.**
6. **Minimize the visual impacts of automobiles.**
7. **Locate primary entrances to face the street, not a parking lot.**
8. **Minimize impacts on adjacent historic houses.**