

Centreville Village Plan

Chapter Six

DESIGN GUIDELINES

6.1 Purpose and Intent

The New Castle County Unified Development Code (UDC) establishes basic limitations on the size of a building, its placement on a site and the purposes for which it may be used. A structure built to the legal limits established for height, setbacks, rear yards and use may, however, be one that is not compatible with the character of its older, established community. To address this problem, the UDC was amended on March 23, 2004 to allow for the establishment of Hometown Overlay Districts.

This new legislation recognizes that traditional areas often have a development pattern that does not fit the suburban model found throughout much of New Castle County. The creation of a hometown overlay district permits standards more appropriate for that specific district, while still meeting the overall intent and protections of the UDC. Centreville village is the third community to be so designated.

These Design Guidelines are to be used by developers and their designers in the project design process; by residents, business owners, the local Design Review Advisory Committee (DRAC) and other community groups in their review of projects; and by the New Castle County Department of Land Use, the Historic Review Board, the Planning Board and County Council during the approval process.

6.2 Where the Guidelines Apply

Design Guidelines apply within the boundaries of the Centreville Village Overlay District, as shown on the official NCC Zoning Map. In addition to these guidelines, structures included in a New Castle County historic zone (or those within 500 feet of an historically zoned property) are also subject to the provisions of Chapter 40, Article 15 of the UDC and review by the Historic Review Board.

6.3 Review Process

In accordance with the provisions of the Centreville Village Overlay District, any exterior property improvement proposed within the overlay area is subject to review by the Centreville Design Review Advisory Committee (DRAC.) To benefit from the special provisions of the UDC applicable to the Centreville Village Overlay District (i.e. parking and environmental strategies), the design of a proposed development or improvement must be consistent with these design guidelines. Consistency shall be determined by the NCC Department of Land Use, taking into consideration the recommendations of the DRAC.

The design review process will be in accordance with the provisions of the Hometown Overlay Ordinance, which includes formal application, DRAC review and recommendation, and the County Department of Land Use review process.

DESIGN GUIDELINES

- Design Guidelines cover only EXTERIOR property changes—alteration, demolition, relocation, construction or reconstruction.
- Guidelines shall automatically apply to improvements involving new construction within the Hometown Overlay District.
- All projects that require a New Castle County building permit are subject to these Design Guidelines.
- To maintain village character and property values, all property owners should refer to Design Guidelines when embarking on maintenance, replacement or landscaping improvements.
- Properties covered by a New Castle County Historic Overlay are also subject to Guidelines developed by the County Historic Review Board (HRB), Historic and Cultural Resource Design Guidelines, June 2006—available at New Castle County Department of Land Use, 87 Read's Way, New Castle, DE, 19720.
- Owners of pre-1930 properties not covered by a New Castle County Historic Overlay are advised to refer to the HRB Guidelines before beginning exterior home improvements. Recommendations are invaluable to owners of older homes.

Guidelines are organized into three sections:

(1) SITE DESIGN

This section addresses placement of buildings on a lot, landscaping and hardscaping, lighting, and service or mechanical areas.

(2) BUILDING DESIGN

Guidelines for building construction are included in this section: size, form, openings and materials.

(3) SIGNAGE

Sign guidelines are reviewed in this section.

SITE DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

Setbacks

New buildings should have setbacks within ten (10) percent of the average historic setback along the block hosting the new construction.

Spacing

Spacing of new buildings should approximate the existing spacing along the street. The spacing of new structures should vary no more than ten (10) percent from the average spacing of historic structures along the block hosting the new construction.

Driveways, Parking and Walkways

Driveways and Parking

Curb-cuts required for driveways shall be kept to the smallest openings that are functional.

The number of curb-cuts shall be kept to a minimum; shared access is encouraged.

Circular drives in front yards are not permitted.

Double width drives that are visible from the public right-of-way are not permitted.

Large expanses of paving should be broken up with landscaping to improve visual attractiveness and control run-off.

Parking areas shall be unobtrusive and should protect neighboring properties from light, glare, noise, and fumes.

Parking shall be located to the rear of lots.

Shared parking is strongly encouraged.

Existing grades should be retained.

Rain gardens and other innovative stormwater management techniques are encouraged.

Walkways

Walkways and steps shall be compatible to the architectural style and history of the structure located on the property.

Existing decorative walls for steps shall be retained.

Walkways shall be composed of concrete, brick, or stone pavers.

Front walks shall lead directly from the public sidewalk to the front door of the structure.

Walks shall be flush with the grade of the front yard and with the public sidewalk.

Landscaping

General

Significant trees and historic landscape features, such as retaining walls and gardens, shall be maintained to preserve the context of the property and village.

The existing topography and significant vegetation on the site shall be retained. Large scale grading or fill to level a sloping site is generally not acceptable.

All necessary measures must be taken to create proper drainage and prevent erosion on all parts of the property and every neighboring property.

Landscape plant density must be consistent with its neighboring properties. The number/amount of trees, shrubs and ground cover planted should be sufficient to be appealing to the eye and not appear stark or empty.

Shrubs must be large enough to shield foundations and be in proportion to the size of the space.

Open areas must be covered with lawn or ground cover plants / perennials.

Front Yards

The design of the landscaping in the front yard shall be consistent with the character of the village, and that of a typical historic Northeastern American town.

Front gardens considered "natural" in design such as a wildflower meadow, the use of boulders to create a Southwest appearance, masses of ornamental grasses that creates a beach look, or potted tropical plants for a southern appearance are not appropriate.

Berms are not appropriate.

Trees

Significant trees (Any tree over 4" caliper) shall be retained.

- Trees removal must be approved in writing by the DRAC.
- Pruning/removal of more than 25% of any significant tree's branches is not permitted without DRAC approval.
- Disturbance of the root zone within the drip line should be avoided.
- Any disputes concerning the significance, care, or fate of a tree shall be resolved with a written evaluation from a Delaware Certified Arborist approved by all parties.

Large trees that must be removed should be replaced with trees similar in type. New shade trees should be started, especially along street frontages and parking areas. Refer to Appendix xxx for additional street tree information.

Full-growth tree height must be proportional to rooflines.

In addition, small or intermediate sized trees may be planted within twenty feet of the base of any overhead power wires. (See 5.2.3)

No tree branches below nine feet from ground level may extend over any sidewalk.

Hedges

No woody hedges over two feet in height may grow to encroach within two feet from any non-residential sidewalk or driveway.

To maintain clear visibility of building facades in non-residential areas, no hedges extending more than 25% of a properties road frontage may grow over four feet in height.

For privacy or screening side or rear yards, vegetative hedges are encouraged instead of manufactured fences, but shall be maintained to assure their intended height, width and density.

New Construction (Landscaping)

In addition to the guidelines above, new construction requires the following:

Prior to any construction on any property, all significant trees must be protected by installing 4' high fencing around the entire dripline of the tree to protect its roots from damage by people and equipment.

During construction, trees that can be saved should be protected by using the following practices:

- Protective fencing shall be installed around tree protection areas prior to any land disturbance
- The protected area shall include all land within the canopy area.
- Construction site activities such as parking, material storage, dirt stockpiling, and concrete "wash-out" shall not take place inside tree protection areas.

Landscaping after new construction or renovations to a property must be completed within three months from the time of completion of the construction.

Fences and Walls

Retain and repair existing hedges and historic walls and fences.

The scale and design of any new walls and fences should relate to the scale and design of the existing structure. Simpler and smaller designs are more appropriate on smaller lots. Materials should relate to those used elsewhere on the property or main structure.

The height of a fence or wall should not exceed the average height of other fences and walls of surrounding properties. Those along street frontages shall not be over three (3) feet in height.

(Note: Any street walls or hedges should be in line with others in the block.)

Retaining walls, when visible from a public right-of-way, shall be finished with stucco, stone, or brick.

Fences shall be double-sided.

Chain link and vinyl fencing are not permitted if visible from the street.

Garages, Outbuildings and Site Features

Garages and Outbuildings

Restore existing historic garages and outbuildings.

Design new garages or outbuildings to be compatible with the style of the major buildings on the site, especially in materials and roof slope.

New garages or outbuildings should be located to the rear or side of the main structure.

The scale of new garages or outbuildings should not overpower the existing structure or the size of the existing lot.

Site Features

The design and location of any new site features should relate to the existing character of the property.

Outdoor Lighting

Commercial Lighting

Exterior building lights shall be appropriate to the architectural style of individual buildings.

All exterior lights - whether pole lights, bollards, sconces, spot lights, ground lights, or sign lights - shall be top-cutoff fixtures (designed to minimize light pollution, glare, and light trespass).

Up-lighting is not permitted for the illumination of signs. All sign lights must be full-cutoff, downward-facing lights.

Residential Lighting

All security spot lights must be full-cutoff fixtures with motion detector switches (to reduce light pollution, glare and light trespass).

Mechanical and Service Areas

Mechanical Systems

A building's mechanical, electrical and plumbing systems shall be concealed completely from view from the street or sidewalk and adjacent properties

Rooftop equipment shall be screened from the street, sidewalk and adjacent properties. Parapet screens or walls shall be an integral part of the building architecture.

Window or in-wall air-conditioning units shall not be placed in street-facing windows or walls.

Air-conditioning units located in non-window openings shall be flush with building walls. Units shall be screened with a decorative grill appropriate to the building design.

Solar panels shall be considered on a site by site basis. They should be placed on the back of the building, out of view from the street and should be designed to minimize any undesirable visual impact on nearby properties.

Trash Enclosures

Enclosures for outdoor garbage areas are required, shall be located on the side or rear of the main building, and should be designed to complement the main building architecture.

Service and Loading

Loading and service entrances should be located on the side or rear of buildings. They should be screened from public ways and adjacent properties.

BUILDING DESIGN ENVELOPE

Massing, Scale and Building Footprint

Scale and massing of a new or remodeled building should relate to the scale and massing of historic buildings in the same segment. No single building in the Village, whether new or existing, with additions, may exceed a footprint of 2,000 square feet, excluding open porches.

Oversized or monumental architecture is not acceptable.

Complexity of Form

New buildings shall be visually compatible with existing structures in proximity.

The general plan and form of a new building should relate to the form of nearby historic buildings along the street.

Corporate or franchise architecture is not permitted.

Orientation

Orientation of buildings along Kennett Pike should be toward Kennett Pike, and should align with the prevailing adjacent buildings in the block.

The primary facade of a new structure should face the street.

Buildings should not be sited at unusual angles.

Height and Width

The height and width of a new building should relate to the prevailing height and width along the street. The height should be within fifteen (15) percent of the average height of historic buildings along the block hosting the new construction. The maximum width should not exceed 45 feet; however, a width variation within ten percent (10%) of the average width within the block shall be encouraged.

Scale

New construction should incorporate architectural components that create human scale, such as porches, trim work, and details.

Foundation

Slab foundations on grade are not acceptable.

Roof

The roof of a new building should relate to the roofs of neighboring historic buildings in type, pitch and materials.

Pitched roofs without overhangs are not permitted.

Flat roofs are discouraged and under no condition shall face Kennett Pike.

Openings (Doors and Windows)

Every effort should be made to retain and repair original doors and windows in historic buildings. Modern techniques for repair and weather-stripping are beneficial and encouraged. As a last recourse, new windows and doors may be installed, if they duplicate originals in visual qualities, materials and configuration.

New Construction (Openings)

In addition to the guidelines above, new construction requires the following:

The pattern and arrangement of windows and doors of a new building should relate to nearby historic buildings and be styled appropriately for the design of the proposed structure.

The ratio of wall space to adjoining openings in a new structure should be similar to that in nearby buildings.

The height and width of openings should be similar in proportion to those of nearby historic structures.

Frames in masonry buildings should be recessed in openings. Frames in wood buildings should have raised casings with dimensions similar to those found in historic buildings.

New windows and doors shall be similar in type, design, and appearance to those in nearby historic structures. High quality composite materials may be permitted if approved by the DRAC.

Doorways

All buildings shall have a front door on the main street.

True historic entrance doors shall be retained as part of the original structure. In cases where true, historic doors are still in place and are reasonably repairable, replacement shall not be permitted.

Awnings

- Awnings, canopies and marquees, if used, should be consistent with local character and building type. They should reflect the overall facade organization of a building, and should be located within the building elements which frame the structure.
- Important architectural details should not be concealed by awnings, canopies or marquees. Awning shapes should relate to the shape of the facade's architectural elements.
- Canvas and fire-resistant acrylic are preferred awning materials.
- The use of vinyl or plastic as awning materials is prohibited.

New Construction (Doorways)

In addition to the guidelines above, new construction requires the following:

The size, configuration and materials of doors and doorways should be consistent with the overall building architecture.

Windows

True historic window panes (glass) shall be retained as part of the original structure. In cases where true, historic windows are still in place and are reasonably repairable, replacement shall not be permitted.

A building's original window location and pattern shall be retained.

Opaque panels, such as metal, wood, and/or other materials, shall not be used to replace clear glass windows.

Commercial storefront windows must be in keeping with the scale and character of the structure

New Construction (Windows)

In addition to the guidelines above, new construction requires the following:

The size, configuration and materials of windows should be consistent with the overall building architecture.

If ceilings must be lowered below the height of new storefront windows, interior, full-height space immediately adjacent to the window shall be provided before the drop in the ceiling to retain the original appearance from the exterior.

Dormers

- Surviving dormers should be preserved or duplicated in design.
- Dormer windows should be traditional windows; avoid full-height windows, all-glass walls, or windows out of proportion to the dormer.

New Construction (Dormers)

In addition to the guidelines above, new construction requires the following:

- Dormer design should be kept in scale with the building, should join the main house roof below the ridge and, should not be overwhelming in size.
- Horizontal wood siding or roofing material should be used on dormer sides.

Skylights

Skylights should be carefully placed to minimize their visibility from the street. Skylights are not permitted on front elevations.

Skylights must be flat in design, and they should not be clustered in a row, side by side.

Porches and Porticos

New residential structures should have porches or porticos.

Covered commercial doorways in keeping with the buildings architectural design are encouraged to provide shelter for pedestrians and customers in bad weather and to help identify the location of store entrances.

Materials and Texture

Original architectural features of historic buildings shall not be covered.

New Construction (Materials and Texture)

In addition to the guidelines above, new construction requires the following:

Exterior materials used on additions or auxiliary structures related to an historic building should be complementary to that building's original materials as well as to those of adjacent buildings.

New brick, stone or mortar shall match the color and type of original masonry materials when repairing or adding-on to an historic building.

The same building materials shall be used on all facades of newly constructed structures.

Use of decorative concrete block, applied false-brick or false-stone veneer, vinyl or aluminum siding is not acceptable.

SIGNAGE

Overall Requirements

Signage should provide information simply and legibly.

Primary signage should be limited to advertising the name of a business and its main goods and services. Primary signage should not advertise national brand names or logos.

Signs should be of a size, location and design that do not obscure a building's important architectural details.

The types of lettering, or fonts, and the graphic illustrations used in the sign should relate to the character of the building and village.

Multiple signs, more than one (1), on the same facade, must bear a unified graphic appearance (by color, font, and other design matters).

Materials

All signs should be constructed of durable materials. Painted wooden signs are generally more appropriate. Other materials may be used if their design is compatible with the architecture of the building and character of the village.

Plastic, internally lit, or flashing sign are not permitted.

Color

Colors used for the sign shall generally match or compliment either the background or the trim color of the structure which it serves. No more than two or three colors should be used. If more than one sign is used, the colors on all signs shall be coordinated with each other to present a unified image.

Lighting

Signs shall be illuminated with soft, indirect light. Back lighting shall not be used.

Size and Placement

Signs mounted onto *residential* buildings, including those put to limited commercial use, shall be small, no greater than one (1) square foot, identification panels at the primary entrance.

Free-standing signs shall not be higher than eight (8) feet, although the upright support may extend an additional foot. The sign face shall not exceed twenty (20) square feet.

Projecting signs must have a minimum clearance of eight (8) feet from the sidewalk. The sign shall be located so it does not block or obscure important architectural element of the façade. The sign shall project no more than five (5) feet from the side of the building. The sign face shall not exceed eight (8) square feet. Only one per facade, per business, is permitted. Additional signage may be considered for businesses located on corners.

Wall signs shall not exceed eight (8) square feet.

Signs painted on storefront windows or placed in windows, from the interior, shall occupy no more than twenty (20) percent of the area of the displaying window.

Signs painted or mounted on awnings are acceptable provided the sign size is proportional to the awning size. Generally, the sign should cover no more than twenty (20) percent of the awning.

Any combination of the above may not exceed twenty (20) square feet of signage per property.

Restrictions

Signs painted on the walls of buildings, roof signs, off site signs and temporary signs (other than sandwich signs) are not permitted.

Changeable electronic signs are not permitted.

Neon signs are not permitted.

Street Lights (located in the right-of-way)

- If sidewalk lights are installed along public road frontages between the sidewalk and the roadway, the village light standard shall be utilized. The maximum height (measured at the top of the fixture) shall be ten (10) feet.
- Street lights shall be placed approximately sixty (60) feet apart.