

Lebanon Historic Preservation Design Guidelines, Key Observations and Concepts

Our recent visit to Lebanon, including feedback received from the stakeholder and public meetings, identified important opportunities and challenges facing the Historic Preservation Commission's implementation of the community's historic preservation program. This feedback also clarified important issues regarding the design guidelines and how the guidelines can support strategies outlined in the City's 2021 Comprehensive Plan, *Lebanon Forward 2040*.

Residents of Lebanon expressed pride in their history and community and share values that prioritize the preservation of buildings and places that contribute to Lebanon's historic identity. Whether during interviews, the public meeting, or encountering residents during walks about town, people voiced support for historic preservation. In fact, during these interactions, no one expressed opposition to local historic designation - an achievement for any community.

As outlined in the 2021 Comprehensive Plan, key character areas within Lebanon are of historical significance and some areas are designated as historic districts. Strategies promoting Lebanon's small-town heritage, "College Town" brand, and opportunities for redevelopment will include implementation of best practices in relation to both the treatment of existing historic buildings and in additions and new construction in a historic context.

While the community expressed the desire to retain and preserve historic buildings and places, residents also clearly stated they need help understanding historic preservation terminology, procedures, and best practices and need guidance on why certain repairs or alterations are appropriate or inappropriate for historic buildings. Residents emphasized they would benefit from clear, concise guidance. The design guidelines - especially clear maintenance guidance - can improve the understanding of how to care for historic buildings. Public education can address negative public perception about the costs associated with preservation and point out the cost benefits of preservation, while also reinforcing the historic and cultural values of historic preservation.

Key Field Observations

Residential neighborhoods are well-kept and in good condition, though some changes to historic buildings such as replacement windows, replacement siding, and large-scale additions have the potential to diminish the overall historic character and integrity of the historic districts. The historic downtown Public Square has a strong historic identity but is underutilized. The 2021 Comprehensive Plan outlines the potential for significant rehabilitation and redevelopment in the vicinity of the Public Square. Vacancies and maintenance challenges are obstacles to improving vibrancy downtown. Completed storefront rehabilitation projects have demonstrated that historically appropriate repair successfully attracts new retail tenants, demonstrating the potential for economic improvement, and clearing those obstacles to downtown vitality. Maintenance related to flooding issues, both repair and mitigation, continue to be a challenge for property owners.

Providing information about financial incentives and existing programs to help achieve these goals could benefit owners of historic properties with the financial challenges of maintenance or rehabilitation.

Summary of Community Feedback

The public meeting and stakeholder listening sessions identified concerns from City staff, local residents, and key stakeholders leading to opportunities for improved guidance and communication. Concerns include the identity and role of the Historic Preservation Commission, the broad need for education about historic preservation, and the goals for the design guidelines, described in more detail below.

- A. The Historic Preservation Commission plays a critical role in historic preservation and will benefit from better and more frequent communication with the public. The Commission needs to improve the public's basic knowledge and understanding of who they are, what their role is, how they make decisions, how their role is distinct from Historic Lebanon, and how they assist the community through historic preservation. The Commission should be actively engaged in implementation of the 2021 Comprehensive Plan in historic areas such as the Public Square, West Main, and historic mill areas.
- B. Public education and outreach are important needs in Lebanon and contribute to a successful historic preservation and local landmark program. Public education reinforces the value of Lebanon's historic character and identity through its buildings, structures, materials, and features. Important education topics include:
- Information about historic building types and architectural styles,
 - Places having historic importance,
 - What qualifies as a Local Landmark or Local District,
 - Eligibility for the National Register of Historic Places,
 - How these two programs differ,
 - How to define contributing and non-contributing properties in a district, and
 - The concept of historic integrity and the importance of original building materials.

Additional outreach should discuss and explain:

- Financial benefits of historic preservation,
- Appropriate maintenance and repair,
- Benefits of the retention of historic materials,
- Benefits of excluding inappropriate materials to preserve the historic integrity and identity of Lebanon, and
- Guidance on new design within a historic context.

These explanations should help property owners understand that the repair of historic resources using appropriate materials has potential cost savings over time. Public feedback reinforced the need for sources for historic materials, windows, and window repair contractors.

Realtors were identified as a group that could benefit from education about the significance of the community, the unique built environment, and the work of the Commission.

- C. The Design Guidelines will facilitate a broader understanding of Lebanon's Historic Preservation program and how it contributes to the City's vision for the future. Community feedback indicates a lack of understanding of historic preservation best practices by many in the community, resulting in an inconsistent application of recommended treatments for historic buildings, such as when to replace features and with what material.

The new design guidelines should clarify the Historic Preservation Commission's process, basic terminology, and what constitutes appropriate work to a historic building. Topics to be covered include:

- Administrative review,
- Description of historic building types and architectural styles,
- Definitions,
- Best practices for maintenance, repair, and rehabilitation of historic features and materials,
- Choosing materials, determining when a material is no longer repairable,
- Appropriate and inappropriate materials, including substitute materials,
- Appropriate signage,
- Lighting,
- Additions,
- New construction, and
- When demolition is an option.

The current design guidelines are insufficient for the community's needs. Participants expressed frustration in working with this document which is based on the guidelines from another community. The current document is ambiguous and confusing and is perceived as hard to read. The public wants clear, easy to read, actionable guidance with illustrations.

Key Design Guidelines Issues and Concepts

- **Materials:** The maintenance and appropriate repair of materials is an important need in the community. Include information and guidance for the repair and maintenance of building materials including stone, brick, metal, tile, glass, and wood in the design guidelines. Include guidance about material replacement, when it is justified, and what substitute materials are appropriate options. Address substitute materials and their appropriate application including vinyl, aluminum, fiber cement board siding, synthetic stucco (EIFS), and composite materials.
- **Windows:** Windows are an important character-defining feature of a historic building and should be retained whenever possible. Property owners seek guidance on when it is necessary or appropriate to replace historic windows and, when appropriate, what replacement windows should be used. There is particular interest in information about the repair of wood windows. When original windows have already been replaced, and there is need or desire to replace these non-original windows, the guidelines should provide information about appropriate design and material for new replacements.
- **Storefronts:** The character of Lebanon's Public Square is defined by its historic commercial buildings and their storefronts. Guidance should be provided on existing conditions related to each historic building on the Square - what building and storefront features are significant and how should they be treated to enhance the Public Square's revitalization and commercial vitality.
- **Residential Additions:** Many historic residential buildings are small and owners desire occasional additions and changes to accommodate modern life. The design guidelines should outline how additions and changes can be accomplished in a way that enhances rather than diminishes historic character and significance.
- **Features:** Include information regarding the repair and maintenance of architectural features including windows, storm windows, commercial storefronts, roofs, foundations, fences, signage, and lighting. When historic features are missing, provide guidance on how to reintroduce those features.
- **Paint:** Paint color is a topic that draws conflicting opinions, and the design guidelines should provide guidance on selecting appropriate colors - rather than mandating the use of particular colors. In addition, the guidelines should describe the appropriate application of paint, especially related to painting masonry.
- **Non-Contributing Buildings:** Clarify treatment options for non-contributing buildings, including additions, alterations, and demolition.
- **Natural Disaster Adaptation Strategies:** Provide information, guidance, and assistance regarding floodproofing techniques, flood adaptation, and climate resilience, specifically for commercial properties in the Public Square. Both City representatives and property owners are seeking guidance for dealing with flooding as it relates to the impact on historic buildings and structures.
- **Accessory Buildings:** Include information on existing and new accessory buildings and clarify the HPC's review process for altering existing, or adding new, accessory buildings. Accessory buildings include carriage houses, garages, and sheds.
- **Landscape and Site Features:** While landscape vegetation may not be regulated within local historic districts, guidance should be provided on appropriate vegetation within a historic context as an educational resource in relation to both the historic building and overall neighborhood character. Include information on historic site features and materials, and clarify the HPC's review process for them. Site features may include fences, walls, sidewalks, stairs, driveways, parking areas, permeable paving, culverts and other features.

- **New Construction:** Provide guidance on best practices for the design and construction of appropriate additions and new construction in a historic context. This is particularly important in the vicinity of the Public Square, where there is potential for significant new revitalization projects to enhance the vitality of Downtown.

Other Issues and Needs

Residents expressed the interest and desire for clarifications to regulations and community enhancements typically addressed through local ordinances. While addressing local ordinances and related issues is not a central focus of this design guidelines assignment, they do have a relationship to design review so are mentioned below. Topics include clarification of the Historic Preservation Ordinance, enforcement for ordinance violations, demolition, and public amenities.

Residents expressed interest in clarifications to the Historic Preservation Ordinance including:

- An economic hardship provision,
- A process to appeal a decision by the Historic Preservation Commission, including Certificates of Appropriateness and local designations,
- References to the new property maintenance code and inspection process,
- Processes to assure compliance with provisions of an approved Certificate of Appropriateness,
- Disincentives or consequences for violating Historic Preservation Ordinance provisions. The perception is that there are few consequences (it is easier to ask for forgiveness than approval), and the Historic Preservation Ordinance has insufficient provisions for enforcement,
- Specific provisions highlighting when demolition is necessary or appropriate, including guidelines for moving buildings. Demolition provisions should include information to prevent demolition by neglect and teardowns, and
- Residents expressed other needs including more public sidewalks and traffic calming strategies.

We look forward to the next phase of the project.