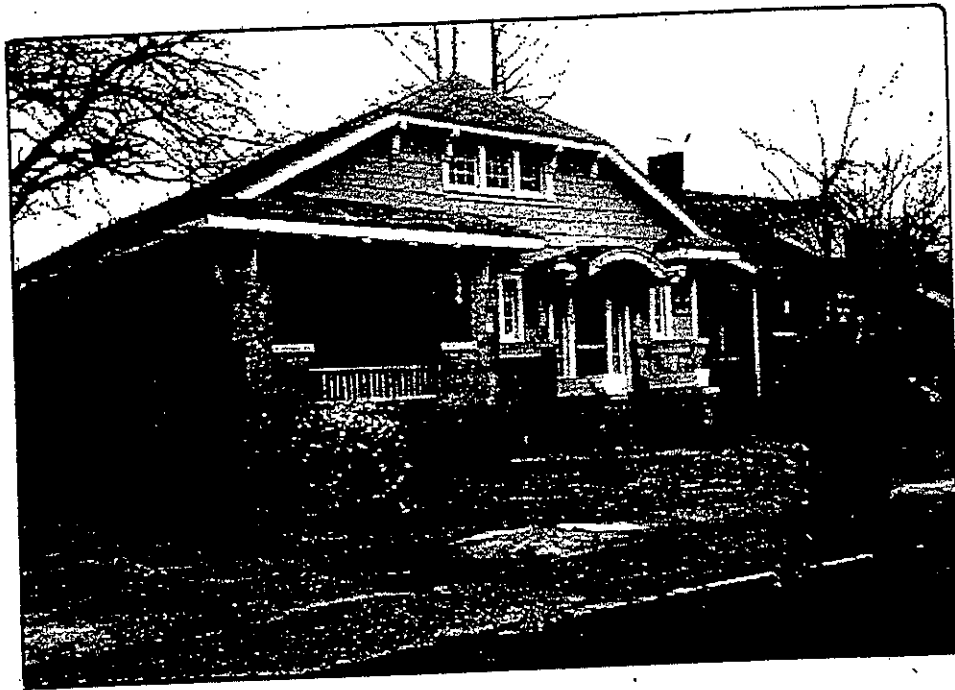


*Design Supplement to the
Decatur Historic Preservation
Resource Manual*



Submitted to

City of Decatur
Historic Preservation Commission
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CHAPTER 1

THE DECATUR HISTORIC PRESERVATION PROGRAM, DESIGN REVIEW, AND THE DESIGN SUPPLEMENT

Historic preservation has been a significant element of planning in Decatur since at least the creation of the Town Center Plan in 1982, one goal of which was to integrate new construction with existing cornice heights in the downtown core. Extensive surveys of historic properties within Decatur include a 1987 survey of South Decatur and a 1990 survey of the entire city. Also in 1990, the Decatur Historic Preservation Commission was created, intended to be at least as involved in education and advocacy as in regulatory activities. Consistent with an educational mission, in 1992 the City of Decatur and the Decatur Historic Preservation Commission sponsored the production of the *Decatur Historic Preservation Resource Manual*, to which this document is the *Design Supplement*. In 1994, the South Candler/Agnes Scott College Historic District was listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

The Decatur Historic Preservation Commission's primary efforts are to educate and advocate for the preservation of Decatur's historic resources. Granted by state statute and adopted by local ordinance, the Commission has the regulatory authority to review plans which involve changing the exterior appearance of locally certified historic structures or structures located within local historic districts. As of this writing, there

are two buildings in Decatur that are designated as historic under the ordinance, the Old DeKalb County Courthouse and the Old Scottish Rite Hospital.



The Old Scottish Rite Hospital.

Having assessed Decatur's historic resources, the development pressures within the city, and the prevalent attitudes towards historic preservation and the retention of community character, the city and the Commission have determined that in Decatur the goals of historic preservation will be best served by promoting an understanding and support for historic preservation and its benefits.

This strategy is particularly apt in Decatur. Preservation in Decatur is based on the recognition that practically every property contributes to the amenity of the place; each property owner is thus encouraged to understand how he or she may participate in the preservation of Decatur's particular character. The populace of Decatur appears to be unusually aware of their town's unique character and receptive to the possibilities offered by its conservation, protection, and appropriate development.

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The High House dates to 1830 with an 1870 alteration.

Consistent with the overall program of historic preservation within Decatur, the tone of this *Design Supplement* is intended to be entirely educational, with an emphasis on the preservation of existing and historic building fabric, the design of appropriate additions to existing and historic buildings, and the appropriate design of new infill structures. The recommendations contained in this *Supplement* are intended to be as flexible as possible, out of the belief that good design cannot be prescribed and will not result from a 'cookbook' of design ideas, but should in special circumstances such as Decatur be given direction and parameters. The flexibility is also intended to give property owners a range of choices so that individual economic circumstances are not an impediment to the appropriate historic preservation of individual properties within Decatur.



Relatively small, well-built houses on narrow lots contribute to the primary image of Decatur.

The recommendations contained within this *Design Supplement* are based upon *The US Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties* (Revised 1995). The durability of the *Standards* is testimony not only to their basic soundness, but also to the inherent flexibility of their language. The *Standards* are not design guidelines; they provide a shared philosophy and approach to the solution of problems to those involved with managing the treatment of historic buildings. In and of themselves, they cannot provide a property owner or reviewing authority with specific solutions for specific problems. The *Standards* inform judgment, but do not replace it. The *Standards* have served as reference points in developing this *Design Supplement*, and they should continue to serve as references during the processes of design and design review. The recently revised *Standards* identify guidelines for four different treatments for historic properties: preservation, rehabilitation, restoration, and reconstruction. These treatments are briefly defined as follows:

Preservation. The act or process of applying measures necessary to sustain the existing form, integrity, and materials of a historic property.

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Work, including preliminary measures to protect and stabilize the property, generally focuses upon the ongoing maintenance and repair of historic materials and features rather than extensive replacement and new construction.

Rehabilitation. The act or process of making possible a compatible use for a property through repair, alterations, and additions, while preserving those portions or features which convey its historical, cultural, or architectural values.

Restoration. The act or process of accurately depicting the form, features, and character of a property as it appeared at a particular period of time by means of the removal of features from other periods in its history and reconstruction of missing features from the restoration period.

Reconstruction. The act or process of depicting, by means of new construction, the form, features, and detailing of a non-surviving site, landscape, building structure, or object for the purpose of replicating its appearance at a specific period of time and in its historic location.

For the purposes of this *Supplement*—intended primarily for the use of property owners and designers who are seeking guidance with regard to proper maintenance and the design of additions and new infill structures—the treatments that are most relevant are **preservation and rehabilitation**. The *Standards* go further to define general guidelines for the individual treatments. The guidelines for rehabilitation incorporate those for preservation and go on to include also guidelines for new construction and additions. Because they articulate basic philosophical principles which are fundamental to historic preservation and which have withstood the test of time, and because of their implications for property owners in Decatur, it is worthwhile to include an outline discussion

of the Secretary's *Guidelines for Rehabilitation*. The *Guidelines for Rehabilitation* have been likened to the 'ten commandments' of preservation, and are quoted in full as follows:

1. A property will be used as it was historically or be given a new use that requires minimal change to its distinctive materials, features, spaces, and spatial relationships.
2. The historic character of a property will be retained and preserved. The removal of distinctive materials or alteration of features, spaces, and spatial relationships that characterize a property will be avoided.
3. Each property will be recognized as a physical record of its time, place, and use. Changes that create a false sense of historical development, such as adding conjectural features or elements from other historic properties, will not be undertaken.
4. Changes to a property that have acquired historical significance on their own right will be retained and preserved.
5. Distinctive materials, features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a property will be preserved.
6. Deteriorated historic features will be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature will match the old in design, color, texture, and, where possible, materials. Replacement of missing features will be substantiated by documentary and physical evidence.

7. Chemical or physical treatments, if appropriate, will be undertaken using the gentlest means possible. Treatments that cause damage to historic materials will not be used.
8. Archeological resources will be protected and preserved in place. If such resources must be disturbed, mitigation measures will be undertaken.
9. New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction will not destroy historic materials, features, spaces, and spatial relationships that characterize the property. The new work shall be differentiated from the old and will be compatible with the historic materials, features, size, scale and proportion, and massing to protect the integrity of the property and its environment.
10. New additions and adjacent or related new construction will be undertaken in such a manner that if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment would be unimpaired.

Standard 1, requiring *compatibility of use*, is the only standard in which the impact of a proposed reuse of a historic building is addressed. (Questions of use are typically fully and appropriately addressed in zoning ordinances and building codes.) The principle of this standard—that a proposed reuse of a historic structure for purposes other than that for which it was initially designed should have minimal distinctive architectural consequences—is to a certain extent self-evident. That is to say, reuses that will result in destructive architectural treatments are unacceptable. However, for reuses where the anticipated impact of a proposed reuse is not readily appar-

ent, evaluation of the architectural treatment rather than the proposed use itself will still be required.

Standard 2, recommending the *retention and preservation of character-defining features*, is one of several statements in the *Standards* which emphasize preservation of as much building fabric as possible. Thus, alterations that accommodate existing original or historic building fabric are, under this standard, clearly preferable to those that require removals of such fabric.

Standard 3 recommends *historical honesty*, and is a clear endorsement of 'true' versus 'false' history. This standard is thus the basis for the prevention of such practices as conjectural restoration of building features or the grafting of architectural features taken from one historic building onto another. This standard also provides a clear basis on which to discourage the practice of building new buildings in an historicized idiom.

Standard 4, which requires the *acknowledgment of physical evolution* of historic buildings, is a critical component in the evaluation of treatments for a historic building which has undergone many changes. This standard not only accepts but values the fact that most historic buildings contain the record of their own evolution and thus are valuable records of changes in taste and use. This standard would provide the basis for discouraging such practices as replacing historic metal roofing with wood shingles, even in cases where a wood shingle roof is known to have originally existed. It would also prevent the replacement of a Victorian porch on an earlier nineteenth century house with a new porch that would replicate porches of the vintage of the original house.

The clear implication of this standard is that, unless it is intended that a building undergo an ac-

curate restoration to a specific period based on adequate documentation, it is best to recommend repair and/or replacement of historic building features *in-kind*, whether or not they are part of the building's original construction.

Standard 5 requires *preservation of the distinctive components* of historic buildings, and is a straightforward endorsement of preservation whenever possible. In Decatur, this will apply particularly to porches, windows, doors, siding, and other decorative elements. Standard 6 requires *repair rather than replacement* where possible and, where it is not, *visually matching replacements*. These two standards articulate the strong preference in preservation for retaining the authentic materials, object, or building fabric, and not just something that replicates the real object.

These two guidelines are particularly relevant to Decatur where there is, for the most part, a high level of integrity but where building fabric is reaching a critical age and replacement will be a strong consideration.

Standard 7, by its *prohibition of damaging chemical and physical treatment*, reflects an awareness—often gained through painful experience—that certain treatments can irreversibly damage the historic fabric that the preceding standards are intended to protect. Sandblasting in particular, whether of wood for paint removal or masonry for cleaning, can irretrievably alter the surface characteristics of historic materials and thereby destroy not only visual characteristics but physical ones as well, and may accelerate further deterioration. Power washing and overly acidic chemical cleaning of masonry can also cause irreversible damage.

Standard 8 requires *preservation and protection of archeological resources*, and generally comes

into consideration only when excavations are associated with a project. This standard clearly recognizes that historic properties will in all likelihood have associated archeological deposits, and recommends that efforts should be made to consider and protect those resources to the extent feasible. Considerations of expense and the likelihood of the presence of archeological resources must dictate the extent to which this standard affects the planning of privately-funded projects. It should be noted, however, that for projects within the South Candler/Agnes Scott College National Register Historic District that involve federal or state funds, archeological mitigation will be required.

The goals of Standards 9 and 10 are *compatibility, differentiation, non-destructiveness, and reversibility of additions, alterations, and new construction*. Both standards are intended to minimize the overall damage to historic fabric caused by building additions and to insure that new work will be differentiated from but compatible with existing structures, in order to protect the historic integrity of the property.

The same federal regulation which promulgates the *Standards* explicitly states that they are intended to be “applied to specific rehabilitation projects in a reasonable manner, taking into consideration economic and technical feasibility.” Thus, the level of craftsmanship and detail as well as the quality of materials that are proposed for any rehabilitation project should be commensurate with the structure to which they will be applied. From the standpoint of the Secretary's *Standards and Guidelines*, successful rehabilitation neither ‘improves’ the original design nor detracts from it.

It is important to reiterate that the Secretary of the Interior's *Standards for Rehabilitation* pro-

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vide a philosophical framework for the planning and evaluation of preservation activities. As summarized above, that framework is one which emphasizes preservation of historic building fabric, honesty of historical expression, and reversibility. It is a philosophical framework which assumes that historic buildings are repositories not only of visual satisfaction but also of information and, as such, it must be possible to 'read' the information they contain without having it clouded by conjecture.



Virtually every house has the potential to contribute positively to the character of Decatur neighborhoods.

The City of Decatur itself validates the *Standards'* orientation towards architectural continuity and historical integrity. The *Standards* articulate and reinforce the continuity and concern for historic and visual integrity that are evident throughout most of Decatur. Although most of Decatur is not included in a National Register Historic District, the concern for the preservation of community character prevalent throughout Decatur makes the *Standards* particularly relevant and applicable.

CHAPTER 2

DEVELOPMENT IN DECATUR / PRESERVATION APPROACH

THE DEVELOPMENT OF DECATUR

The City of Decatur is the county seat of DeKalb County. Incorporated in 1823, Decatur is at the junction of natural ridges along which ran the Native American footpaths that became important eighteenth and early-nineteenth century trade routes, followed by the Georgia Railroad in 1845. To a great extent, Decatur's development must be understood in opposition to that of its enormous neighbor six miles to the west, the city of Atlanta. Although Decatur predates Atlanta, the latter's early growth—Atlanta had 6,000 citizens in 1853 compared to Decatur's 744 in 1850—and industrial boom mandated the formation of Fulton County in 1853, carved from the western section of the original boundary of DeKalb County.

Over time, its status as the county seat and regional center for DeKalb County has allowed Decatur to maintain an identity and a sense of autonomy within the Metropolitan Atlanta region, whose suburban and exurban sprawl is a phenomenon commented upon internationally. Although it was linked very early to Atlanta by road and by rail, and later by streetcar and finally by MARTA, Decatur has both a political and physical sense of being its own place. Decatur aspires to be identified as a regional center and to maintain and celebrate its small town/small city character in the

midst of the almost overwhelming forces of suburbanization.

The specifics of the development of the City of Decatur provide the context for a discussion of the present development pressures facing the city. By 1829, the city had a courthouse, a jail, an academy, and forty houses. In 1850, the population had grown to 744. Decatur was the site of a key Civil War battle for control of the Georgia Railroad that connected Atlanta with Charleston and Augusta, and then was occupied during the siege of Atlanta. Sherman himself passed through Decatur on his march to the sea, leaving decimation in his wake. Due to the Civil War and the hard times of reconstruction, by 1870, Decatur's population had dropped to 401 citizens.

The boundaries of the city were first extended in 1871 to include a circle whose radius extended one-half mile from the courthouse square. As wealthy merchants began to build their homes along the main routes into town on Sycamore Street and South Candler Street, the Georgia Railroad offered two 'accommodation trains' per day, early commuter service between Atlanta and Decatur. By 1890, the South Decatur 'dummy' streetcar line, driven by steam engines, was in operation. In 1893, the north side 'electric line' entered the city along Electric Avenue.

Decatur's growth took the form of several subdivisions built out along the routes of the streetcar lines. These original subdivisions provided the settlement pattern that shaped the remainder of the city: small- to moderate-sized houses on narrow but deep lots, facing the street and maintaining a fairly consistent front yard setback on individual blocks. The older subdivisions were built when people walked from place to place and had quite shallow front yard setbacks, expressing the direct relationship between the house and the

street and promoting a sense of civility and sociability that deep porches contributed to. The pattern of development evolved in the direction of steadily deepening front yard setbacks, driveways, garages incorporated within the structure of the house, especially on narrower lots, smaller or absent front porches, and front walks turned towards the driveway and not to the street.

By 1900, there were 1,418 people living in Decatur, and by 1940 there were 16,561, a growth of 1,000% over 40 years. It is interesting to note that by 1970, the population had just topped 20,000 but dropped back down to 17,336 in 1990, partly due to the decrease in the size of households. During the interval between 1970 and 1990, employment within the city increased 40 percent. It must be remarked that as of 1996 there has been virtually no net population growth within the city since 1940, yet residential occupancy rates are quite high.

DEVELOPMENT PRESSURES IN DECATUR

Decatur's location within and access to its burgeoning region, its deserved reputation for livability, and its relatively affordable housing stock will contribute to a period of growth over the next two decades. Decatur's Comprehensive Plan calls for the addition of 1,300 residential units between 1990 and 2010, and a population increase to 19,050. The fact that Decatur's neighborhoods are essentially built-out, and that large-scale clearances are neither anticipated nor feasible, will require that the majority of new residential units be higher density townhouses or multi-family apartment buildings, located either towards the center of town or along major arteries such as Scott Boulevard and West College Street.



Recent townhouse development at Scott and Clairemont.

The Comprehensive Plan anticipates that the small number of new single-family units will occur as infill on isolated undeveloped single parcels, or as a part of parcel development of larger tracts with a single existing house that will be subdivided for single-family clustered homes or townhouses. Virtually all single-family residences that have been built in Decatur over the last ten years have been shoe-horned onto sites that had been previously undeveloped due to steep slopes, proximity to low-lying drainages, or being on the edge of a thoroughfare.

Another development pressure in Decatur is the demand for larger houses. Given that the bulk of the housing stock is small to moderately sized and that the town is mostly built-out, this has resulted and will continue to result in additions to existing houses. The sensitivity and appropriateness of residential additions in Decatur vary, as do their impact on existing character. Additions will result in greater population density within existing residential neighborhoods, higher percentages of lot coverage, and the need for more parking. Additions will also affect a neighbor's views and access to light and air.

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One-and-one-half-story house with roof-top addition.

The downtown business district has the highest proportion of empty building sites within the city. Its direct connection to MARTA and its importance as the center of county business contribute to the downtown business district's enormous potential for dense commercial and business development. Several studies have been made of this district, including in 1982 a Development Plan for the Decatur Town Center (updated in 1989). The goals identified in the plans for the town center are based upon a vision of the district as a thriving commercial, residential, government, social, and entertainment center. The center's gravitational pull would extend beyond the city of Decatur, yet it would retain its small town character.



Decatur's downtown has unique potential as a town center with a wealth of buildable lots.

The City of Decatur has taken several firm steps to manage and direct the development of the downtown business district in a manner that will increase the sense of downtown as Decatur's center, and will improve the quality of life for Decatur residents. If it is to be truly successful, in addition to the quantitative goals of economic growth, the development of the downtown business district must accomplish two qualitative successes. First, mid-rise development (the Decatur Zoning Ordinance has an 80-foot height limit but the plan recommends that the Zoning Board permit this to be exceeded) must be made compatible with the goal of retaining and promoting the small town character of the city, the pedestrian's experience at street level. Second, the development of the areas around the central core, the transition zones, must be accomplished in a manner that reconnects the center to the outlying neighborhoods, and reintegrates back into the fabric of the city what is now almost perceptibly an island surrounded by surface parking lots and a ring road.



The transitional areas must be developed to reconnect the town center with the outlying residential neighborhoods.

PRESERVATION APPROACH

The overall approach to preservation within the City of Decatur is to direct and define development in a manner that reconciles the goals for development that are absolutely essential for a vital community with the goal of retaining and promoting the much cherished small town character of Decatur. The recommendations that are included in Chapters 3, 4, 5, and 6 are flexible enough to allow some measure of mutual benefit to what at first glance might seem to be the irreconcilable forces of development and preservation.

In order to assist property owners and to formulate recommendations that are appropriately specific and flexible, six character areas have been identified within the City of Decatur. These character areas are defined by the predominant features that give them their distinctive quality. In some cases distinguishing features are the result of similar periods of development and in some cases the result of similar function. This is not to suggest that all of the neighborhoods and districts included within a given character area are identical, but only that the principles that determine

appropriate design treatments in those areas are the same. Thus, character areas are often not contiguous.

See map 1 that follows this chapter for the boundaries of the character areas and the original subdivisions of the city.

Nineteenth Century Residential Neighborhoods

The oldest residential neighborhoods in Decatur feature some of the smallest and some of the largest houses in the city, on a variety of lot sizes and in a wide variety of styles. Nineteenth century residential neighborhoods include the Agnes Scott/South Candler National Register Historic District and 'Old Decatur' including Sycamore Street. Individual property owners developed these areas over a protracted period of time, choosing a variety of architectural styles and front yard setbacks. Some houses are set back as far as 60 feet and have large original outbuildings, either barns or stables. The landscape features very mature trees and plantings. These contexts are unique in Decatur not only for their age, but also for their variety.



Nineteenth century residential neighborhood on Sycamore Street.

In general, preservation recommendations for the nineteenth century residential neighborhoods are as follows:

- Exercise extreme care in maintaining, repairing, and restoring building fabric in these areas. Removal of historic fabric should be minimized.
- Preserve the settings for these houses. The variety of landscaped lots are critical elements in defining the character of this section of the city and should not be subdivided. It is particularly important to maintain the single-family residential character of these neighborhoods.
- Additions to existing buildings should not be visible from the street. If this is not possible, new additions should be held back from the front facade and not visible when the house is viewed frontally.
- Front and side porches should not be enclosed.
- Demolition of existing buildings, including secondary outbuildings, that contribute to the character of these areas should be strongly discouraged.

Pre-World War I Residential Neighborhoods

The pre-World War I residential neighborhoods are distinguished by small to moderate houses with shallow to moderate front yard setbacks, usually consistent within a given block. Lot widths are narrow to moderate. Styles may vary from house to house, suggesting an appreciation for the eclectic and the individuality of each homeowner. Porches are prominent with a direct connection from the house to the sidewalk via a front

walk. Driveways and garages are rarely original. Ridge lines tend to run perpendicular to the street. Houses related to pedestrian travel and to street-car service, and were not intended to accommodate the automobile. Streets are rectilinear, and landscape elements are very mature; porches, narrow streets, and shallow setbacks lend the oldest subdivisions within the city a particularly intimate character.



Pre-World War I neighborhood on Third Avenue.

The following subdivisions are examples of pre-World War I residential neighborhoods: Place, College View, Ponce de Leon Terrace (partial), Ponce de Leon Heights (partial), Chelsea Heights (partial), Clairemont Park, Oakhurst, Haynes, Tuxedo Park Cooper, Oakview, College View, Mason and Weeks, East Rivers Realty, Daniel, Klaitz, Goldin and Goldin, Ridley, and Stanley. (See Map 1)

In general, recommendations for pre-World War I neighborhoods are as follows:

- Preserve and retain as much historic fabric as possible.
- Repair and replace historic fabric in-kind, as much as possible.

- Additions should be subsidiary and to the rear of these structures, not visible when the building is viewed frontally.
- Front porches should not be enclosed, as they contribute to the character of the individual structures and to the sense of the public character of the streets.
- New construction should be treated as in-fill, and should be designed to the same scale setback and massing as existing adjacent structures, which tend to provide strong precedents in these neighborhoods.

Pre-World War II Residential Neighborhoods

Pre-World War II residential neighborhoods feature a higher level of conformity of building style, with often slightly deeper but very uniform front yard setbacks and a regular rhythm of houses and side yards. Ridge lines more often parallel the street, often creating the sense of a solid street wall. Front porches are somewhat less prominent in these areas, and garages are often incorporated into the structure of the house, usually on a lower level. Driveways are more often than not original and front walks tend to be oriented towards the driveways and not the front sidewalks. Streets are usually curvilinear, providing a constantly changing vista when experienced by automobile.



Pre-World War II neighborhood on Nelson's Ferry.

The following subdivisions are examples of pre-World War II character areas: Ponce de Leon Terrace (partial), Ponce de Leon Heights (partial), Chelsea Heights (partial), Emory Acres, Womack, Glenwood Estates I, McCrary, Edgemore, Lockridge, Dumas and Wallace, Pickets, Spring Street, Redwine, DeKalb County Fair Association, Hardin Estates, Feld, Green, and Winnona Park.

In general, preservation recommendations for pre-World War II residential neighborhoods are as follows:

- Preserve and retain as much original building fabric as possible.
- Replacement of existing original building fabric should be in-kind, when possible.
- Additions may be to the side or rear of these houses but should not visibly encroach upon, envelop, or transform the original structure of the house, including the roof line.

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- The frontality of these houses should be emphasized. Primary entrances and front doors should remain oriented to the street.
 - Secondary structures such as garages or studio/in-law apartments should be towards the rear of lots.
 - Front porches should not be enclosed or added to houses that never had porches.
- erty line, with retail use on the ground floor reinforcing the sense of the street as an enclosed and habitable space. The more recent developments have parking garages located internal to their blocks, with access via landscaped walks through to Ponce de Leon Avenue.

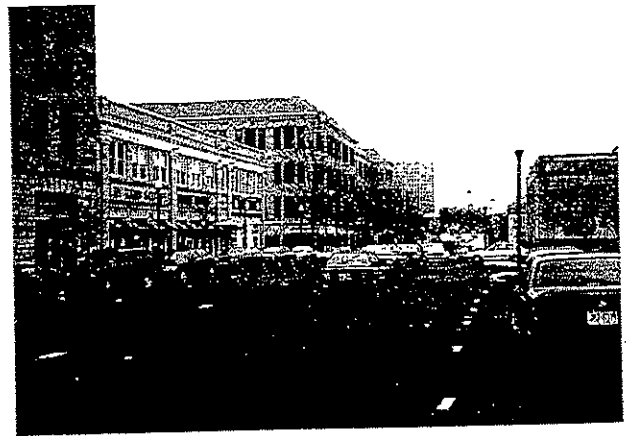
Central Business Core

The core area of Decatur's downtown business district is centered around the historic courthouse and its square. Elements of the downtown that recall Decatur's past and contribute to its small town character are the courthouse and its square, the Pythagoras Masonic Temple, the First National Bank Building (now Starbucks Coffee), several one- and two-story commercial buildings, a frame residence, and an automobile service station.



The Pythagoras Masonic Temple.

Several larger office buildings date to the 1960s and subsequent decades. Recent larger-scale developments are four- and five-story commercial and office buildings built on or close to the prop-



Central business core looking east on East Ponce de Leon.

General recommendations for the core area of Decatur's downtown business context are:

- Consider every proposal in terms of its impact upon the pedestrian's experience of the downtown business district.
- Do not demolish existing historic buildings.
- Reuse and restore existing historic commercial buildings, especially at the continuation of Sycamore Street along the MARTA station.
- New construction should be brought out to or close to the sidewalk and set back at the third or fourth floor.
- Parking should not be permitted in front yards.

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- Signage should not compete for attention with the architectural elements of commercial structures. On the other hand, signage should not be overly regular, subdued, or codified.
- Encourage a mix of retail use on the ground floors.
- Provide pocket parks and informal spaces, furniture, and plantings that will promote interaction and street life. The streets of this context should be the best place for social interaction in the city.
- Provide a sense of security to pedestrians. Allow on-street parking. Time traffic lights to provide plenty of time for crossing streets. Provide good illumination and eliminate dark spots.
- Provide parking in mid-block garages. Parking garages along streets contribute little to the vitality of the downtown district.
- A variety of scales and styles is appropriate.

Transitional Belt

The transitional belt surrounds the central business core and has the potential to reconnect the core to the residential neighborhoods of Decatur. These transitional areas are primarily the result of the widespread clearances that occurred as a part of urban redevelopment during the 1960s. The transitional areas do not have a consistent character and include vast surface parking lots on East and West Ponce de Leon, the townhouses of Commerce Street, the row of single houses (most of which have been converted for businesses along south Church Street), the beginnings of strip development along Clairemont Avenue,

especially at Commerce Drive, and concrete-and-glass-box office buildings in seas of parking lots.



View of vacant lot in transitional belt, looking west on East Ponce de Leon.

The general recommendations with regard to the transitional belt between the central business core and the neighborhoods are as follows:

- Consider every proposal in terms of its impact upon the pedestrian's experience of the downtown business district and the pedestrian connection between residential neighborhoods and the central business core.
- Landscape Commerce Drive to soften its appearance and make it less of a boundary and more of a gateway into the center.
- Encourage medium- and high-density residential uses and mixed uses. A ten-story building might have retail use on the ground floor, three floors of office use, and six stories of apartments.
- Do not allow parking in front yards. Screen any parking in side yards from the street with fences and/or plantings.

- Existing surface parking lots should be landscaped, especially with buffers at their perimeter.
- Townhouse developments should be built out to or close to the building line. Parking should be on mid-block lots, screened from the street. The primary entrance to individual units should be on the street facade. The scale of townhouse apartments should be consistent with the scale of residential development elsewhere in Decatur.



Townhouse development close to the street reinforces the pedestrian scale within the transition belt.

- Garden apartments may be set back from the building line as much as 25 feet, but parking may not occur in the front yard. The primary entrance to garden apartments should be on the street facade. The apartments at East Ponce de Leon and Glendale Avenue are an excellent model.
- A variety of scales and styles is appropriate, although 'false' historical styles that have little or nothing to do with Decatur are not recommended.

Neighborhood and Small-Scale Commercial Buildings

There are regrettably few neighborhood and small-scale commercial buildings in Decatur, although several one-story commercial rows are excellent examples. Generally, one-story commercial buildings feature decorative fronts including cornices and large display windows, built right up to the sidewalk, or with one row of parking in front. Facades have received a number of treatments over the years; some have retained their integrity and others are virtually unrecognizable. Small-scale commercial buildings should be viewed as absolutely essential elements to the retention of the small town character of Decatur.



Neighborhood commercial 'storefront' building on West College Avenue.

Examples of the neighborhood and small-scale commercial context are at Oakview Road, on West College Avenue, on the pedestrian portion of Sycamore Street, and on either side of East Ponce de Leon just off the Courthouse Square. Although presently something of an eyesore, the service station at the corner of East Ponce de Leon and Church Street is a small-scale commer-

cial building that contributes to an understanding of Decatur's past and should be preserved.

In general, the recommendations for neighborhood and small-scale commercial areas in Decatur are as follows:

- Preserve and retain as much original or historic fabric as possible.
- Repair and replace original or historic fabric in-kind, as much as possible.
- Restore storefronts based upon historic documentation such as photographs or architectural drawings and or actual physical evidence at the building.
- In the absence of documentation on which to base a restoration, replacement storefronts may be of a contemporary design, compatible both with the existing building and the design of storefronts from the period of the building. In no case should replacement storefronts recall a period that is older than the building itself, such as a 'colonialized' storefront.
- Awnings and signage should be appropriately scaled to the building, installed in a manner that does not damage or obscure existing building fabric, and is reversible.
- Pent roofs are strongly discouraged, as is the use of materials such as cedar shakes that have no historic precedent in Decatur.
- Do not permit any more than one row of parking in front of a neighborhood commercial building.

CHAPTER 3

THE PRESERVATION AND REHABILITATION OF EXISTING AND HISTORIC BUILDINGS

INTRODUCTION

The recommendations in this chapter provide guidance to property owners contemplating a range of treatments to existing and historic buildings within the City of Decatur. It is hoped that while these recommendations are based upon historic preservation practices, they will also educate the property owners of Decatur as to the proper maintenance and care of their historic buildings.

DOORS, WINDOWS, AND SHUTTERS

Doors, windows, and shutters are the moving parts of building exteriors. As such, they are subject to hard and frequent use. They are also critical elements in regulating the passage of light, air, rain, and people into the interior of a building.

These elements are also critical in determining the architectural character of individual buildings. The correct preservation of existing doors, windows, and shutters as well as the appropriate design of their replacements is essential to the maintenance of the character of individual buildings and their context within a historic district or character area.

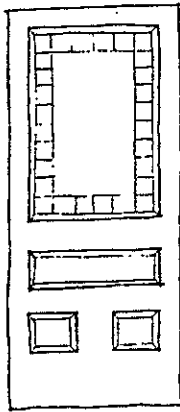
The repair and replacement of existing original or historic doors, windows, and shutters should be in-kind—that is, to match existing conditions as closely as possible. Attention should be paid to the size, species, and profile of the piece or element requiring repair or replacement. Custom millwork may be required if stock millwork matching existing conditions is unavailable. Replacement of existing non-historic doors, windows, and shutters should be appropriate to the age and character of the building.

DOORS

Paneled doors were prevalent during the earlier periods of Decatur architecture in every residential and commercial building type found within the city. The technology to produce flush doors is a relatively recent phenomenon, having mostly to do with the development of inexpensive glues. Panel trim and moldings have changed over time as have the configuration of the panels and the use of glazing in the panels.

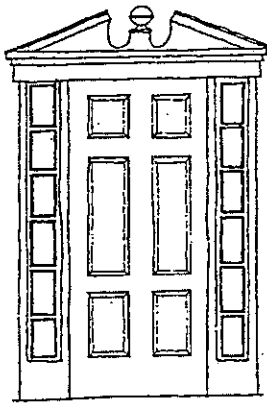
Second Empire- and Folk Victorian-style residential doors were more ornate with elongated vertical panel shapes, glazed upper panels, and deeper and more complex molding profiles.

The Queen Anne style of residential architecture introduced further levels of ornamented doors, including gouged, carved, and incised profiles, sometimes with arched and curved panel shapes, and often with relatively large glazed panels.



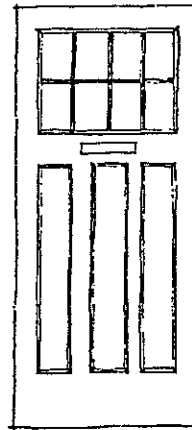
A Queen Anne-style door.

Revival-style doors tend to be fully paneled, with more restrained ornament.



A typical Colonial Revival-style door.

The overall simplicity of the Bungalow style is evident in the design of doors. Bungalow doors often featured single glazed panels above with simple raised panels below. Paneled doors also continued to be prevalent and had 4, 5, 6, or even 8 panels.



A Bungalow-style door.

The design of doors for commercial establishments typically remained consistent during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Shop doors were either single or double doors, often with a transom above. The doors themselves were usually paneled below with glass pane inset above. Steel and bronze frame storefront 'systems' began to appear after 1920.

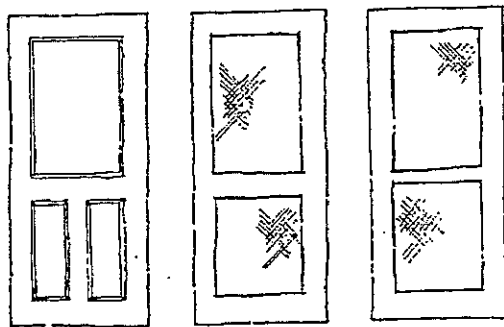
Recommendations for the preservation and rehabilitation of existing doors are as follows.

Recommended

- Retain and repair as much historic door fabric as possible. Repair should be in-kind to match existing size, species, profile, and configuration.
- If existing historic doors or screen doors are deteriorated irreparably replace in-kind to match existing size, species, profile, and configuration.
- Replace inappropriate doors with doors appropriate to the period and style of the building.

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- Screen and storm doors should be wood and kept as simple as possible except in the cases of Queen Anne, Second Empire, and Folk Victorian styles, which may be more elaborately composed and detailed. Except for screen doors that are a part of a screened porch enclosure, horizontal and vertical rails of screen doors should align and coincide with those of the door behind.



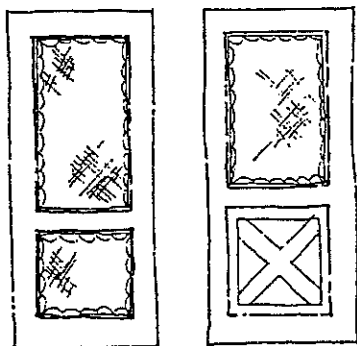
Door Storm and screen doors

Screen and storm doors to align with doors.

- Storm doors that are designed to have one large opening and that allow the door behind to be visible are also recommended.

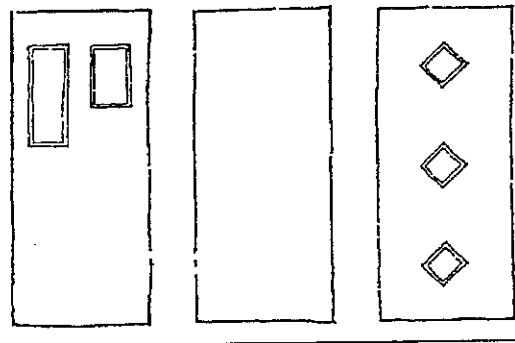
Not Recommended

- Aluminum doors and aluminum screen doors are not recommended in the pre-World War I and pre-World War II residential neighborhoods.



Not recommended.

- Modern flush doors are not recommended on the exterior of houses in the pre-World War II neighborhoods.
- Modern flush doors are inappropriate on the exterior of buildings within the nineteenth century and pre-World War I residential neighborhoods.



Inappropriate.

- Doors of an earlier (or otherwise inappropriate) style than the building are inappropriate.
- Enclosure of existing transoms and sidelights is inappropriate in every neighborhood.
- Aluminum doors and screens doors are inappropriate in the nineteenth century residential neighborhoods.

WINDOWS

The history of window design, until recently, can be seen as the continuous attempt to increase the size of glazed openings. Thus, throughout the nineteenth century (especially in commercial design), opening sizes increased, glass panes got larger, and muntins got thinner. Only the Colonial Revival represents a significant departure from this trend, in which a compromise was struck between the large sheets of available plate glass and the 6-light sash with thick muntins common

in Colonial buildings. The compromise was reached in the 6-over-1 window.

Early window casing was usually planed out of one piece; built-up moldings were virtually standardized by the end of the nineteenth century.

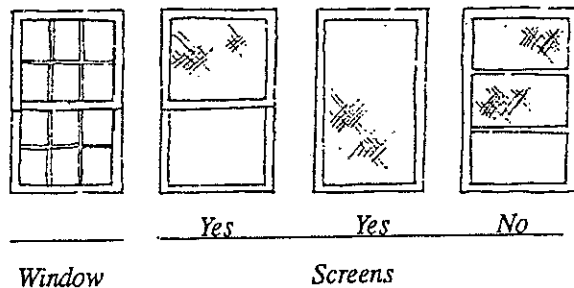
Typically, there was a wider range of sizes available in any given period. It is generally the case, however, that windows in any given period were proportioned so that the width was roughly 3/4 that of the height.

The following rehabilitation recommendations are intended to provide Decatur property owners with information with regard to the appropriate treatment of existing windows.

Recommended

- Repairing existing windows with in-kind materials is always preferable to replacing windows.
- When existing windows are irreparable, replacement windows should replicate as closely as possible existing historic window details, including pane configuration and muntin, mullion, casing, and trim profiles.
- Replacement windows should have the same operating characteristics as the original windows (i.e., double-hung windows should replace double-hung windows, casement windows should replace casement windows, etc.).
- Use only clear glass in existing or replacement windows.
- Window opening sizes and shapes should not be changed to accommodate replacement windows.

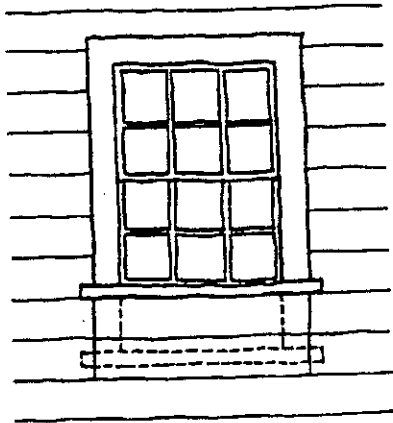
- Existing stained or leaded glass should be repaired or restored. This work should be accomplished by a trained leaded glass artisan, using the gentlest means possible. If this is not feasible, stained or leaded glass panels should be removed and stored in a manner that will allow future restoration.
- The rails of window screens and storm windows should match the rails of windows behind.



- New awnings should be attached in a manner that does not harm the existing building and should be of fabric and not of rigid material.

Not Recommended

- Replacing windows that are restorable is not recommended.
- Air conditioners should not be inserted in windows on the primary facade of buildings.
- False muntins for divided-light wood windows are not recommended. They are easily detectable from a distance.
- Smoked, tinted, or reflective glass is inappropriate in existing or replacement windows.
- Window opening sizes and shapes should not be changed to accommodate replacement windows or to accommodate new interior furnishings or cabinetry.



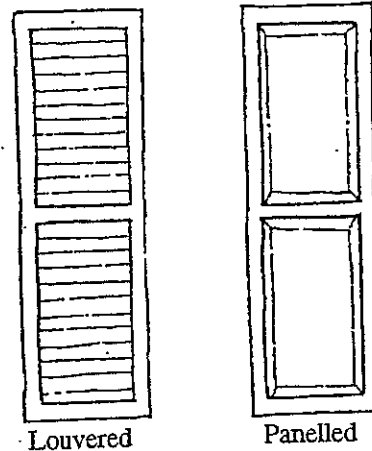
Inappropriate altering of window opening.

- Contemporary picture windows are inappropriate on the front facades of buildings built before World War II.

SHUTTERS

Wood shutters are quite common on houses within the residential neighborhoods of Decatur. Although few people presently put them to their intended use, their original purpose was to provide security and privacy, to permit ventilation while keeping rain and sunlight out, and to act as storm sash during heavy rains. Presently, shutters are most often fixed in place and serve as attractive elements in the design of the facades of residences within Decatur.

The following recommendations pertain to shutters on buildings in Decatur.



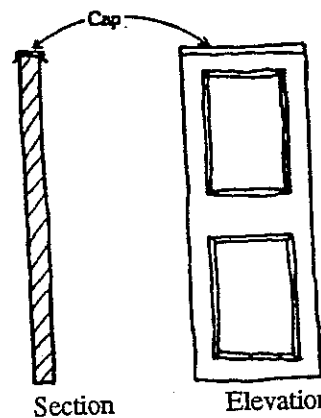
Louvered

Panelled

Shutters

Recommended

- Shutters should be repaired in-kind. If shutters are irreparable, replacement shutters should match existing.
- Shutters should be made of wood and painted for protection. An unobtrusive metal cap along the top edge will dramatically increase the longevity of the shutter.

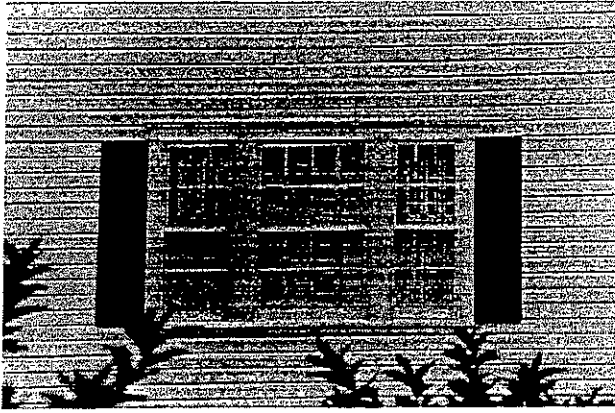


Section

Elevation

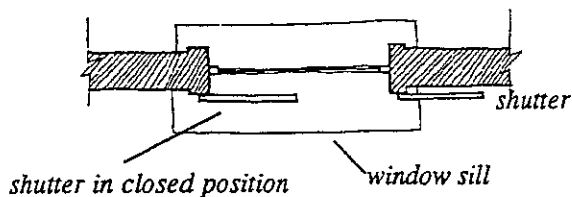
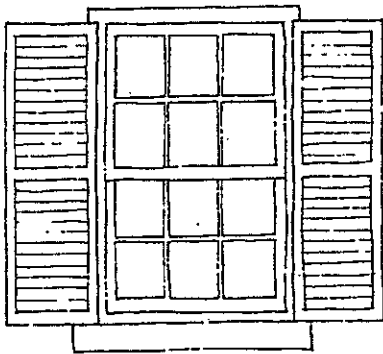
Metal cap for shutters.

- Shutters should be proportioned and sized appropriately to cover the existing window opening.



Shutters that do not, or would not, close over windows are not recommended.

- Louvered or paneled wood shutters are appropriate (typically paneled shutters were used only on lower floors, for security reasons).
- Shutters should be mounted to operate or at least give the appearance of being operable.



Appropriately proportioned and installed shutters.

Not Recommended

- Vinyl and aluminum shutters are not recommended.

ROOFING

There are a variety of historic roofing materials in Decatur: slate and cedar shingles, and metal roofing including copper and tin. Asphalt and fiberglass shingles and cement shakes are non-historic materials that are also prevalent. It should be noted that roofing material is a wearing surface whose lifetime is finite and that various roofing materials have various lifetimes. A slate roof may be viable for more than 100 years. Cedar shingles can last 50 years. A good copper roof can last 60 years. It is common for historic buildings not to have their original roofs. There are several basic steps that can be taken to prolong the lifetime of existing and new roofs.

The following recommendations are intended to provide guidance to property owners contemplating roof work within the City of Decatur.

Recommended

- Whenever possible, retain and repair historic roofing material in-kind and to match existing, whether original to the building or not. Reuse or replace in-kind historic decorative elements.
- Replacement roof materials should match those existing or verifiable historic conditions. Substitute materials are best limited to non-conspicuous roof areas.
- Flat-seam and standing-seam metal roofs are appropriate treatments for the replacement of existing non-repairable historic metal roofs.

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- Appropriate metal roofing material includes copper, lead-coated copper, terne-coated stainless steel, and terne metal. Painted metal roofs are also appropriate, but the paint used must be compatible with the metal roof. Colors should be limited to traditional roof colors such as red, green, and silver.
- Leave exposed eaves open and uncovered.
- If a slate roof is beyond repair, there are several materials available that are slate substitutes. Of these, cement tile is recommended. The owner should verify that the roof structure can support the weight of the cement tiles. Asphalt, fiberglass, and composition shingles are suitable replacements for slate within the pre-World War I and pre-World War II residential neighborhoods.



Exposed rafter ends and open eaves are important features and should remain exposed.

- Metal roofing should be installed in accordance with the recommendations of the Sheet Metal and Air Conditioning Contractors' National Association, Inc., 8224 Old Courthouse Road, Vienna, Virginia (703) 790-9890. These recommendations pertain especially to flashing details at roof edges and intersections.
- When replacing non-repairable and/or non-historic roofing of any kind, existing roofing material should be removed. This will assist in prolonging the life of the replacement roof and will maintain the thickness of the roof edge and thus minimize the effect on the proportions of the facade.
- Maintain historic roof forms. New dormers and skylights should be limited to the rear slopes of buildings.
- Skylights on rear facades should have minimal curbs and flat glass. Dormers on rear facades should be appropriately scaled to maintain the dominance of the form of the existing roof.
- Asphalt, fiberglass, and composition shingles are not recommended for existing historic buildings within the nineteenth century residential neighborhood. When used, they should be monochromatic and a muted color to lessen their visual impact.
- Pre-formed metal roofing panel systems are not recommended for existing and historic buildings. The width of the cap and trim pieces are intended for large-scale commercial applications and appear thick and heavy and out of character with the massing of original and historic buildings.
- It is not recommended that a new roof be installed over an existing roof. Layering old and new roofing traps moisture that may accelerate the deterioration of the roof structure. It also visually thickens the roof and roof edge.

Not Recommended

- Do not apply asphalt shingles over wood shingles. This will entrap moisture and accelerate the deterioration of the roof and roof structure.
- Do not place lath over existing asphalt shingles to provide a nailing surface for new wood shingles. This will increase the thickness of the roof and will trap moisture.
- The removal of historic decorative elements such as roof cresting or finials is strongly discouraged.
- Alterations to existing and historic roof forms are strongly discouraged. New dormers and skylights should not appear on front or side roof slopes.
- It is inappropriate to enclose existing open eaves. This treatment would alter the appearance of the building and may trap moisture against the existing building fabric.

FLASHING, GUTTERS, AND DOWNSPOUTS

The following recommendations are intended to provide guidance to property owners contemplating work on roof accessories within the City of Decatur.

Recommended

- Use 1/2-round or plain rectangular sheet metal gutters and plain round downspouts. Metal may be copper, lead-coated copper, terne-coated stainless steel, terne metal, or aluminum.

Not Recommended

- Extensive areas of visible metal flashing

should be avoided. In some masonry and stucco conditions, metal flashing may be covered by mortar or stucco.

- Galvanized steel gutters and downspouts are strongly discouraged as they rust and deteriorate quickly. The rust will stain adjacent surfaces. If used, galvanized steel gutters should be allowed to weather prior to the application of rust-inhibiting paint.
- Vinyl gutters and downspouts are not recommended. Their life expectancy is short and their lower initial installation cost does not represent a long-term savings.

WALLS: MASONRY

Masonry has been used from the earliest periods of building in Decatur and was used in several post-World War II subdivisions. Masonry is a strong, durable, and attractive material that requires little maintenance. The inherent durability of masonry construction is dependent upon appropriate maintenance and repair methods.

Guidelines for the repair, maintenance, restoration, or rehabilitation of exterior masonry are as follows.

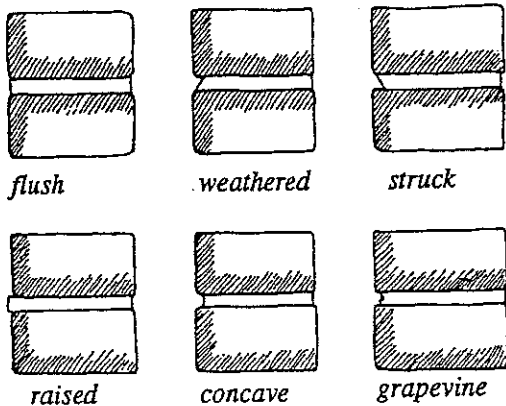
Recommended

- Where repointing is proposed, the mortar used for repointing should be equivalent to or softer than the original mortar in the masonry joints. Under no circumstances should the mortar be harder than the brick or masonry in the wall. To determine the composition for equivalent mortar, it is necessary to perform laboratory analysis of the mortar. In the absence of such analysis, a high lime content and low Portland cement content mortar will usually be com-

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patible with most historic masonry. A mortar mix of 1 part cement, 1 part lime, and 6 parts sand (1:1:6) is frequently acceptable. Where the original mortar or masonry units are particularly soft, a mortar mix of 1:2:9 may be appropriate.

- In addition, repointed mortar joints should match the appearance, color, texture, joint size, and tooling of the original or historic repointing, whichever predominates. If possible, use appropriate sands to match the color and texture of existing mortar. Do not use color additives (pigments), which tend to lighten over time. Numerous test panels may be required to achieve an acceptable match. Allow test panels to cure at least one week prior to evaluating their appearance.



Types of mortar joints.

- Where repointing, deteriorated and loose mortar should be removed manually, using non-mechanized hand tools, in order to minimize damage to surrounding masonry work. Remove mortar to a depth of 3/4" or equal to the width of the mortar joint, or to sound mortar, whichever is more.
- Pay particular attention to masonry and trim detailing on the facades of residences and com-

mercial buildings. If rebuilding is required, full photographic and dimensional documentation should precede it. Projecting and decorative cornices should be retained and repaired in-kind, if possible, or replicated in-kind. They should neither be removed nor covered up.

- Clean masonry using the gentlest means possible; often a prolonged saturation with water followed by brushing with bristle brushes will be sufficient.
- When replacement of an area of brick or stone in a masonry wall is required, that area should match the existing material in bonding pattern, decorative pattern, coursing, color, size, strength, pointing, and mortar, and should be toothed or keyed to existing masonry work. Replacement material should never be substantially stronger than the existing.
- Prior to rebuilding any masonry wall, foundation, or chimney, carefully document the structure by photography and actual measurement to facilitate accurate duplication. Reuse as many brick or stone units as possible.
- Install sloping mortar wash surfaces at the tops of chimneys to protect the chimney walls.
- If a chimney cap is required, a stone or terra cotta cap is recommended.
- Do not sandblast masonry for any reason.
- Do not change the size or tooling profile of the mortar joint when repointing brick.
- Prior to repointing, do not remove existing mortar with power equipment. Remove existing mortar using hand tools narrower than the width of the masonry joint.

- 'Over cleaning' of brick with harsh chemicals and/or excessive water pressure will do more harm than good to the brick.
- Do not use masonry sealer, which traps moisture inside masonry walls, preventing them from breathing.

WALLS: WOOD SIDING AND TRIM

Wood siding is the 'skin' of a building. Its purpose is to shed water quickly and thoroughly, thus preventing decay of the underlying structure and the deterioration of interior finishes, and to deflect sunlight and wind. Siding also plays an important visual role in establishing the scale of the building. Each clapboard or shingle casts a shadow line, adding some visual depth to the wall surface, while the size of the clapboard or shingle visually affects the mass and proportions of each building.

Directly associated with the wood siding, and with masonry as well, is the exterior trim of the building. Wood trim serves a critical visual purpose by providing architectural ornament and a functional purpose by sealing the structure at vulnerable locations. Corner boards, fascia boards, window caps and trim, architraves, and cornices are examples of trim elements that protect critical joints of a building from exposure.

The following recommendations are for the repair, maintenance, or rehabilitation of wood siding and trim.

Recommended

- Siding and trim should be retained and repaired. For areas of partial deterioration, techniques utilizing in-kind and visually matching patches are preferable to total replacement, in the interest of retaining as much existing material as possible.
- If siding is severely deteriorated and re-siding is proposed, it should be done with horizontal siding to match existing. Vertical siding is a more modern intrusion and would be more appropriate to secondary structures such as sheds and outbuildings.
- Existing original asphalt shingle siding should be repaired and replaced in-kind where it contributes to the character of the building.
- All wood siding and trim should be painted.

Not Recommended

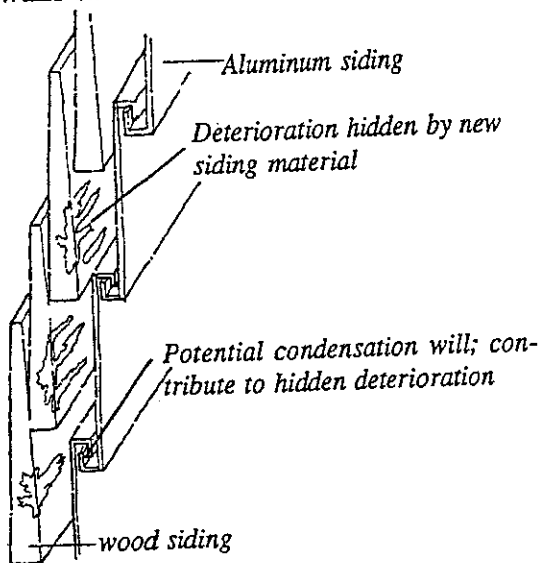
- Aluminum siding is not recommended for use on new or existing buildings except in the post-World War II residential neighborhood for reasons that have to do with its potentially destructive tendency to hide deterioration and to trap moisture against the existing wood siding. It also has a significant negative visual impact in that it conceals historic fabric and has a detectable sheen and vertical joints that detract from the character of these neighborhoods.

When it is used on existing buildings, steps should be taken to minimize its impact, such as:

- Retain and leave exposed the wood trim at windows, doors, and corners. Siding should butt the trim. This may require the removal and furring out of existing trim in order to be in the correct plane in relation to the siding. This work should be accomplished in a manner that will not damage existing trim.
- Retain and leave exposed decorative elements such as brackets, spindle work, cornices, etc.

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- If corner boards cannot be retained, use an aluminum corner that duplicates the width of the original corner board.
 - Do not use pastel or 'ranch house' colors.
 - Match the width of the original wood siding; i.e. 4" exposure wood siding should be covered with 4" exposure aluminum siding.
 - Maintain constant ventilation to the inside surface of the aluminum siding. The effects of the condensation that will otherwise result will be prolonged, serious, and invisible.
 - Vinyl siding is not recommended for use in Decatur. Its sheen is noticeable and it is nearly impossible to install without covering up or obliterating original architectural details. Its seams are visible, it tends to warp and deflect with changes in temperature, and its color will fade noticeably over time. It also traps and hides potentially damaging moisture within the walls of the house.
- If it is proposed for use, certain steps should be taken to mitigate its effects:
- Vinyl siding should be installed to allow ventilation to occur between it and the underlayment below.
 - Vinyl siding that is embossed with artificial wood grain should not be used.
 - Existing trim details at corners, windows, doors, eaves, and elsewhere should not be covered over and in no case should they be removed or altered.
 - Match the width of the original wood siding.
 - Vinyl siding is inappropriate for use on existing buildings in the nineteenth century residential neighborhood. Its sheen, finish, and artificial wood grain are easily visible. Details and installation are difficult to make compatible with the historic character of these neighborhoods.



Aluminum siding over wood siding.

- Wavy-edged shingles are strongly discouraged.
- Textured plywood (T-11) vertical siding should not be used on primary structures within the residential and commercial areas of Decatur.

PORCHES

Porches are critical architectural elements on many of the residential streets throughout Decatur. The porch is a unique outdoor living area that belongs to the house but partakes in the life of the street. The full extent of its lightweight structure and fine detailing is fully exposed to the weather, requiring the maintenance and repair of porches to be a constant process. The proper de-

sign of porches entails more than the correct architectural elements, proportions, and materials, and includes proper construction detailing. This is true for all porches, whether they are existing or part of new construction.



Porches are critical architectural elements subject to full exposure to the elements.

The following recommendations are intended to provide guidance to homeowners contemplating maintenance, repair, or rehabilitation of existing porches.

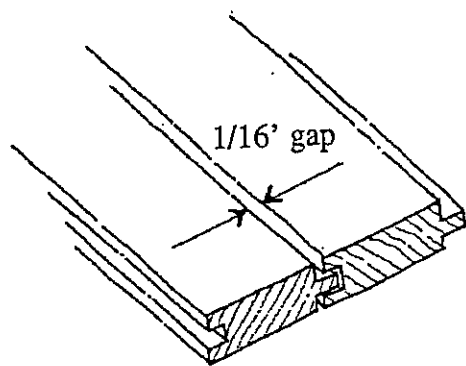
Recommended

- Retain as much existing porch fabric as possible. Repair with in-kind materials, almost always wood, with profiles to match existing as nearly as possible.
- The porch floor should be even with or a maximum of one-step below the corresponding floor of the house, unless existing or historic conditions suggest differently.
- Porch ceilings should be the same height as that of adjacent interior rooms. Porches with exposed rafters and roof deck should not have ceilings installed. When re-roofing, nails should not be visible below the underside of the deck of the porch roof.
- It is appropriate to construct a porch on a house that historically had a porch that has been subsequently removed. The design of the new porch should be carefully researched. If photographic or other good historic documentation is available, it should serve as a literal model for the new porch. If no such documentary evidence is available, the new porch may be of a contemporary design that is compatible and complementary to the existing building, and consistent with the size and design of porches typical to the period of the house. New porches should not be built to look 'old' when no evidence exists for the original porch design.
- For new porches on houses where documentary evidence for a historic porch is not available, the rhythm of the porch bays, as established by the regularity of columns and openings, should match that of the solids and voids of the house behind.
- For new porches on houses where documentary evidence for a historic porch is not available, the height of the bottom of the porch fascia board should be at or very near the height of the window head of the house. This may vary slightly because of the variety of porches in Decatur. The intention of this guideline is to prevent inappropriately proportioned porches. The design of fascia boards should be appropriate to the style of the house.
- All visible porch components should be painted wood, unless there is historic precedent for the use of weathering wood such as cedar. Because of the amount of exposure to which wood porch components are subject,

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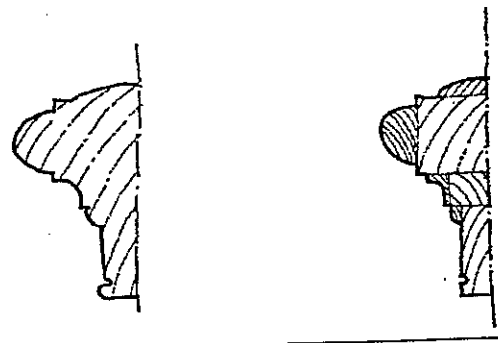
all painted parts should be 'back-primed'—i.e., prime-painted on their concealed surfaces to discourage deterioration from moisture penetration.

- For new porches on houses where documentary evidence for a historic porch is not available, the porch should be at least 6' deep to allow comfortable seating. Maximum depths of porches are a function of the overall height of the house or porch ceiling.
- Leave open the spaces between porch piers so that ventilation can occur beneath the porch. This is best done using painted wood lattice or grillage.
- Replacement porch flooring should match existing tongue-and-groove flooring with a $1/16''$ maximum gap between boards to allow for expansion. Wood edging should be applied to the exposed ends of floorboards.



Tongue-and-groove flooring with gap for expansion.

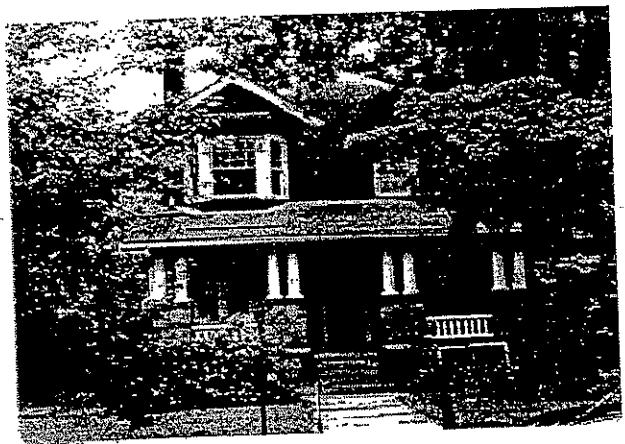
- Replacement porch ceilings and roof decks should match existing beaded tongue-and-groove planks where applicable.
- Replacement porch railings should match existing as closely as possible. If a historic railing profile is not available, often a good replica may be constructed made up of a number of available moldings.



Historic Profile

Profile built-up from stock moldings

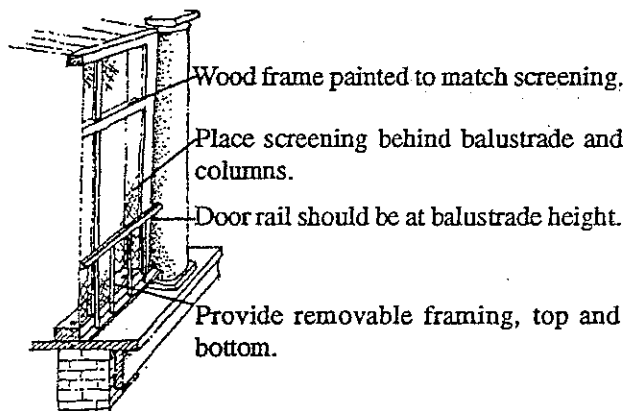
Replacement porch railings.



The porch railing and balusters complement the solidity of this house.

- Porch columns should be retained, or replaced in-kind if beyond repair.
- For enclosures of side porches that are visible from the street, new construction should be placed behind the existing columns and balustrade so as not to obscure existing architectural elements. The walls of the enclosure should reflect the massing—the relationship of solid-to-void—of the porch itself. This will require porch enclosures to have a large amount of glass. The wood parts of the new porch enclosures should be painted a

matte finish, a dark color compatible with the glass or screens. The color of the rest of the enclosure should contrast with the color of the original porch, to maintain the distinction between original and new construction.



Enclosing porches with screening.

Not Recommended

- Use of composition and plastic moldings is not recommended on porches in Decatur. Their longevity is unproven.
- It is inappropriate to add porches to the primary facades of historic structures that never had porches.
- Enclosing porches on primary facades is not recommended. Because it is often the most economical way to create additional interior space, enclosing front porches, will continue to occur. See the guidelines for the enclosure of side porches, above.
- It is inappropriate to use substitute materials; wrought iron piers should not be used in place of brick or wood columns.

- It is inappropriate to enclose the space between porch piers with continuous wood or masonry. This will discourage ventilation from occurring beneath the porch, hastening deterioration from moisture.
- It is inappropriate to add ornament to a porch from a style that is different from the house itself, unless there is historic precedent for it.
- Two-inch-thick boards are inappropriate for porch floors.
- Unpainted wood is inappropriate for use on porches in Decatur.
- It is inappropriate to replace porch columns with columns of an architectural order or character that is not compatible with the house.
- It is inappropriate to install a porch ceiling where none existed. The exposed rafters and deck are a part of the architectural expression of the porch.

STEPS

Steps nearly always extend beyond the roof line of buildings or porches and are thus exposed to the weather even more than porches. Steps are an important part of the streetscape, establishing rhythm and regularity and articulating building entrances. Proper detailing is as important to the correct design of steps as is the use of appropriate materials and style.

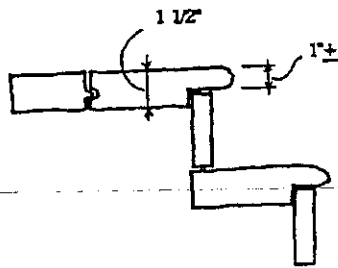
The prevalent materials of existing steps in Decatur are wood and brick. A few houses feature stone or concrete steps and stoops.

The following recommendations are intended to guide Decatur property owners who are contem-

plating the repair, maintenance, or rehabilitation of steps.

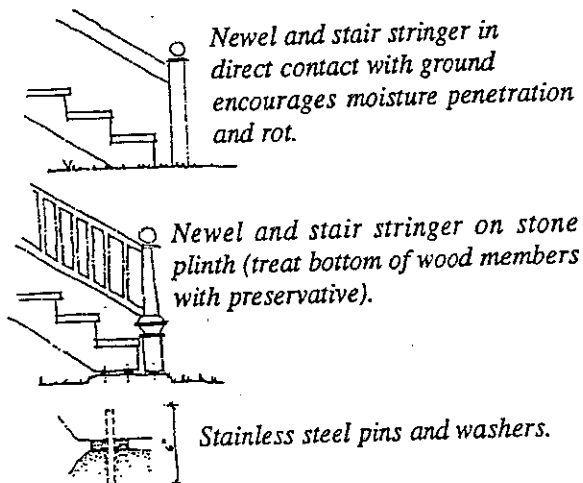
Recommended

- Wood steps should be retained or repaired in-kind. If replacement is unavoidable, it should be carried out by using wood of size, species, and profile to match existing. Wood steps should be painted.
- If 2" lumber is used for treads on wood steps, the leading edge of the tread should be reduced to visually 'lighten' the tread.



Detail for reducing tread and porch floor edge thickness.

- Wood steps and posts should not come in contact with the ground but should land on a stone or concrete plinth.



Exterior wood steps.

- Brick steps should be retained or repaired in-kind. In the residential neighborhoods, brick steps may be a replacement for earlier wood steps. Thus, where brick steps are not integral to the design of the porch or house, wood steps may replace brick steps, but should be designed simply.
- Stone steps should be retained and repaired in-kind. Patching of existing stone steps should be with material to match existing. A concrete patch, tinted to match adjacent stone, is acceptable. If replacement is required, stone should be used.
- Replacing wood steps with brick steps is inappropriate, unless there is historic precedent for it.
- Replacing historic stone steps is inappropriate unless the stone itself is unusable. Repairing stone steps is often a matter of re-setting existing stone steps on a firm foundation with new mortar or sealant joints.
- Brick steps should not be sandblasted. Sealant should not be applied to mortar joints, as it will seal moisture within the brickwork.

PAINT

Paint is the final layer of finish applied to a building's exterior. It plays an absolutely critical role in the appearance of a building and in protecting the building from rain and sunlight. It is a sacrificial layer, requiring re-application every five to ten years. As such, paint colors are also the aspects of a building's design that are the most subject to changes in taste over time. It is not unusual for a 100-year-old building to have a paint build-up of ten or more colors, several of which

may be considered 'historic.' It is therefore difficult to prescribe paint colors rigidly.

Changes in tastes in color generally accompanied changes in architectural style, and so it is often most appropriate to paint a historic building in its original color scheme. The only way to be certain of original paint colors is to undertake a paint seriation study. This must be performed by specialists who will examine a cross section of paint chips under special light conditions to ascertain the specific color, hue, and value of individual paint layers. This procedure can be done relatively inexpensively if the property owner can send a paint sample to the paint specialist.

The following guidelines are intended to give property owners some assistance in deciding upon an appropriate color scheme for their building. It should be understood that there is a great deal of overlap between specific architectural styles and specific paint schemes, and these brief guidelines are by no means a substitution for paint seriation analysis. It should be further noted that the dates attributed to the architectural styles below are as suggested in *A Field Guide to American Architecture* (Rifkind, 1980); dates associated with particular styles may tend to be later in Decatur.

Second Empire (1860-1900). Second Empire buildings were often painted to match masonry predecessors, usually softer earth tones. Trim was painted in contrasting colors, but somewhat bolder and darker colors. Occasionally, this theme was abandoned, and Second Empire buildings were painted in bold colors with lively contrast between the siding and the trim, which could be highlighted using two or even three colors.

Queen Anne (1865-1900). This style introduced increased boldness, liveliness, and contrast both in architectural style and color. There was a great deal of variety. Several colors might appear on

the same building, with trim being two colors and different volumes of the structure expressed with different colors. Often, different colors were used to articulate each story of a house.

Victorian Commercial (1870-1920). Although colors varied, dark hues such as forest green were predominant. On brick buildings, painting was limited to the wood trim and metal components that are often the ornamental features of the facade.

Colonial Revival (1900-1920). Colors returned to the white siding and green shutter paint schemes of the Greek Revival period.

Bungalow (1880-1930). Colors were still used to express the various parts of the structure, but they were less bold, darker versions of the earlier Italianate and Gothic styles.

Because of ongoing refinements and improvements in modern paint formulas, the difference in quality and longevity between oil-based and latex exterior paints has become minimal. It is still the case that latex may be applied over oil-based paints but the reverse is not true. Once latex paint is applied to a building, it must be stripped before oil-based paint can be applied satisfactorily. Both latex and oil-based paints are recommended for Decatur.

ENERGY CONSERVATION AND HEATING, COOLING, AND ELECTRICAL SYSTEMS

It is the contention of these guidelines that historic preservation and energy conservation are completely compatible and mutually supportive. Moreover, some non-historic energy conservation innovations, such as storm windows and batt insulation, may be sympathetically incorporated

in both historic buildings and new construction in Decatur.

The large equipment associated with some more contemporary mechanical, electrical, and communication systems are non-historic, though essential, additions to Decatur. As such, they should be hidden or screened from view. Their undisguised presence is not recommended.

Recommended

- Where increased thermal performance is required of existing windows, install interior thermal storm windows within existing openings. Allow for air circulation between the windows to prevent the build-up of condensation that will accelerate the deterioration of historic wood windows. Match the color of the existing window as well as the opening size and overall design. Metal thermal sash is recommended for metal windows, and wood, PVC, or vinyl thermal sash are recommended for wood windows.
- Exterior storm windows are recommended. They should have slender frames and meeting rails that align with the historic windows behind, and should be painted to match the adjacent window frame.
- All glass in any window should be clear glass rather than tinted or reflective.
- Awnings are more appropriate in the commercial districts and especially on Queen Anne- and Bungalow-style houses. These should be of canvas, and may be solid colored or striped. Their shape should be simple, to conform to the configuration of the window or porch opening.



Simple awnings complement the appearance of storefronts and provide shelter from sun and rain.

- Air conditioning equipment should be screened by plantings, lattice, or brickwork, so as not to be visible from the street.
- All mechanical equipment, including TV antennas and satellite dishes, should be located so as not to be visible from the street. Where possible, consolidate several antennae on any one building into one antenna. If necessary, sight-line studies should be performed to assist in the selection of unobtrusive locations for such equipment.
- Roof-top solar panels should be located so as not to be visible from the street.

Not Recommended

- Replacement windows are not recommended for the purposes of energy conservation. Either interior or exterior storm windows are more effective in conserving energy, and permit the historic wood windows to remain in place.

- The addition of aluminum and vinyl siding to existing structures is not recommended as an energy conservation strategy. In addition to the loss of historic character and features, the application of siding prevents inspection of underlying historic fabric, thus concealing the early indicators of what may be serious deterioration due to moisture or insects.
 - Also, there is a great deal of controversy as to whether siding is in fact an effective insulator. A study performed by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development in Providence, Rhode Island, showed an energy conservation related payback period of 30 years for aluminum siding, while the payback for storm doors, storm windows, and attic insulation was 4.5 years. For strategies for mitigating the damage caused by adding aluminum and vinyl siding to a historic structure, see "Wood Siding and Trim" above.
 - Do not add vestibules to the exterior of the house, unless there is historic precedent for a vestibule. The expense of the construction will probably not be recovered through energy savings, and the addition to the entrance facade will significantly alter the building's character, proportions, and massing.
 - Modern aluminum doors and storm doors do much harm to the character of historic houses within the nineteenth century and pre-World War I residential neighborhoods and are not recommended in the pre-World War II residential neighborhoods.
- be brought to bear when planning energy conservation measures for structures within Decatur.
- Apply weather stripping between windows and frames and doors and frames. Paint all metal weather stripping to match windows, doors, and frames.
 - Shutters should remain operable.
 - Provide attic insulation. Provide an attic vent 1/300 the area of the attic. Install batt insulation with the vapor barrier face down between the floor joists in unheated attics. The vapor barrier should always be installed closest to the occupied space to prevent water vapor from passing through to unheated surfaces, where it will condense, resulting in moisture build-up. 'Blow-in' insulation is appropriate for attic insulation when installed with a vapor barrier.
 - Insulate the first floor at basement and crawl spaces. Install vapor barrier up, directly underneath floor boards. The vapor barrier should always be installed closest to the occupied space to prevent water vapor from passing through to unheated surfaces, where it will condense, resulting in moisture build-up. 'Blow-in' insulation is appropriate for crawl space insulation.
 - Install caulking at joints that have opened up between siding and trim, and elsewhere on exterior.
 - Do not add wall insulation to the air spaces within the exterior walls of wood frame construction. This will alter the ability of water vapor to pass in and out of the wall. This, combined with the susceptibility to condensation of wood frame construction, has the potential to cause irreversible damage to the walls as

Preservation Recommendations

In addition to the above guidelines, the following recommendations are intended to serve as reminders of general considerations that should

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well as damage to historic fabric due to holes cut in historic siding and interior plaster during installation.

- Do not add insulation to masonry cavity walls. These walls have inherent insulation value and the elimination of the air cavity may cause condensation to form. It is also expensive.
- Interior storm windows, caulking, and weather stripping will contribute significantly to the conservation of energy in existing buildings.



CHAPTER 4

NEW CONSTRUCTION AND ADDITIONS IN THE RESI- DENTIAL NEIGHBORHOODS OF DECATUR

As Decatur's primary building boom occurred between 1900 and 1940, plats were subdivided and individual building sites were developed as single-family residences. Only the most difficult building sites were not developed at that time, and for good reasons; either natural topography such as steep slopes and nearby streams, or proximity to major arteries rendered them not feasible for single-family residential construction. The result is that presently, most of the available building sites within the existing residential neighborhoods are, almost by definition, distinctly not typical Decatur building sites. This is a dilemma; most of the available building sites in the residential neighborhoods of Decatur are available for building only because they were specifically excluded from the typical residential development activity of Decatur. To the extent that unbuilt lots may continue to participate in the traditional development pattern of Decatur, it is as vacant lots.

Two problems present themselves. First, the interest of preserving the traditional development pattern of Decatur's residential neighborhoods would best be served if unbuilt lots—those previously considered unbuildable—remain vacant. Second, given the reality of development pressures and the assured fact that these lots will eventually be developed, non-traditional building sites

may not lend themselves particularly well to design principles and architectural solutions that are based on typical Decatur houses. Steep slopes require that new houses be entirely raised on first-floor garages, with primary entrances accessible by way of a long flight of exterior stairs. Extremely low sites may require a bridge between the sidewalk and the front porch. Neither long steps nor a bridge are typical ways to enter Decatur houses. In the photograph below, recent single-family residential construction is separated from its neighbors by a preexisting border of trees that must have been intended to screen the upper end of Superior Avenue—the traditional limit of residential development—from the arterial traffic of Scott Boulevard. Appropriate infill construction in the residential neighborhoods of Decatur is particularly problematic and will require very individual, well-considered solutions.



Later house on Superior Avenue at Scott Boulevard, separated from older neighbors by buffer of trees.

The relatively small size of Decatur houses has long made them relatively affordable. This is still the case, and adding to existing buildings is a preferred manner of adapting to requirements for additional space. Although building sites tend to be quite deep, additions in Decatur have tended to go up rather than out, sometimes dwarfing or severely altering the appearance of the existing

residential structure. Appropriate house additions can increase property values in a neighborhood while a succession of unsympathetic additions may depress them. Additions also have the potential to affect a neighbor's views, and can restrict access to light and air.



Some additions have dwarfed the existing residential structure.

The recommendations below are intended to maximize the choices available to property owners and designers who are contemplating new construction and additions. In order to promote new construction and additions that are compatible and complementary to existing historic buildings, the recommendations are written with the understanding that the more narrow the guidance for new construction, the more severe will be the limitations placed on creative and innovative design solutions. The spirit of these recommendations then is neither rigid nor formulaic; it is not possible to concoct a recipe for good design. Rather, the recommendations are intended to promote an informed flexibility in planning new residential construction and additions within the City of Decatur.

The recommendations that follow suggest and illustrate general principles that should be ob-

served when undertaking new construction or additions within Decatur's residential neighborhoods. Property owners seeking a formula or a recipe for appropriate design will be disappointed. Strict adherence to these design principles is no guarantee that good buildings will result; the creativity, inspiration, and innovation of a good designer is still required. The point of these recommendations is to provide flexible parameters within which appropriate, appealing design will emerge.

Compatibility and appropriateness, as referenced in the recommendations for new construction and additions that follow, do not suggest the literal reinterpretation or reiteration of existing or historic buildings or styles. Rather, they suggest the design of buildings whose appearance, character, and attitude reflect the existing buildings and overall pattern of development within a given neighborhood. The recommendations below encourage the designer of new construction to consider existing and historic buildings as a starting point in the design process, and not as the final goal.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NEW CONSTRUCTION

Siting

New construction in Decatur's residential neighborhoods should respect the dominant setback line of existing construction, over and above what is called for in the Zoning Ordinance. In the nineteenth century neighborhood, where lot size and setbacks vary, there is greater flexibility of siting; generally buildings should be on the front portion of lots. In the pre-World War I and pre-World War II neighborhoods, where lot sizes and setbacks tend to be quite regular, the setbacks and siting of new construction should be the same as

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or very close to that of adjacent structures. That is, a new building should occupy its site and have the same relationship to the street and sidewalk as its neighbors.



Consistent setbacks contribute to the creation of a street "wall."

Style

It is specifically *not* the intention of these recommendations to require 'historical' designs or the adherence to a particular style, formula, or set of architectural elements. 'Period architecture' and the strict quotation of architectural elements and details is distinctly not their intent. There are a number of reasons why these recommendations do not encourage the literal use or copying of historic styles that are present in Decatur.

First, there is a wide range of building periods, styles, and types that contribute to the eclectic character of Decatur's residential neighborhoods. This diversity in itself is a key factor in determining the character of the city. For this reason, there is no 'correct' style or even styles for the residential neighborhoods in Decatur.



There is a wide variety of architectural styles in Decatur, often side-by-side.

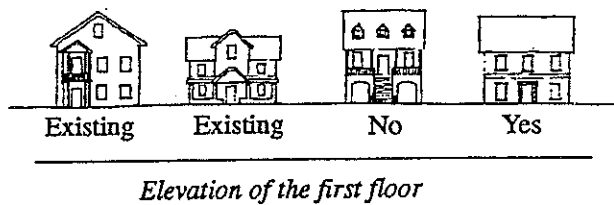
Second, the act of copying architectural styles and elements may trivialize and confuse the genuine historic architecture within Decatur. *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards* specify that new construction must be clearly distinguishable from old. New construction should not confuse the existing clarity of Decatur's history and development pattern, and should not be mistaken for something earlier than it actually is. New construction should reflect present design and construction practices in a manner that interprets and participates in Decatur's architectural diversity. If a contemporary building is to be based upon a historic style, that style should be one that is prevalent in a given neighborhood. That is, a contemporary building that is based on the Queen Anne style would be inappropriate in the pre-World War II residential neighborhood.

Scale

New construction in Decatur's residential neighborhoods should reflect the dominant cornice, soffit, eaves, and roof heights of adjacent buildings. This recommendation becomes more important as a given street increases in density, and is

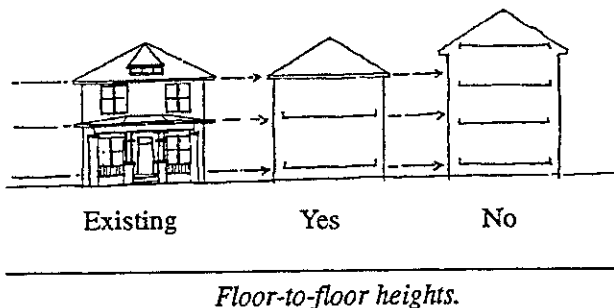
intended to prevent radical departures from prevalent scale elements; building heights of new construction do not have to match exactly the heights of adjacent structures. Where the street does not have a dominant or discernible rhythm of cornice heights, such as the nineteenth century residential neighborhood, decisions regarding appropriate scale should be determined more by considerations of absolute height and massing described below.

of adjacent buildings. Along a flat stretch of street, first floors should be the same as adjacent houses. On sloping sites, the first floors of new construction should complete the pattern of stepping down or up established by the level of the first floors of adjacent houses.



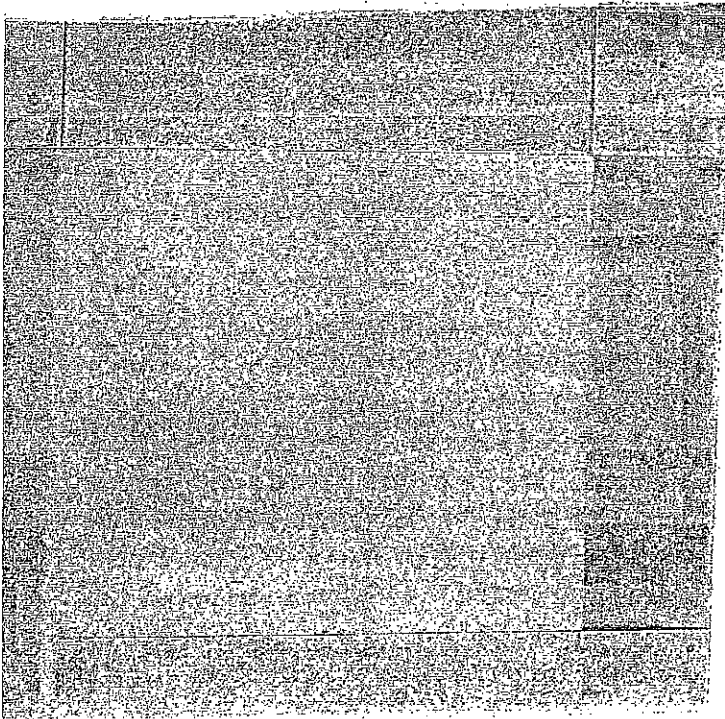
Floor-to-Floor Heights

This important element of scale is often ignored in new construction. As a general rule, floor-to-floor heights of new construction should be within 10% of adjacent existing construction, where a relatively consistent floor-to-floor height is expressed in the facades of a given street. In the nineteenth century neighborhoods, existing ceiling heights will be higher than contemporary heights.



Proportions: Bays, Windows, and Doors

The scale of a building is strongly affected by the proportions—the ratio of width to height—of the building as a whole and of its principal facade components such as door openings, window openings, and porch column spacing. These ele-

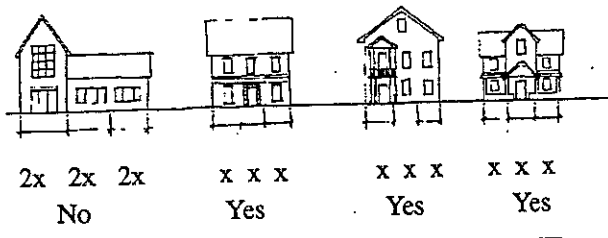


Elevation of the First Floor

Houses along typical residential streets in Decatur tend to have a relatively consistent floor height. This is expressed on the exterior either by steps that lead to first-floor porches that are raised between 1'-6" and 3'-0" above the sidewalk, or by front walks that lead to low stoops. Because the terrain rolls throughout much of Decatur, individual houses may step up or down with the terrain. The elevation of the first floor of new construction in the residential neighborhoods of Decatur should be established according to that

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ments of the facade also visually divide the building into what are commonly termed 'bays.' For example, a first-floor facade composed of a central door flanked on both sides by two windows is generally referred to as 'five bay.' The facade of a proposed building should draw upon the proportion and number of bays contained in neighboring structures if it is to appear compatible with its surroundings. On several streets within the nineteenth century and pre-World War I residential neighborhoods, there is a range in the number of bays composing the facades of houses. This in turn allows more flexibility in determining the bay structure of the facades of new buildings. On several of the streets of the pre-World War II neighborhoods, there is a more dominant horizontal overall proportion and a more regular number of bays and prevalent bay size, suggesting a somewhat narrower range of approaches to these elements of the design of new construction.



Proportions: bays, windows, and doors.

Absolute Size

When the scale of buildings within an individual residential neighborhood is relatively consistent, new construction should be restricted from departing drastically from that scale. In Decatur, one-story, one-and-one-half-story, and two-story residential structures are most prevalent, and three-story residential structures are quite rare. Structures which digress from this precedent impact the character of the residential neighborhoods. A contemporary three-story house in a neighborhood of existing one-story bungalows,

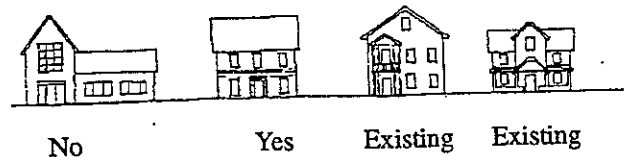
even given the diversity within Decatur, is not recommended. It is interesting to note that in Decatur many of the larger two-story structures are on lots that are not significantly raised from the street. Most houses on sites that are significantly, sometimes dramatically, above the street have one-story and one-and-one-half-story houses.



Absolute size.

Massing

The facades of new construction should reflect the sense of lightness or weight of neighboring buildings by using similar proportions of solids (siding or walls) to voids (window and door openings), and the overall sizes of openings, projecting bays, and overhangs. In Decatur for example, this would limit the use of picture windows on street facades because, aside from the fact that they are not in keeping with the character of most of the residential neighborhoods, they would not reflect the prevalent ratio of solid to void in the facades of existing residential structures.



Massing.

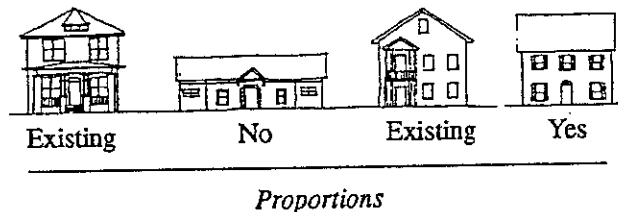
Orientation

In the Decatur residential neighborhoods, new construction should be designed so that the prin-

cipal facade and the principal entrance are oriented towards the street. This is particularly important in the residential neighborhoods of Decatur where virtually every building addresses the street frontally. Primary roof ridges of new construction should be parallel to the primary roof ridges of adjacent existing buildings. As noted before, ridges are more likely to be perpendicular to the street in the pre-World War I neighborhoods, and parallel to the street in the pre-World War II neighborhoods. Facades of new construction on a corner site should differentiate between the two streets. That is to say, new construction with two primary facades or two relatively undifferentiated primary facades is inappropriate. Each facade of a corner building should reflect the character of the streetscape upon which it fronts.

Proportions

The proportions of new construction should relate to the dominant proportions of the styles present in the immediate neighborhood. The proposed design should reflect closely the height/width ratios of overall building proportions as well as that of doors, windows, and porch bays.



Materials

New construction should use materials in a manner sympathetic to the existing buildings within a given residential neighborhood. Materials should be of similar or complementary color, size, texture, scale, craftsmanship, and applicability to the function performed. In Decatur, there are clear

precedents for the use of materials. Bungalows sometimes combine wood siding with stone porch pillars, and the Revival styles often place a special material around the entrance, such as brick around the entrance to houses with siding and stone around the entrances to brick houses. Generally, there is a relatively high level of detail and craftsmanship in Decatur houses, which should be maintained in the design of new construction.

It should be noted that the sympathetic use of materials does not imply that materials used in new construction will replicate the old in detail, nor that new construction will attempt to imitate historic structures. Rather, it is a matter of determining the compatibility of the new with the old. Certain materials are potentially so visually intrusive that their use for new construction within the Decatur residential neighborhoods is not recommended. These materials include:

- exposed concrete masonry
- painted concrete masonry
- ornamental pierced concrete masonry screens and walls
- 'antiqued brick'
- vinyl and metal siding
- wrought iron and aluminum porch columns
- exposed chain link fencing
- carpeted porch floors and steps
- flush exterior doors
- inappropriate window treatments:
 - jalousie windows
 - glass block
 - picture windows
 - windows with horizontal glazing
 - windows from the wrong period such as 12-over-12 double-hung sash on a Bungalow or 5-over-1 sash on a Georgian Revival

- asphalt siding
- unpainted wood
- vertical wood siding on primary structures

Forms

New construction should reflect and be sympathetic to the forms of adjacent structures. The richness of styles in the residential neighborhoods of Decatur feature a variety of architectural forms such as shallow gables, parallel overlapping gables receding from the front, concave gables, steeply-pitched intersecting gables, small and large dormers, additive porches, projecting bays, loggias, ells, semi-circular and circular window forms, an assortment of window and door shapes, architectural chimneys, and small slightly projecting entrance bays. Examples of non-historic forms within the residential neighborhoods include flat roofs, horizontal ribbon windows, ranch houses, low-country-type one-and-one-half-story houses with dormers, and Charleston-style side entry porches. The use of these inappropriate forms in new construction within the residential neighborhoods of Decatur is out of character with the rest of the city and not recommended.



There are a wide variety of appropriate forms for new residential construction in Decatur.

Curb-cuts and off-street parking in front yards or along-side houses within the nineteenth century and pre-World War I neighborhoods are not original or historic features of Decatur and are not recommended. Where available, off-street parking in the rear of the site with access by alleyways should be encouraged. On-street parking should be encouraged where street widths allow, because it provides a perceptible barrier between pedestrians and traffic and makes walking a more attractive means of transportation.

Secondary Structures

There is some precedent in the historic residential neighborhoods of Decatur for secondary structures, including but not limited to garages, studios, and guest houses. These buildings are usually located towards the rear of the lot, especially in the case of lots served by rear alleys. Similar to additions, new secondary structures should be subordinate to the primary structure on the lot and visually complementary to the existing building. New secondary structures should in no way compromise the character of the existing structure. Ideally, the secondary structure should be located so as not to be visible from the street. In any case, secondary structures should be located as far to the rear of a lot as possible. Secondary structures should be free-standing and not linked to the primary structure. The design recommendations above regarding proportions, massing, materials, form, orientation, and siting apply to secondary structures as well.

ARCHEOLOGICAL RESOURCES

The Secretary of the Interior's Standard 8 requires the preservation and protection of archeological resources. There is some likelihood that excavation for new construction in Decatur may involve archeological resources. While efforts should be

made to consider and protect those resources, the extent to which this consideration will bear upon appropriateness will vary from project to project. Certainly, property owners should be cognizant of a project's possible impact on archeologically sensitive areas. Excavations should be monitored whenever possible, to confirm that valuable resources are not being lost. Projects within the South Candler/Agnes Scott College Historic District benefiting from either federal or state funding will require archeological mitigation.

ADDITIONS TO EXISTING BUILDINGS

Additions to existing buildings in the residential neighborhoods of Decatur include construction that results in additional enclosed habitable space, as well as porches and decks. Most of the design recommendations for new construction also apply to additions to existing buildings, with the exception that instead of compatibility and relationship to its neighbors, an addition has the original building as its strongest context and precedent. There are several precedents within Decatur for appropriate approaches to building additions.



There have been several compatible additions to existing structures within Decatur.

In general, there are five basic principles which guide the design of additions to residential structures:

1. The Style and Form of the Original Structure

- Is the house a Bungalow, a four-square, or a Queen Anne Victorian?
- The architectural features which characterize the house should be protected and studied for design ideas.

2. The View from the Street

- Will the addition be visible from the street?
- Additions should be located and designed in such a way that they do not change a home's appearance from the street.

3. The Nature of the Site

- Is the site long and narrow, square, or sloped?
- The dimensions and contours of a site will influence the location and form of an addition.

4. Consideration of the Neighboring Houses

- What do the neighboring houses look like?
- How are they sited?
- An addition should not cause a house to vary significantly from the norms of its neighborhood in terms of volume, scale, setback, and absolute size.
- An addition should be sited in such a way that it does not block light, air, and/or view from a neighbor's house.

5. Interior Function and Appearance

- Why is the homeowner considering an addition?

- The spatial requirements of the owner and the existing floor plan can dictate the size and location of an addition.
- The existing structure, even if remodelled, may not accommodate the owner's needs.

The Style and Form of the Original Structure

A successful addition will enhance the house on which it is built. In order to enhance a structure, an addition must coexist harmoniously with the original structure and must retain and defer to the distinctive and defining features of the original structure. Thus, before designing an addition it is crucial to identify these defining features which can be decorative or formal in nature. They can include such things as arched windows, detailed trim, a tripped roof, or a long rectangular floor plan. While an addition does not have to accurately reproduce all or even any of the defining features of the original structure in order to coexist harmoniously with it, maintaining such things as the overall proportions, bay size, and window dimensions of the original structure in the addition is usually helpful. Many excellent examples of successful additions can be found in the neighborhoods of Decatur, and can provide inspiration to potential builders.

Additions to historic structures of all styles should conform to *the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties*, reviewed in Chapter 1 of this publication. In general, to conform to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards 9 and 10, an addition to an existing building within the Decatur residential neighborhoods should be subordinate to the original building, and should read clearly as an addition. Standard 9 states that contemporary design and additions to existing properties should not destroy significant historic architectural fabric and should be compatible with the design of the property and

neighborhood. Standard 10 states that wherever possible, additions to structures shall be built so that future removal will leave unimpaired the essential form and integrity of the historic structure.

The following general design principles related to form and style should be considered when designing an addition.

Scale

An addition should be smaller than, and subordinate to, the original building.



An addition should be subordinate to the existing building, as shown here.

Floor-to-Floor Heights

Floor-to-floor heights should be equal to or no more than 10% less than the original building, but should not be higher than those of the original building.

Massing

The massing of an addition—the relationship of solid to void—should complement, but not necessarily be the same as, the original building. For

example, a glassed-in porch on a side facade may be a 'lighter' variation of the original facade massing. The solid infill enclosure of an existing or new side porch is not recommended.

Orientation

The addition should be located, planned, and detailed so as not to confuse the dominant orientation of the original building. The addition may or may not have its own hierarchy of facades, but it should not turn a secondary facade into a primary facade. The addition should not assert itself visually, but should be screened from the street as much as possible.

Proportions

The proportions of the addition should be complementary to the proportions of the original building. The addition of a two-story ell at the back of a vertically proportioned building may be more appropriate than a long low structure. The addition should be smaller in proportion to the original building, both in its overall square footage and in its footprint. Ideally, the addition should not exceed approximately half of the original building's total floor area or footprint.



A well proportioned addition to an existing residence.

Materials

An addition may be made of the same material as the original building, or it may be made of subordinate material (i.e., wood and stucco are subordinate to brick which is subordinate to stone). A brick building should have a brick or wood addition, but a wood house should not have a brick addition. The material restrictions in the section on new construction, above, apply to additions to existing construction.

Forms

Similar to proportions, the form of additions should be complementary to the overall form of the house. A shed-roof addition is appropriate on a gable-roofed or hip-roofed structure, as would be a gable or hip roof. Flat roofs are rarely appropriate for additions in the residential neighborhoods of Decatur.



This addition overwhelms the form of the original house.

The following are additional recommendations for additions to existing construction.

- New front porches should not be added to an existing or historic building without precedent for a porch.

- Because open front porches are important character-defining elements in the residential neighborhoods, the enclosure of existing front porches is not encouraged.
- The addition of dormers is best kept to the rear of the building, not visible from the street. Dormers added to front roof slopes may be acceptable, if their scale and detailing is compatible with the existing building.



A good example of enclosing the front porch of a residential building, reused for business.

- The design of additions should acknowledge what is new and what is original. This may be done in a variety of ways, including simplifying details, changing materials, slightly altering proportions, or even slightly varying paint color.
- Decks are strongly discouraged on front facades in all of the Decatur residential contexts, and on side facades in the nineteenth century residential context. When decks are constructed on side or rear facades in any of the residential contexts, they should be screened from the street with landscape materials.
- The architectural style of an addition should not be older than the style of the existing building.

The View from the Street

Additions should be sited to have the least possible visual impact from the street. There should be no new additions in front of front facades; additions to side facades should be held back as far as possible from the front facade. Rear additions are most appropriate and, given the narrowness and depth of many residential lots in Decatur, often the most feasible. New additions should not be visible above the roof line of the existing structure. When standing on the sidewalk or at the centerline of the street, aligned with the

center of the facade, the visual impact of the addition should be negligible.



A large addition, probably too large, that has minimal visual impact from the street.

The Nature of the Site

The size, shape, location, and contours of a site can be a strong influence on the form and siting of an addition. Larger lots can accommodate larger additions. Deep, narrow lots located mid-block will accommodate long, narrow, rear additions, while houses in square, corner lots, visible from two streets, often call for additions that are more square in form. Rear yards which slope down from the back of a house can accommodate taller additions than rear yards that slope up from the back of the house.

Before beginning construction, it is useful for a homeowner to evaluate the open space around his house to determine the potential locations for an addition. The ways in which an addition might affect the use of open space, and circulation patterns around and into the house, should also be considered. Last but not least, a homeowner should be aware of local soil conditions and zoning regulations before considering new construction.

Consideration of the Neighboring Houses

An addition to a house affects not only the house to which it was added, but also the surrounding neighborhood. Successful additions within a neighborhood can increase property values, while a succession of awkward or unattractive ones can depress them. An addition which changes the character of the house in such a way that the house no longer appears to belong to the neighborhood (a two-story modern addition on the front of a one-story bungalow in a neighborhood of one-story bungalows, for example) may accommodate an individual homeowner's space requirements while hurting his neighbors.

At a smaller, more local scale, an addition can block a neighbor's scenic views, and can restrict the amount of light and air flow reaching a nearby neighbor's house. It is important to be mindful of the impact that an addition can have on neighbors, both near and far, when planning to expand a residence.

Interior Function and Appearance

An addition to an existing home must enhance the function and appearance of the interior of the house, as well as complement its exterior. The first step in designing an addition is to evaluate the positive and negative aspects of the existing interior spaces, so that the size and type of addition which is needed can be identified. Often, the problem with existing structures is wasted space. In this instance, an interior remodeling may be a better, less expensive solution than an addition.

When designing an addition to a home, it is not enough to design the room or rooms in isolation. The ways in which new spaces relate to the existing ones, and the ways in which people move through the new spaces to reach the old, must be

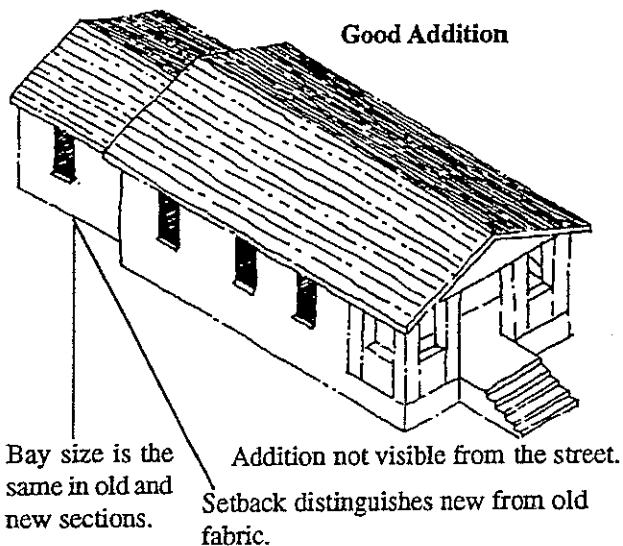
examined. In a kitchen addition, for example, the owner must consider whether he likes to cook in private, or with his friends watching. He must also consider whether he and his family like to eat in the kitchen, in the formal dining room, or out on the deck. How will he bring his groceries in from the car? Where will the recycling bins be stored? The answers to these questions will help to determine where the addition will be located, and how it will open into the existing structure.

Once the location, form, and function of the addition have been decided, the shapes of the new rooms must be carefully evaluated. Can furniture be comfortably arranged in the new rooms, or are the new spaces oddly shaped? Do they contain too many windows and doors, and not enough wall space? Do the paths of circulation run right through their centers? If so, some replanning might be required.

Additions should not only function well, they should also be aesthetically compatible with the interiors of existing structures. Additions should strive to be compatible both in terms of proportion and style. If the addition is built onto a house with large rooms and high ceilings, the addition should also have rooms with high ceilings. While it is not necessary to replicate the historic molding and trim of the existing structure in the addition, the use of similar forms, or at least the avoidance of inappropriate historical forms, such as ranch-style molding in an Arts and Crafts-style bungalow, should be a goal. The creation of a 'transition zone' between the new and old sections can also make an addition feel less tacked on, and more an integral part of the structure. A transition zone might blend elements of the new and old sections, or might temper the change between the two sections through the use of lighting or color.

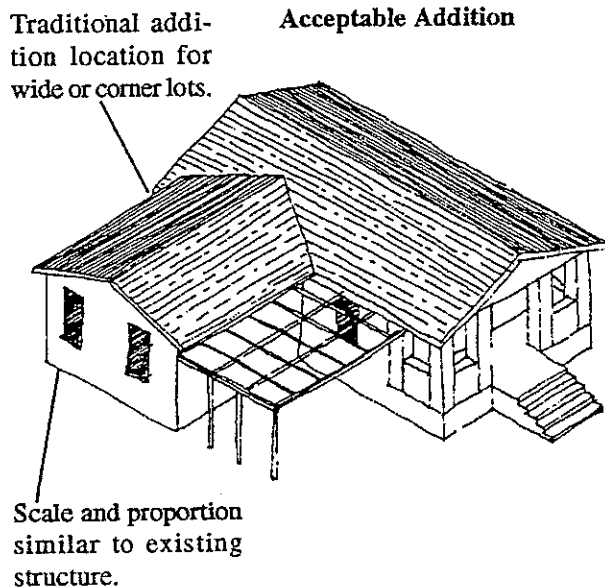
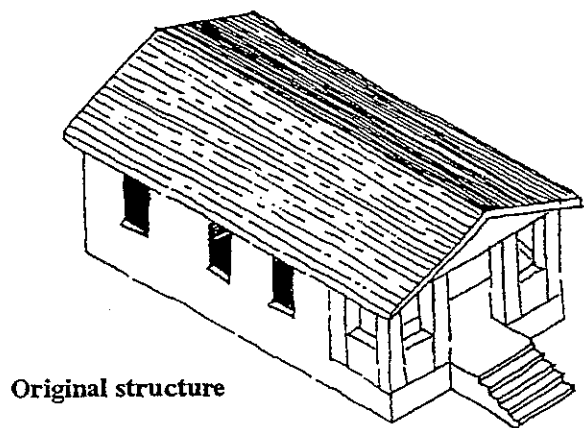
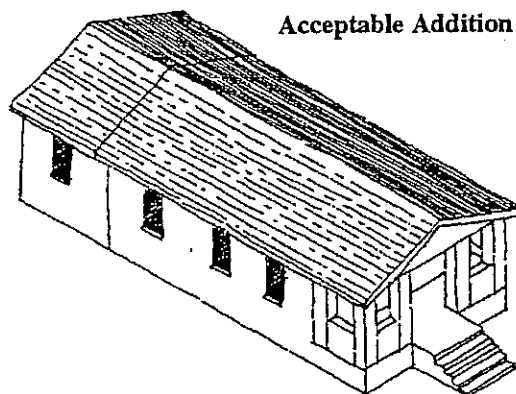
Appropriate Additions...

- Preserve the character of the original structure.
- Do not obscure the original form of the structure.
- Are in the style of the house or are contemporary in design.
- Are usually not visible from the public street.
- Maintain the proportions of the original structure.
- Are in scale with the original structure.
- Often have successful historical precedents.

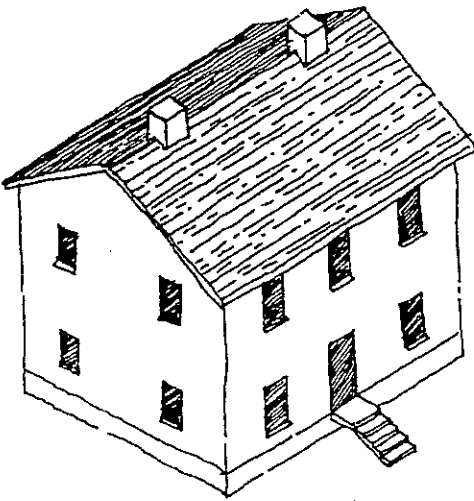


Inappropriate Additions...

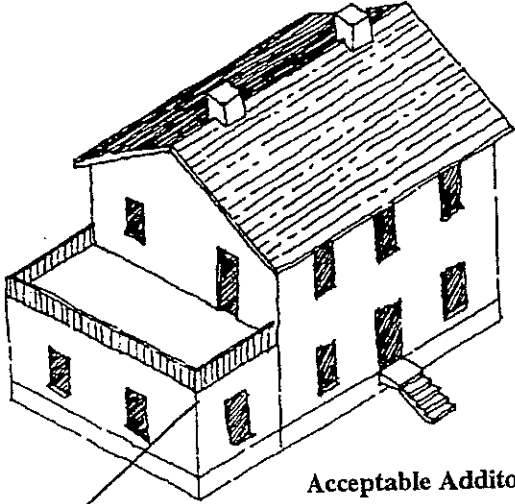
- Destroy the character of the original structure.
- Obscure the form of the original structure. (This includes building to the corners, destroying/creating symmetry.)
- Mix styles and time periods.
- Are visually prominent from the street.
- Do not maintain the proportions of the original structure.
- Overwhelm the original structure.



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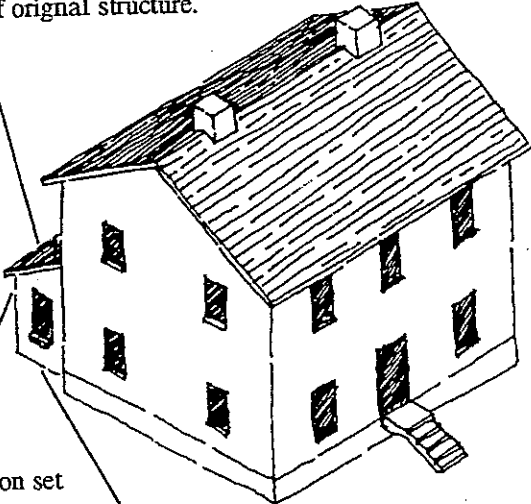
Original structure



Acceptable Addition

Acceptable addition although roof contrasts with existing roof form.

Addition maintains roof slope of original structure.

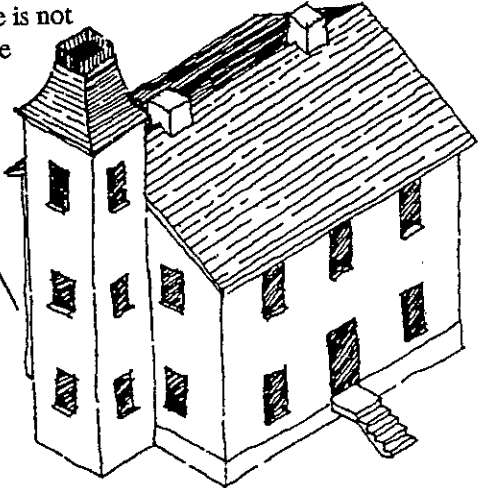


Good Addition

Addition set back from corner of original structure.

Addition not visible from street.

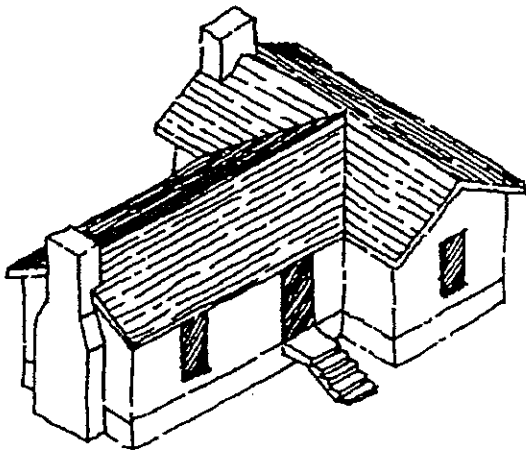
A Victorian-style addition to a Colonial-style house is not appropriate



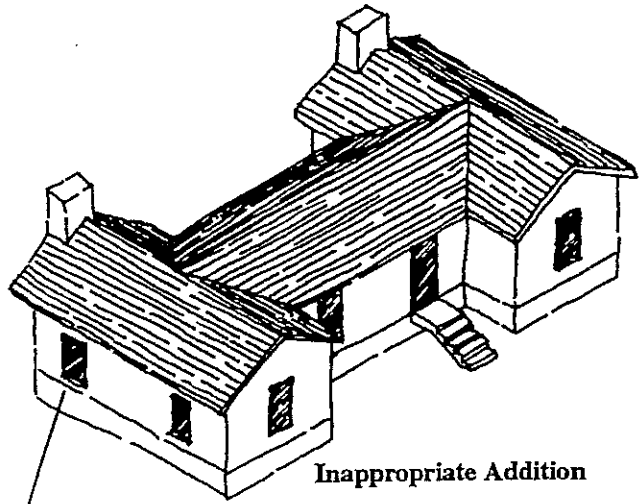
Inappropriate Addition

ADDITIONS TO A GEORGIAN HOUSE

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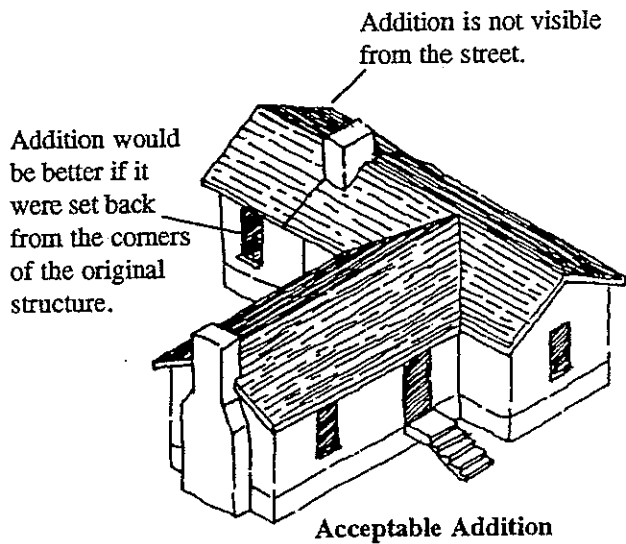


Original Structure



Inappropriate Addition

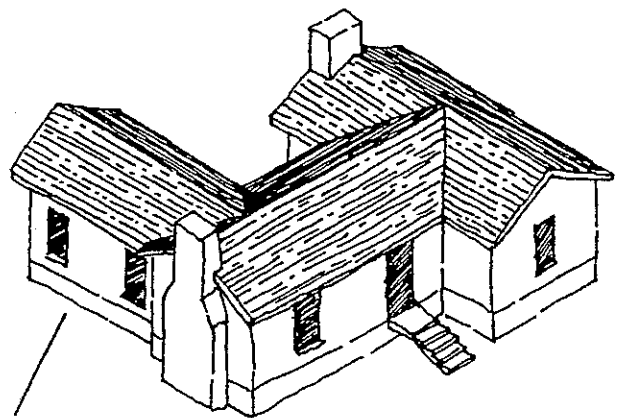
Addition distorts the form of the original structure. It converts an asymmetrical house into a symmetrical one.



Addition would be better if it were set back from the corners of the original structure.

Addition is not visible from the street.

Acceptable Addition



Addition overwhelms the original structure and distorts its form.

Inappropriate Addition

ADDITIONS TO A GABLED ELL COTTAGE

DEMOLITION

The pressure to demolish buildings within any residential neighborhood is a regrettable fact of life. The loss of the original architectural fabric, the resulting missing teeth of vacant lots, and/or improperly-scaled infill construction all contribute powerfully to the loss of the character of the neighborhood. Fortunately, there appear to be very few buildings in Decatur that have been neglected to the point that their condition renders them beyond repair.

Demolition, especially of repairable structures, is more often than not an economic issue. Indeed, within the residential neighborhoods of Decatur, the only other legitimate reason for consideration of demolition is if the building poses a threat to public safety. Because of the potential for the harmful effects of incremental change in Decatur, demolition of existing residential structures is only acceptable after all possible means of saving the building have been exhausted.

The following criteria should be evaluated in considering the demolition of existing or historic buildings within the residential neighborhoods of Decatur.

- The financial implications of maintaining a property versus demolishing it.
- Regardless of economic issues, the relative significance of the building slated for demolition should be considered. If the building does not contribute to the character of the residential neighborhood, then its demolition may not be objectionable. If a building does contribute to the character of its neighborhood, then demolition should be strongly discouraged. Several of the structures within the nineteenth century residential neighborhoods are

so significant that their demolition is strongly discouraged; extraordinary measures should be made to delay or prevent their demolition. Adaptive reuse of original or historic buildings is always preferable to demolition and new construction.

- Further, in order to provide some slight mitigation of the effects of unavoidable demolition of existing and historic structures within the residential neighborhoods of Decatur, owners should provide adequate recordation of a property scheduled for demolition. The extent of such recordation would depend on the significance of the property. At the least, thorough archival photographs should be produced for every original or historic building that is lost to demolition within the residential neighborhoods of Decatur. When the demolition of an extremely significant building is unavoidable, measured drawings should be produced that comply with the standards of the Historic American Buildings Survey.
 - Lots left vacant by demolition should be treated in a manner that is sympathetic to the residential neighborhood. Parking should not be permitted on vacant lots, and they should not be allowed to become overgrown or strewn with trash. Community gardens or parks should be encouraged.
- 'Demolition by Neglect' is defined as "improper maintenance or lack of maintenance of a building, structure or object which results in substantial and widespread deterioration of the building, structure or object which threatens the likelihood of preservation and which presents a threat to the public safety, health and welfare of the immediate community."



'Demolition by Neglect' is a threat to the character of some of the older subdivisions in Decatur.

Because the city formally recognizes only two historic buildings, it is recommended that the city enact and that property owners comply with the requirements of the BOCA National Property Maintenance Code (reference number NPMC90), which is directed towards correcting the conditions that accelerate the deterioration of existing buildings.

RELOCATION OF EXISTING BUILDINGS

Moving existing buildings out of, into, or within the residential neighborhoods should be discouraged. The removal of existing and historic buildings from the residential neighborhoods has the same effect as demolition on the historic character of each neighborhood. Moving historic buildings within the neighborhoods confuses the actual history. Moving historic buildings into the neighborhoods falsifies the existing record by adding a building that does not belong to either time or place. Relocating a building, however, is always preferable to its demolition.

General guidelines to follow when relocating a building are concerned with the building itself, the site that is being vacated, and the relocated building at its new site. (Refer to "Moving His-

toric Buildings" by John Obed Curtis, published in 1979 by the U.S. Department of the Interior, Technical Services Division, Washington, D.C.)

Moving buildings is both an art and science, and should be undertaken only by contractors with the specialized skills to move existing structures. The type and size of a building will determine the best means of moving it. In the case of a historic building, the best means will be the method that involves the least damage to historic fabric.

The site that is being vacated, if it is to be unbuilt, should be regraded to conform with adjacent slopes. The foundation wall may be left in place, but the cellar hole should be infilled, and new landscaping provided. New construction on the site should conform with the setback of the original and/or adjacent structures. If an area is being redeveloped it may be appropriate to establish new setbacks.

The new site of a relocated building and the building's relationship to the new site should be as similar as possible to the original site. The new site should provide similar slopes, setbacks, vegetation, and relationship to adjacent structures.

CHAPTER 5

NEW CONSTRUCTION IN THE DOWNTOWN BUSINESS DISTRICT

The downtown business district has two distinct character areas: the central core context and the transitional context (see Map 1). For the purposes of these design recommendations, there is a certain amount of overlap in these two contexts that will depend upon how the entire district develops over time.

The unfortunate truth is that unlike residential contexts of Decatur, the central core and transitional contexts of Decatur have lost most of their original character. In these contexts, significant change, demolition, and development have left original and historic features to stand as artifacts that survive from a previous era. Thus, design recommendations for these contexts must be based less on concerns for responding to the existing original context and more upon a new vision for the downtown business district as a regional center that complements the residential quality of the rest of the city.

Since 1982, the city has undertaken a variety of planning efforts directed specifically towards formulating a vision for the development of these contexts. The goals identified in the Town Center Plan of 1982 (revised 1989) must be foremost in the minds of those planning and reviewing development proposals for the downtown business district, and must shape the design recommendations for this area of the city.

- Retain and recover the small town character and quality of life in the town center while encouraging mid-rise development downtown, at and over the current height limit of 80 feet.
- Implement a streetscape program with the courthouse square as its focus and most identifiable image.
- Encourage housing downtown, both high-density apartment buildings and high-density, single-family garden apartments and townhouses.
- Encourage retail development at the street level to provide more sidewalk activity.
- Complete the southern portion of the Commerce Drive Ring Road, thus allowing and encouraging through traffic to bypass the center. This will relieve traffic congestion and improve access to the center for those who live, work, shop, and play there.
- Define the edge of 'downtown.' This relates not only to the treatment of the ring road but also the general definition of the downtown business district as a distinct precinct.
- Improve parking downtown.
- Interrelate different scales and types of development.

Most recently a Market Analysis and Cluster Plan (1995) has built on the Development Plan to break the downtown business district into individual clusters, defined as unified areas of complementary businesses. The cluster plan identifies a central core, adjacent clusters, and then

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transitional clusters. It stresses the idea of a gateway, or a sense of entering into the center.

Based upon the goals identified in the Development Plan for the Decatur Town Center and the Market Analysis and Cluster Plan, the recommendations for new construction within the central core context are as follows.

- All proposals should be evaluated based upon their contribution to the pedestrian experience. Downtown Decatur is uniquely attractive to the extent that it is invigorated by activity at the street level.
- The vision for the central core context is a densely urban setting with a vital mix of uses, but intimate enough for neighbors to stop to chat.
- Within the central core context new construction should be built out to the sidewalk line, with retail or service-oriented businesses on the ground floor along the street. New construction should step back at the third and fourth floor to permit light and air onto the street.
- Office towers should not be set back from the sidewalk line or sit in the middle of a parking lot.
- Within the central core context, new construction should be planned to provide small pocket parks and landscaped seating areas where social interaction can occur.



Pocket parks and landscaped pedestrian connections will encourage social and commercial activity.

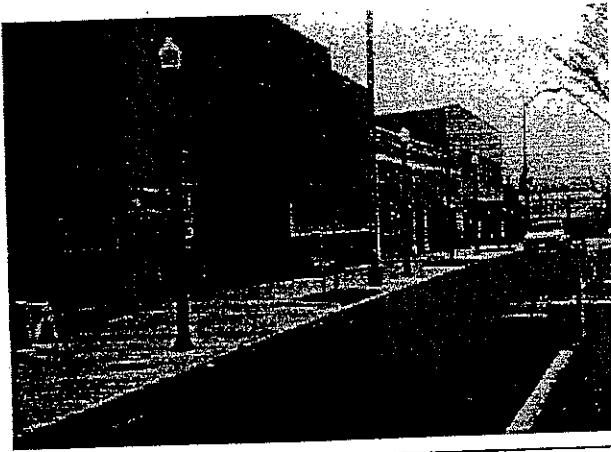
- Provide parking in garages located in the interior of blocks. Parking garages along the sidewalk have a negative impact upon the life of the street.



Parking garages along the street do not contribute to the pedestrian scale of the central business core.

- The demolition of existing buildings built more than 50 years ago is strongly discouraged. These small-scale buildings are absolutely essential to retaining a sense of Decatur's historic small town character.

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Small-scale commercial structures are essential to the preservation of Decatur's small-town character.



New construction should have a degree of 'transparency' along the street.

- Large-scale structures are best located away from the courthouse square.
- New construction should be planned with some consideration for the views of the courthouse and the courthouse square itself, two of Decatur's most important images.
- The massing of new construction should have a sense of 'lightness' and permeability at the ground floor. The ground floors of new construction should feature high levels of transparency so that the public realm of the street extends into new buildings. The ground floor of the Pythagoras Masonic Lodge is a good model, although breaking up the large plate glass into smaller panes would be truer to the scale and character of the building.
- New construction should be planned so that sidewalk cafes can be set up during good weather.
- A wide variety of building materials and architectural styles is appropriate and should be encouraged.
- New construction should be planned to provide a secondary network of passageways, alleys, and outdoor corridors, nooks, and eddies. These urban spaces provide access to inner-block parking lots and can give access to smaller retail establishments that may not be able to afford rents along the main street. These secondary spaces also vary the pedestrian experience and encourage and reward exploration.
- New construction may be arcaded or have canvas awnings over the sidewalk.

The transitional belt is zoned for a wide variety of uses, and a wide variety of building types may result. The overall concern in these areas should be to provide a connection between the down-

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town business district and the residential neighborhoods. Design recommendations for new construction within the transitional contexts are as follows:

- Evaluate all proposals according to their contribution to the pedestrian experience.
- The density of this area should mediate between the urban character of the central core and the single-family character of the residential neighborhoods.
- Residential buildings may be set back from the sidewalk as much as 20 feet.
- Parking should not be permitted in any front yard and should be limited to 12 cars in side yards and screened from the street. On-street parking should be encouraged to provide a barrier between traffic and pedestrians.
- Townhouse developments may be built to the sidewalk as at the existing units on Sycamore Street and Commerce Drive, or may be slightly set back and landscaped. The principal entrances to each unit should face towards the street, or onto a courtyard or mews that is connected to the street. Parking should be located behind the buildings and screened from view. Parking should not be below the houses themselves.



Townhouse development in the transitional belt should be sited close to the sidewalk.

- Single-family residential developments should be discouraged in the transitional zones. It will not provide a coherent transition between the urban character of the core and the residential character of Decatur's traditional neighborhoods.
- Garden apartments may be set back from the street, but parking should be to the rear. The principal entrance to each building should relate to the street. The apartment building at Glendale Avenue and East Ponce de Leon is an excellent model.



The apartment building at Glendale Avenue and East Ponce de Leon provides an excellent model for new garden apartments.

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- A wide variety of building scales and architectural styles is appropriate within the transitional context.
- The streetscape program should be extended to include the transitional context. Street trees and good crosswalks will be essential in creating a sense of entrance into the central core.
- Commerce Drive should be landscaped with large trees and planted borders. A slightly raised planted bed at the center line would do much to soften the effect of the wide expanse of asphalt that presently isolates the central core.
- Large-scale commercial and residential structures should have retail or service-oriented commerce on the ground floor, similar to the central core context.
- For the appropriate design of small-scale commercial buildings, see Chapter 6.

CHAPTER 6

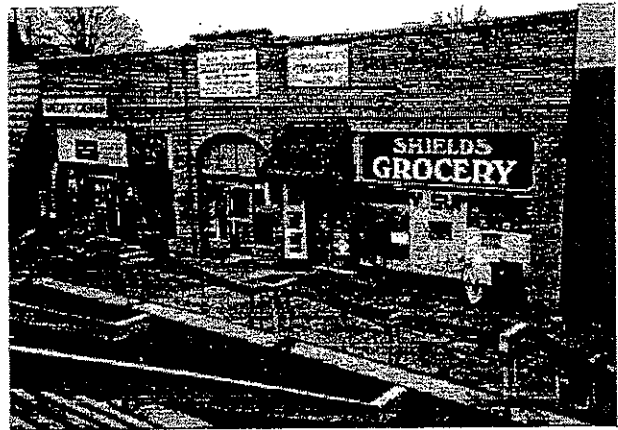
SMALL-SCALE AND NEIGHBORHOOD COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS

Small-scale and neighborhood commercial buildings are important reminders of Decatur's history, and have the potential to contribute much to the retention of the city's small town character. Shopping centers, regional malls, and convenience stores have all but replaced storefront commercial buildings, and as a building type they are rarely built new. Very few small-scale commercial buildings survive in Decatur, although those that do provide illustration of how and how not to treat this significant building type. In fact, the scale, relative transparency, direct relation to the street, and general level of detail provide a model for the storefronts of new construction in the downtown business district discussed in Chapter 5.



Existing storefront buildings can serve as models for the ground floors of large-scale construction in the central core.

Because commercial activity is often associated with the 'new' and is somewhat dependent upon its ability to attract attention to itself, commercial owners and tenants have tended to make relatively frequent alterations, often adding incrementally to commercial facades over time. The result is that although it is rare for small-scale commercial buildings to retain their original appearance, and it is rather more often the case that commercial facades suffer from drastic alterations, it is often the case that original fabric remains below layers of later material.



Storefront buildings suffer a constant process of alteration.

The development over time of storefronts is linked to the ability and desire to increase the size of panes of glass and thus the available display space. The earliest storefronts were residential in character, with divided-light windows typical of houses along the street. Sometimes large bay or oriel windows were used, but available glass technology, as well as the difficulty in spanning large openings, dictated the use of small panes of glass and smaller openings. Storefronts of larger commercial establishments consisted of heavy piers of brick infilled with small windows and paneled doors. Canvas awnings and wood and metal canopies were used for climate control as well as for signage.

Typical late-nineteenth century storefronts featured thin structural storefront systems of wood or cast iron and large expanses of glass. The typical single or double doors flanked by display windows were often set into a recessed opening to provide shelter and additional display space. Display windows were usually raised off the ground by bulkheads that provided horizontal display surfaces on the inside and allowed deliveries to be made to the basement through hatches in the sidewalk. An entrance to the side of the facade led to the residential units upstairs in two- and three-story buildings.

Later in the nineteenth century, operable transom lights were placed above display windows to provide ventilation into the store and to increase daylight. The signboard, placed in the fascia above the storefront and covering the structural beam, became a prominent part of the facade. Canvas awnings became even more prevalent. Display window size continued to expand with the development of metal clips to hold in place increasingly large free-standing glass panes. In the early twentieth century, decorative transom lights added another level to the decorative character of storefronts. Incandescent electric lighting allowed store owners another method of drawing attention to their buildings.

Design recommendations for the rehabilitation, restoration, and replacement of storefronts follow. Generally, if a significant part of an original storefront exists and is in good condition, rehabilitation is recommended. If an original storefront does not exist or is severely deteriorated, restoration or replacement is recommended. Restoration should only be undertaken when sufficient evidence is available on which to base a design that will return a building, as closely as possible, to its appearance at a specific point in time. Replacement storefronts should be sympa-

thetic to and compatible with the historic fabric of the remainder of the building. Replacement storefronts should reflect, but not copy, the character of storefronts that would be typical for the period of the building.

STOREFRONT REHABILITATION

Recommended

- Because of the tendency for commercial buildings to have been periodically altered, documentation and research are critical elements of any rehabilitation.
- Historic photographs provide the best visual evidence of a building's earlier appearance, but drawings and prints are often useful as well. Because alterations to storefronts often were made in the most expedient manner possible, often just covering over original fabric, exploratory removals of selected non-historic fabric will provide the best evidence of historic conditions. Removals are also required to determine the condition of underlying fabric.
- Regardless of how much historic storefront fabric remains in place, respect the style of the building. Do not impose upon the building the elements of an earlier, more 'fashionable' style such as pent roofs, wood shakes, or small-paned windows. Do not impose upon the building later inappropriate elements such as wood, vinyl, or aluminum siding.
- Retain as much existing fabric as possible and incorporate it in the design of the rehabilitated storefront. If existing fabric is severely deteriorated or was severely damaged during the course of previous alterations, but is in place, restoration is recommended.

- Paint colors should be based on the building's historic appearance. Simpler paint schemes, generally, are more appropriate than elaborate schemes. Historically unpainted surfaces should remain unpainted.
- Rehabilitation should include, where possible, the return of the configuration and size of original openings. The treatment and detailing of the openings may vary.

Not Recommended

- Do not remove, demolish, or obscure existing historic fabric, or alter the major forms of the building.
- Do not alter the size or proportions of openings.
- Do not add a false front, false story, or pent roof to the building.



Adding false fronts and pent roofs is not recommended.

- Do not use materials unavailable at the time of original construction, such as vinyl or aluminum siding, stainless steel, anodized aluminum, mirror-tinted glass, or artificial stone.

STOREFRONT RESTORATION

Restoration should be undertaken only when sufficient documentation or physical evidence exists to accomplish a full and accurate recreation of a building during a specific time period. Documentation may consist of historic photographs, original drawings, existing architectural fabric, or, preferably, all of the above. In the absence of documentation on which to undertake a restoration, a conjectural design that creates a 'false history' of the building is not recommended.

The recommendations for the restoration of storefronts are as follows.

Recommended

- The design of storefront restorations should be based on historic documentation and/or physical evidence relating to the specific building in question.

Not Recommended

- Speculative restorations—those that are not based on historic documentation or physical evidence—are inappropriate.
- The removal of later historic fabric in order to restore a building to an earlier appearance is inappropriate.

STOREFRONT REPLACEMENT

If a building's original or historic fabric is severely deteriorated or missing, and if restoration is not desirable or not achievable, a replacement storefront is recommended. The following design recommendations pertain to the design of replacement storefronts.

Recommended

- The design of replacement storefronts should be distinctly contemporary, while being compatible and complementary to the character of the existing building.
- Respect the scale and proportion of the existing building. A replacement storefront should extend no further in height or width than did the original storefront.
- Use materials appropriate to the period of the building.
- Respect the configuration and proportion of solid-to-void (i.e., walls and columns to openings) of the original storefront. If the original storefront is missing altogether, base the configuration and proportions of the replacement storefront on storefront designs typical of the period of the building.
- Maintain the planes of the original storefront, either flush with, recessed, or projecting beyond the plane of facade.
- Differentiate primary and secondary entrances, using size of doors, articulation of frame, etc.
- Use clear glass.

Inappropriate

- Do not attempt to 'colonialize' or give a false history to the building. A contemporary design, properly executed, will better retain the character of Decatur's small-scale commercial buildings than will a falsely 'historic' storefront.

NEW STOREFRONT CONSTRUCTION

Very good models exist in Decatur for the construction of small-scale commercial 'storefront' buildings. The best examples are on Oakhurst Drive and on West College Avenue.

These buildings are one story, with pilasters articulating demising walls between individual stores, large masonry openings with knee walls, and decorative cornices and parapets. The key to these buildings is that they are separated from the street by only one row of parking, and the sidewalk continues past the storefronts. These are stores that are intended to be walked to.

The commercial row along East Ponce de Leon next to the Masonic Lodge is of a similar two-story design, with office space above.



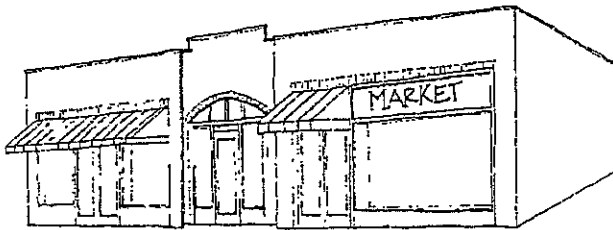
This two-story commercial row is an excellent model for new construction in the transitional context.

AWNINGS

Design recommendations for awnings apply to projects involving rehabilitation, restoration, and replacement of small-scale commercial buildings.

Recommended

- Awnings are appropriate on virtually any existing small-scale commercial building in Decatur.
- Awnings should be canvas or other soft fabric.
- Awnings should be mounted on retractable framework so that they function to control the passage of light into the building.
- Awnings should be sized and located so as not to obscure the architectural features of the storefront. Ideally, they will fit just inside existing openings.



- Awnings should be installed in a manner that does not damage or require the removal of historic fabric.
- Awnings should be no lower than 7'-6" above the sidewalk.
- Awnings may be solid colored or striped.

Not Recommended

- Rigid awning material such as plastic or vinyl is inappropriate.
- Awnings that obscure architectural features or typical locations for historic signage, or

whose installation damages or requires the removal of historic features, are inappropriate.

- Translucent canopies that double as signs are not recommended.
- Fixed awnings are not recommended.

SIGNS

Signs are an issue related to the treatment of small-scale and neighborhood commercial buildings. Within a city like Decatur, signs must be designed to attract attention while not detracting from the overall appearance of the building or street upon which they are located.

Signs have a critical effect, positive or negative, on the character of commercial buildings and streetscapes. Inappropriately designed and located signs overwhelm buildings and detract from the character of the street. Well designed, appropriately located signs can unify a commercial street while serving to identify and promote effectively the businesses housed within individual shops.

Signs are first and foremost a means of advertising, of attracting patronage. They are intended to capture the attention of the passerby, and in consequence rely on the innovation and creativity of the designer. The potential variety, vitality, and quality that can be achieved from freedom of design can be more variable than unduly heavy restrictions that dictate conformity. The most successful recommendations regarding signs will be those that permit the greatest design flexibility but prohibit those elements which are indisputable detriments to the character of the commercial streetscape.

The most important principle in establishing and reinforcing the character of the small-scale commercial buildings is to consider the entire facade of a building as the 'sign.' The entire elevation of the storefront should be conceived to attract shoppers—signs, windows displaying merchandise, and architectural character. Consequently, the signs themselves are an integral part of the building facade in both design and function. New signs should always be designed to complement and be subsidiary to the character of the building facade. Buildings whose facades are carefully considered and well maintained do not require the tremendously over-scaled signs that plague many modern streets today.

Recommended

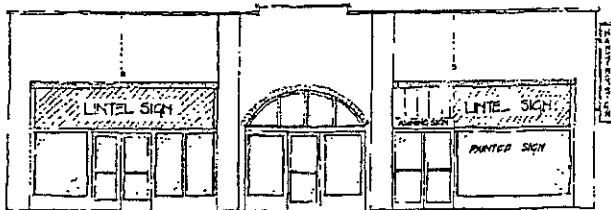
- Historic signs and advertising painted on the sides of buildings should be retained.
- Sign material should be compatible with the design of the building. Wood and metal signs are recommended.
- Any appropriate period sign that reflects historical authenticity of design, materials, and placement for the architectural style it serves is recommended, regardless of limitations imposed upon contemporary signs.
- Signs should be located where they best complement the building—on blank expanses of wall, large plate-glass windows, fascias, cornices, and awnings.
- A sign should be consistent and compatible in terms of its size, style, materials, and location with the historic building, and should be integrated into the architectural design of the building on which it is located. Signs should be simple and not too large. No sign should be from a period earlier than the building on which it is placed.
- Signs should not project from the building to the extent that they are a visual obstruction or physical hazard to pedestrian or vehicular traffic. Similarly, new signs should not interfere with a neighboring store by obscuring its signs or architectural features.
- The removal of back-lit fluorescent signs, large signs with distinctive logos, and signs that obscure significant features is encouraged.
- Signs at the storefront level should be oriented primarily to pedestrians and should thus be sized and designed for pedestrian vision. For projecting signs at pedestrian level, a maximum projection of 4'-0", or half the width of the sidewalk, from the building is recommended, whichever is less. 8'-0" minimum clearance from the sidewalk is required.
- Appropriate locations for signs are horizontally at the storefront lintel, on the inside of glass, hanging signs that are appropriately scaled, and on awnings.
- While no absolute limit is recommended with regard to the size of signs, it should be noted that one over-scaled sign on a commercial street will reduce the visual quality of the streetscape and may foster competition elsewhere.



- Signboards surface-mounted to buildings should be simple with little or no carving or ornament. Paint should be the primary decorative element.
- Concealed incandescent lighting for signs is recommended.
- Neon signs installed inside storefront windows are appropriate.
- Signs that are of an earlier style than the building on which they appear are inappropriate.
- Back-lit fluorescent signs are inappropriate.
- Temporary, visually assertive signs set behind display windows are not appropriate.
- Signs that obscure the view through glass doors or storefront windows are not recommended.

Not Recommended

- Signs should not cover or obscure the architectural features of the building upon which they are affixed.



- Large-scale signs are not recommended. They should be permitted only when they are appropriate to the scale and character of the building on which they are to be located or when there is precedent and documentation sufficient to determine the appropriateness of the sign for the particular facade.
- Plastic and fiberglass signs are acceptable, but not recommended.
- Inappropriately-scaled graphics are not recommended, especially at pedestrian level.
- Signs that are clearly unsympathetic to the character of the building on which they are located are inappropriate.
- Signs that obscure significant architectural features of any historic building are inappropriate.

CHAPTER 7

THE DECATUR LANDSCAPE

LANDSCAPING AND SITE AMENITIES

Just as Decatur's origins are tied to its geographical setting at the intersection of several ridges, its present-day image is largely a function of its landscape. Subdivisions were platted in response to the topography, principally hills and streambeds. The siting of individual houses grew out of, and has a direct relationship to, the nature of the land itself.

Because Decatur was built-out very early on, one of its distinguishing characteristics is the relative maturity of its landscape as reflected in the age and large size of its trees, the constancy of the tree canopy overhead, and the overall density of vegetation. It is the vegetation that contributes most to the sense of enclosure of the typical Decatur streetscape—giving it texture and providing both foreground and background for the individual houses.



Typical view of pre-World War I suburb with dense canopy and ground cover, front steps, and front walk.

The image of each building in Decatur is in large part a function of the treatment of its immediate surroundings. Plantings and site amenities such as fences, retaining walls, paving, light fixtures, site, steps, and even driveways provide the setting for individual buildings while helping to define the character of the entire city.

In addition to providing the setting for individual buildings, landscaping and site amenities also help define the relationship between structures. The overall relationship of structures within Decatur is one of civility and sociability. Houses are usually sited with porches close enough to the street to permit and encourage conversation with passers-by. Landscape and site amenities should thus be low enough and transparent enough to permit and encourage this sociability.



Typical view of pre-World War II suburb with dense tree canopy and ground cover in front yards.

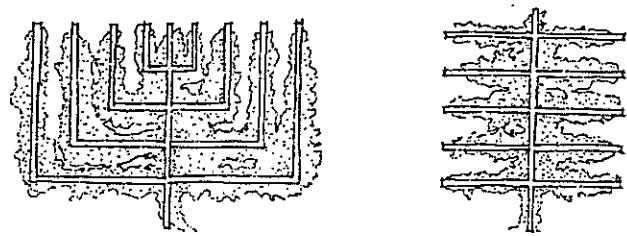
Just as in planning new construction, many of the clues to appropriate landscape design will come from neighboring properties.

The following design guidelines apply to planting in Decatur.

Recommended

- Unless a deliberate contrast is desired, select and locate plant material so as to accent and enhance significant architectural forms, rather than to obscure them.
- Consider the 'texture' of a plant—its branch structure and degree of transparency. Consider also its 'habit'—its form, be it round, columnar, horizontal, etc.
- Combine finely-textured, airy plants with fine architectural detail such as wood porches, and dense, coarse-textured plants with massive construction such as solid brick. Columnar plants complement vertical elements such as porch columns while lower rounded forms complement foundation features.
- Plantings at the perimeter of foundations should express, or at least not obscure, the rhythm of the building itself. Continuous foundation planting did not become popular until the early twentieth century, and was especially favored in the Colonial Revival and Bungalow styles.
- Select and locate plant material according to site conditions of sun, shade, soil, and adjacent plant material.
- Plant low enough and sparsely enough so that the house is visible from the street and vice versa. Planting should 'set-off' the house, not obscure it.
- Select plant material according to its mature size, allowing for the long-term impact of the mature plant.
- Select plant species appropriate to the climate and growing conditions of Decatur.

- Every effort should be made to save large trees.
- Where planting to screen or complement masonry walls, provide a wire or wood frame for the vine or plant to cling to. This technique is known as 'espalier.'



Espalier

- Do not 'over plant.' Allowing for the mature size of trees and shrubs is critical.
- Provide enough space between buildings and plantings so that the structure will not be 'crowded.'
- Continuous foundation planting is appropriate for several architectural styles in Decatur, including those of the Revival and Bungalow styles.

Not Recommended

- Without the advantage of either physical remains or documentary evidence, 'historic' garden design is highly speculative. As a rule, the design of formal gardens should be as simple as possible, concentrating on location and groupings of planting material. In the absence of strong historic evidence, the introduction of paved garden walks, beds raised with retaining walls, and garden structures such as gazebos, pergolas, and arbors are not recommended.

- Provide adequate drainage away from structures on the site.
- Do not permit plant material to destroy architectural fabric. Ground cover and vines that have grown on masonry walls may be accelerating the deterioration of the masonry. (See discussion of 'espalier' technique, above.)
- Wire fencing is inexpensive and easy to install. This fencing material is appropriate for more modest residences. It should be used as a plant support at property borders, and not left unadorned.
- Retain original site fences and walls, such as retaining walls, which are distinctive site features.

FENCING AND WALLS

Front yard fences are rare in the twentieth century neighborhoods of Decatur, and tend to be of relatively recent vintage. Their effect is to separate the house from the street and to break up the flow of front yards that gives Decatur neighborhoods their sociable character. Front yard walls are almost invariably low retaining walls that serve as a transition between a sloping front yard and the grade of the sidewalk.

Generally, site fences and walls in Decatur should not exceed 4'0" in height. The following design guidelines should be considered in the design of fencing and walls. Recommendations for fencing apply to side and rear yards only.

Recommended

- Wood picket fences of a wide range of designs are appropriate for side and rear yards throughout Decatur, and for front yards of nineteenth century neighborhoods.
- Cast iron fencing is appropriate for new fences. Existing cast iron fencing should be repaired or replaced in-kind. New cast iron fencing should be of relatively simple design; a typical earlier design was three horizontal bars with intermittent supporting posts and decorative pickets, with ornamentation at corners, gates, and picket tops.

- Unpainted fences of cedar or other naturally durable wood are recommended.
- The dense tree canopy overhead will often make growing grass difficult. Shade-loving ground covers are attractive and low maintenance alternatives to grass.
- New retaining walls should be kept low and align with existing adjacent retaining walls.

Not Recommended

- Fences in front yards of twentieth century neighborhoods are not recommended.
- Chain link fencing is unattractive and suggestive of exclusion and confinement, and is not recommended for use in Decatur. Where it exists, it may be successfully planted out by encouraging vines to trail across and through it. Where a new installation is contemplated it should be limited to side and rear yards. At side yards, chain link fence should not be placed forward of the front of the house. At corner properties, chain link fence should not be installed along either street frontage.
- Woven wood fencing, opaque wood fencing, and any modern or 'fancy'-style fence is not recommended.

- Unpainted wood fences of pressure-treated lumber are not recommended.
- Walls that protrude above grade and that do not function as retaining walls are contrary to the 'sociability' of typical Decatur streets and are strongly discouraged.



Walled-in front yards are incompatible with the clear and sociable connection between Decatur's houses and streets.

Inappropriate

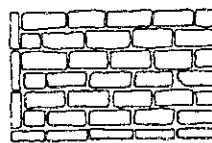
- Concrete and concrete block walls are inappropriate as a fencing or retaining wall material in Decatur. Existing concrete and concrete block walls should be stuccoed and painted, while 'decorative' masonry screens should be painted black-green.

PAVING AND BORDERING

The paving along or within the perimeter of a property provides the connection between the front door and the street. Providing the 'carpet' to the door, it should be as graceful as the rest of the yard.

Recommended

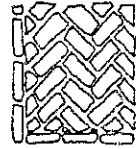
- Brick, gravel, concrete, flagstone, and compressed earth paths are appropriate for domestic walks and garden paths.
- Brick paving should be dry-laid in one of several patterns.



Running



Basket Weave



Herringbone

Brick Paving Patterns

- Glazed brick borders are appropriate for planting bed borders in Victorian-style gardens.
- Retain in place the distinctive driveway/steps that are original to several houses on steep slopes.
- When repaving driveways, maintain the width of the existing paved area.



Retain distinctive site features such as the driveway steps common to houses at the top of steep slopes.



Pre-cast concrete hexagonal paving blocks were typical for sidewalks in much of South Decatur prior to World War I, and should be retained.

Not Recommended

- ‘Over-paving’ to create formal gardens is not recommended in Decatur.
- Using concrete to replace brick, flagstone, or other historic paving materials is not recommended.
- Concrete block, painted rocks, and low wire fencing are inappropriate border materials in Decatur.
- Repaving deteriorated concrete driveways with asphalt is not recommended. The dark asphalt will alter the appearance of the previously light concrete surface, and may be prone to delamination from the unstable concrete below.

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