Guidelines for New Commercial and Mixed Use Construction

Historic preservation begins at construction. Many modern materials that replicate traditional forms do not have the durability of historic construction. Design with the future in mind. Design to withstand the test of time.

The following guidelines offer general recommendations for the design of infill and new commercial and mixed-use buildings in Cedar Falls Downtown District. The guidelines are not intended to be overly specific or to dictate certain designs to owners and designers. They also do not encourage copying or mimicking particular historic styles, although some property owners may desire a new building designed in a form that respects the existing historic styles of the district.

They are, however, intended to provide a general design framework for infill and new construction. These criteria are all important when considering whether proposed new buildings are appropriate and compatible to existing buildings in the vicinity. The degree of importance of each criterion varies within each area as conditions vary. When designing a building, elements should be drawn from nearby buildings according to a higher order of reference. Look first to the historic core for design clues. Good designers can show a preference to the spirit of the historic district while having the freedom to design appropriate, new commercial architecture in Cedar Falls Downtown District.
The guidelines in this brochure do not pertain to certain types of institutional buildings such as schools, libraries, and churches. These buildings, due to their function and community symbolism, usually are of a distinctive design.

There is limited opportunity to build new structures in the downtown area, since existing historic buildings already occupy most of the land. For this reason, buildings that contribute to the historic character of Cedar Falls Downtown District generally should not be demolished for new construction.

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Setback and Spacing

Setback is the distance between the building wall and the property line or right-of-way at the front of the lot. Spacing refers to the distances between buildings. Most commercial buildings in Cedar Falls Downtown District have a very limited setback and spacing.

Massing and Building Footprint

Mass is the overall bulk of a building and footprint is the land area it covers. In Cedar Falls’ downtown, most buildings have a tall rectangular mass and are sited on lots with an average width of 20 to 40 feet. The nature of the mass will be further defined by other criteria in this chapter such as height, width and directional expression.
Scale and Orientation

Height and width also create scale, or the relationship between the size of a building and the size of a person. Scale also can be defined as the relationship of the size of a building to neighboring buildings and of a building to its site. The design features of a building can reinforce a human scale or can create a monumental scale. In Cedar Falls, there is a variety of scale. An institutional building like a church or library may have monumental scale due to its steeple or entry portico while a more human scale may be created by a storefront in a neighboring commercial building. Orientation refers to the direction in which the front of a building faces.

1. Provide features on new construction that reinforce scale and character of the surrounding area, whether human or monumental, by including elements such as storefronts, vertical and horizontal divisions, upper story windows and decorative features.
2. New commercial construction should orient its façade in the same direction as adjacent historic buildings, that is, to the street.
3. Front elevations oriented to side streets or to the interior of lots should be discouraged.
Directional Expression

This guideline addresses the relationship of height and width of the front elevation of a building mass. A building is horizontal, vertical, or square in its proportions. The majority of commercial structures are vertical in their expression.

In new construction, respect the directional expression (or overall relationship of height to width) of surrounding historic buildings. The directional expression of many commercial buildings is vertical.
Height and Width

The actual size of a new building can either contribute to or be in conflict with a historic area. New construction proportions should respect the average height and width of the majority of existing neighboring commercial buildings. Where neighboring buildings vary, take clues from the historic core and preference the spirit of the historic district.
Complexity of Form

A building’s form, or shape, can be simple (a box) or complex (a combination of many boxes or projections and indentations). The level of complexity usually relates directly to the style or type of building. The rectangular forms of these commercial buildings are as simple as their façade organization. Decoration, cornices, and openings add interest and complexity. Take clues by looking to the historic core as the preference.

In general, use simple rectangular forms for new construction that relate to the majority of surrounding commercial buildings.
Traditionally designed commercial buildings found in downtown Cedar Falls have distinctive rows of upper story windows and storefronts on the first level. The windows typically have vertical proportions and may have a decorative lintel or cap over them. Their light (pane) configuration varies with the style and age of the building.

1. The rhythm, patterns and ratio of solids (walls) and voids (windows and doors) of new buildings should relate to and be compatible with adjacent facades. The majority of existing commercial buildings in Cedar Falls Downtown District have a higher proportion of openings to wall area. This factor suggests that new buildings should also share that general proportion of openings to wall, particularly in regard to the storefront on the first level.

2. The size and proportion, or the ratio of width to height of window openings of new buildings' primary facades, should be similar and compatible with those on facades of surrounding historic buildings.

3. Window types should be compatible with those found in the district, which are typically some form of double-hung or casement sash.

4. Traditionally designed openings generally have a recessed jamb on masonry buildings and have a surface mounted frame on frame buildings. New construction should follow these methods in the historic district as opposed to designing openings that are flush with the rest of the wall.

5. Many storefronts of Cedar Falls' historic buildings have typical elements such as transoms, cornices, bulkheads, and sign areas. Consideration should be given to incorporating such elements in the design of storefronts on new buildings.

6. If small paned windows are used in a new construction project, they should have true divided lights and not use clip-in fake muntin bars. Most major window manufacturers make a wide variety of windows that still have true divided lights.
Materials Reference

There is a rich variety of building materials and textures found throughout Cedar Falls’ downtown including brick, limestone, wood siding, and stucco/EIFS.

1. The selection of materials and textures for an infill or new commercial building should be compatible with and complement neighboring commercial buildings.
2. Preference more traditional materials, looking toward the historic core for design clues that keep with the spirit of the historic district.
3. In order to strengthen the traditional image of the commercial area of the historic district, brick or stone are the most appropriate materials for new buildings.

Unlimited usage
The following materials may be used in unlimited quantities on building facades:
- Brick
- Stone
- Terra Cotta

Limited Usage
The following materials may be used in limited quantities on building facades:

Wood-Finish Stock/Dimension Lumber/Plywood/Solid Panels-
Wood should not be used as general siding material under most circumstances (see point #1 above). Wood may be used for architectural elements (i.e. pilaster, cornices, decorative raised panels, trim board, brackets, lintels, etc.).

Stucco/Plaster/EIFS-
Includes any material similar in texture and perception, either synthetic or natural. These materials should not be used as the only other finish material beside glass on a façade. The amount, proportion, and location should be carefully considered.

Concrete Block/Glazed Block/Ceramic Tile/Terra Cotta-
Concrete blocks may be used in combination with other materials such as brick, stone or terra cotta. Glazed block or ceramic tile should be used only as accent material.
Concrete and Precast Concrete-
This includes site-poured or preformed concrete items. Use is limited to architectural elements such as window hoods, cornices, columns, capitals, etc. Exposed concrete foundations should not be used in most circumstances.

Metal - Flashing and Architectural Elements-
Use of metal shall be limited to metal flashing and other architectural metal-formed elements such as cornices, columns, and moldings. (See glossary)

Structural Steel-
Standard structural preformed steel may be exposed for aesthetic purposes at lintel and column etc., in a manner similar to existing historic structures.

Glass-
Glass shall comprise a minimum of 50 percent of the area of the storefront, but no more than 50 percent of upper stories. Window openings should have similarities to surrounding buildings.

Awnings and Canopies-
Natural or synthetic fabric material constructed over a framework for sun or moisture protection. Awnings and canopies to be used only at window areas, except at the storefront level where extended use may be appropriate

Fiber Cement, Aluminum, Metal, or Vinyl Siding and Preformed Panels– Synthetic materials can be used to imitate other traditional materials as a substitute in construction. Continuous, monolithic siding materials are not acceptable. Up to 40 percent of any one siding material may be used on the primary façade and up to 50 percent of any one siding material on a secondary facade. (Note: windows are not considered siding material and are not to be taken into consideration when calculating percentages.)

Prohibited Usage
The following materials are prohibited from use where they may be visible to the public on building facades, fences, etc.:

- Porcelain or baked enamel metal panels
- Asphalt or wood shingles or siding
Architectural Details

The details and decoration of Cedar Falls’ commercial historic buildings vary tremendously with the different styles, periods, and types. Such details include cornices, roof overhang, chimneys, lintels, sills, brackets, masonry patterns, shutters, entrance decoration, and storefront elements. The important factor to recognize is that many of the older commercial buildings in the district have decoration and noticeable details.

It is a challenge to create new designs that use historic details successfully. One extreme is to simply copy the complete design of a historic building and the other is to “paste on” historic details on a modern unadorned design. Neither solution is appropriate for designing architecture that relates to its historic context and yet still reads as a contemporary building. More successful new buildings may take their cues from historic images and reintroduce and reinterpret designs of traditional decorative elements.

The illustrations and photographs found throughout all of these guidelines offer many examples of details from the historic district and may serve as a source for new designs.

Color

The similarity or compatibility of the proposed color to the existing building and other buildings in the area should be considered. Buildings in the downtown have generally neutral colors, however, a more noticeable secondary color can be incorporated in the design to help highlight the building’s architectural features and are acceptable as accents to architectural features of the facade. Painting brick is generally discouraged. It is traditionally recommended to respect the architecture of the building and use signage to reflect personality and marketing/branding.
Guidelines for Additions

There are limited opportunities to make additions to many of Cedar Falls’ commercial buildings. An exterior addition to a historic building may radically alter its appearance. Before an addition is planned, every effort should be made to accommodate the new use within the interior of the existing building. When an addition is necessary, it should be designed and constructed in a manner that will complement and not detract from the character defining features of the historic building. The Secretary of the Interior Standards for Rehabilitation has more detailed information in the “New Exterior Additions for Historic Buildings” section of the preservation briefs. (https://www.nps.gov/tps/how-to-preserve/briefs/14-exterior-additions.htm)

The design of new additions should follow the guidelines for new construction on all elevations that are prominently visible (as described elsewhere in this section). There are several other considerations that are specific to new additions in the historic district and are listed below.

Function
Attempt to accommodate needed functions within the existing commercial structure without building an addition.

Design
New additions should not destroy historic materials that characterize the property. The new work should be differentiated from the old and should be compatible with the massing, size, scale, and architectural features to protect the historic integrity of the property and its environment.

Replication of Style
A new addition should not be an exact copy of the design of the existing historic building. If the new addition appears to be a part of the existing building, the integrity of the original historic design is compromised and the viewer is confused over what is historic and what is new. The design of new additions can be compatible with and respectful of existing commercial buildings without mimicking their original design.
Materials and Features
Use materials, windows, doors, architectural detailing, roofs, and colors that are compatible with the existing commercial historic buildings.

Attachment to Existing Building
Wherever possible, new additions or alterations to existing commercial buildings and structures shall be done in such a manner that, if such additions or alterations were to be removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the building or structure would be unimpaired. Therefore, the new design should not use the same wall plane, roofline or cornice line of the existing structure.

Size
Limit the size of the addition so that it does not visually overpower the existing commercial building.

Location
Attempt to locate the addition on the rear elevations or in a manner that makes them visually secondary to the primary elevation of the commercial structure. If the addition is located on a primary elevation facing the street or if a rear or side addition faces a street, parking area, or an important pedestrian route, the visible elevation of the addition should be treated under the new construction guidelines.