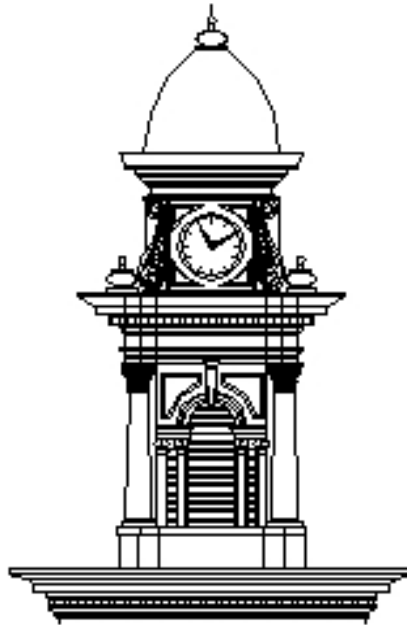


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# DESIGN REVIEW GUIDELINES FOR OPELIKA 'S HISTORIC DISTRICTS



Lee County Courthouse • Opelika, Alabama

## Includes the following attached Sections

- \_\_\_\_\_ Design Guidelines for the Downtown District
- \_\_\_\_\_ Design Guidelines for the Northside District
- \_\_\_\_\_ Application for Certificate of Appropriateness

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2nd Edition

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Property owners in Opelika’s Historic Districts enjoy the advantages of increased economic value and a built environment protected from unsympathetic changes. These residents are responsible for helping to maintain the distinctive character which makes the Historic Districts unique. Therefore, owning property in Opelika’s Historic districts is both a privilege and a responsibility.

Opelika’s Historic Preservation Commission (OHPC) was created in 1997. The board consists of seven volunteer members nominated by the Mayor and appointed by the City Council. The Commission is charged by law to designate historic districts and to “preserve and protect buildings, structures and sites of historic and architectural value in the historic districts.”

Through review of proposed construction, renovation, and demolition of structures within the historic districts, the Commission protects the interests, rights, and investments of property owners and residents. Working in partnership with the Commission and with the City of Opelika, property owners are encouraged to develop compatible and creative development within designated historic districts. By protecting and maintaining the historic character of the districts, the Commission fosters civic beauty and ensures that future generations will enjoy the benefits of Opelika’s rich cultural and architectural heritage.

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## **HISTORY OF OPELIKA**

The Opelika area is shown on maps as early as 1773. An 1832 treaty with the Creek Indians allowed white settlers to move into their territory. Opelika was settled in 1836, becoming one of the first villages to be built on former Creek territory. The City of Opelika was incorporated into Russell County in 1854. At that time, the city limits extended one mile in every direction from the Montgomery and West Point Railway Station. Nearby, the first commercial district was composed of wooden buildings. During the Civil War, Union troops burned and raided the train depot and warehouses.

After the war, Opelika became the seat of the newly-established Lee County in 1866. During the railroad age, Opelika was the mercantile and railway hub of east Alabama. The commercial area was destroyed by fire in 1868, and rebuilding began in the 1870s. Opelika was laid out in a grid plan with a series of rectangular blocks created by roads and a network of alleyways. The Western Railway of Alabama divides downtown into a northern and southern section, a pattern typical of small railroad towns. The rebuilt buildings date to the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, and they form the center of downtown Opelika and the Railroad Avenue Historic District.

The Railroad Avenue District was accepted for placement on the National Register of Historic Places in 1984. The District consists primarily of one- and

two-story brick commercial, industrial, and institutional buildings; this area is the core of the first Opelika historic district established by the Opelika Historic Preservation Commission in 1997.

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## SECTION ONE: THE DESIGN REVIEW STANDARD

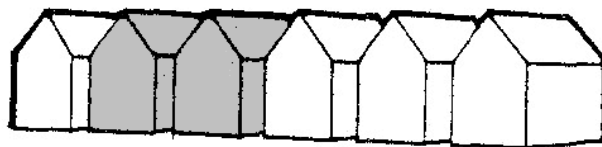
The Design Review Standard of the Opelika Historic Preservation Commission is composed of two separate, yet equally important, components: 1) the Design Review Guidelines discussed below, and 2) any other resources specifically listed under Other Referenced Guidelines. The Design Review Guidelines listed below reflect general design principles which, when adhered to, will foster development that contributes to the architectural character of Opelika's Historic Districts. These principles, which may be applied uniformly to many different architectural styles, establish a repetition of forms and elements which create harmony and character in the various Historic Districts. Additionally, other resources may be listed under Other Referenced Guidelines for more specific information on architectural details unique to each Historic Preservation District.

The Design Review Standard, composed of the Design Review Guidelines, below, in conjunction with Other Referenced Guidelines, are provided to assist the property owner and the Review Board in developing design solutions which satisfy Opelika's historic preservation ordinances. City ordinances require that alterations to historic buildings shall not materially impair the architectural or historical value of the building or district. While Opelika's Historic Preservation Commission will attempt to uniformly apply these guidelines, each building is evaluated on a case by case basis, giving full consideration to its unique characteristics.

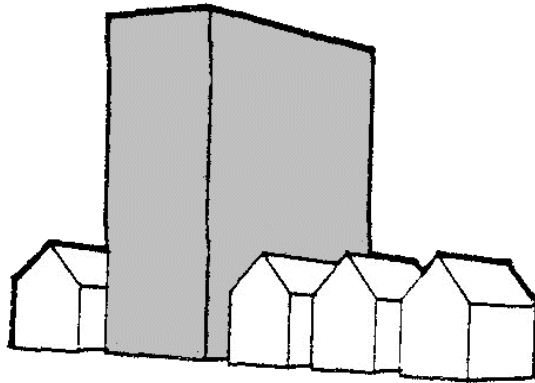
### Design Review Guidelines

#### HEIGHT

Consider — Relating the overall height of new construction to that of adjacent structures. As a general rule, construct new buildings to a height roughly equal to the average height of existing buildings from the historic period on and across the street.

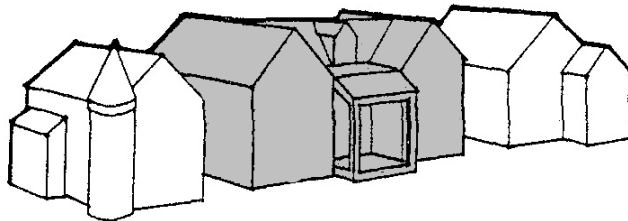


Avoid – New construction that greatly varies in height (too high or too low) from older buildings in the vicinity.

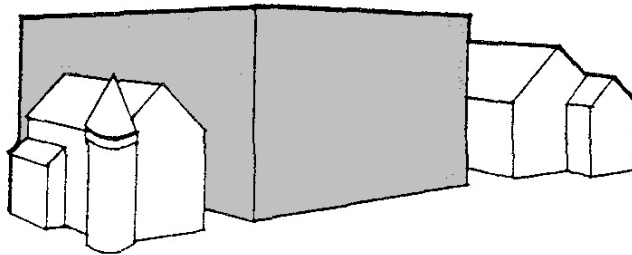


## SCALE

Consider – Relating the size and proportions of new structures to the scale of adjacent buildings. Although much larger than its neighbors in terms of square footage, the building shown maintains the same scale and rhythm as the existing buildings.

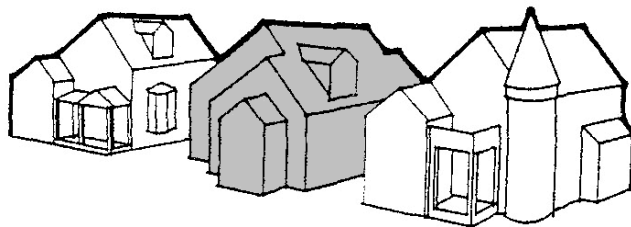


Avoid – Buildings that in height, width, or massing violate the existing scale of the area. The new building shown here disrupts the scale and rhythm of the streetscape, although it might be appropriate in a different location.

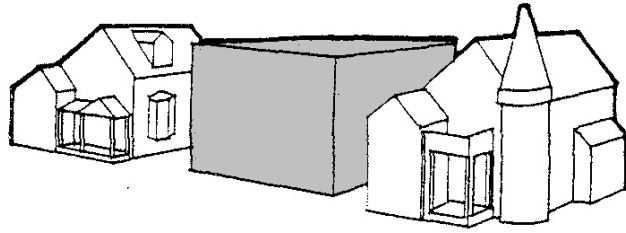


## MASSING

Consider – Breaking up uninteresting box-like forms into smaller, varied masses such as are common on most buildings from the historic period. Variety of form and massing are elements essential to the character of the streetscape in historic districts.

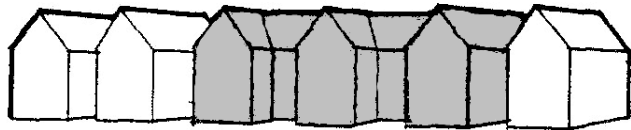


Avoid – Single, monolithic forms that are not relieved by variations in massing. Box-like facades and forms are intrusive when placed in a streetscape of older buildings that have varied massing and façade articulation.



## DIRECTIONAL EXPRESSION

Consider – Relating the vertical, horizontal, or non-directional **façade** character of new buildings to the predominant directional expression of nearby buildings. Horizontal buildings can be made to relate to more vertical adjacent structures by breaking the facade into smaller masses that conform to the primary expression of the streetscape



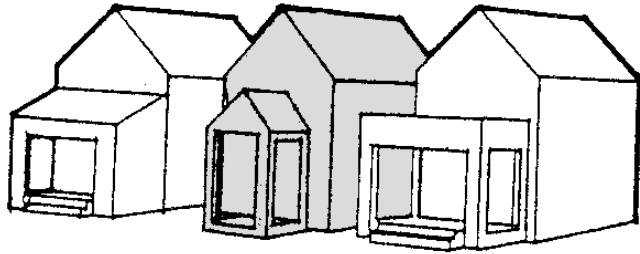
Avoid – Strongly horizontal or vertical facade expressions unless compatible with the character of structures in the immediate area. The new building shown does not relate well to either its neighbors or to the rhythm of the streetscape because of its unbroken horizontal facade.



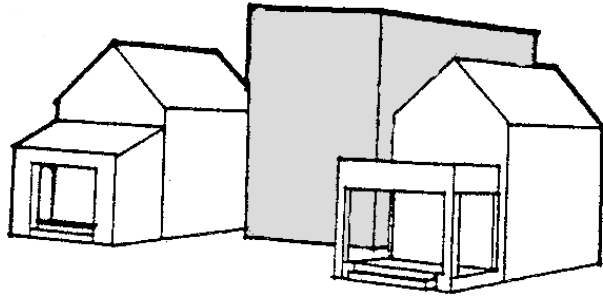
## SETBACK

Consider – Maintaining the

historic facade lines of streetscapes by locating front walls of new buildings in the same plane as the facades of adjacent buildings. If exceptions are made, buildings should be set back into the lot rather than closer to the street. If existing setbacks vary, new buildings should conform to historic siting patterns.

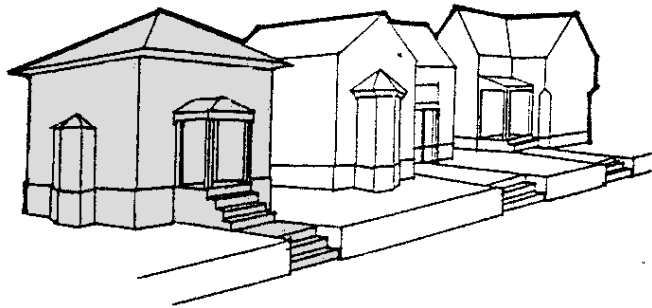


Avoid – Violating the existing setback pattern by placing new buildings in front of or behind the historic facade line. Avoid placing buildings at odd angles to the street, unless in an area where diverse siting already exists, even if proper setback is maintained.

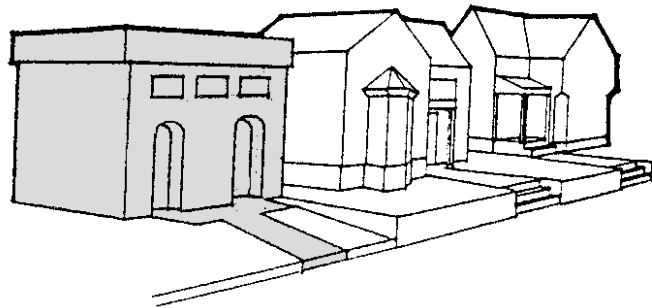


## PLATFORMS

Consider – The use of a raised platform is a traditional siting characteristic of many of the older buildings in Opelika. This visual “pedestal” is created by retaining walls and terracing up to the building or by high foundation walls and stepped entries.



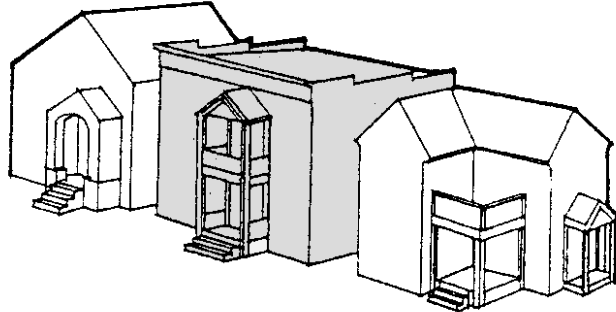
Avoid – Bringing walls of new buildings straight out of the ground without a sense of platform, i.e., without maintaining the same entry height as neighboring buildings. Such structures seem squat, visually incomplete, and do not relate well to their elevated neighbors. Also avoid leveling off terraced slopes or removing retained platforms.



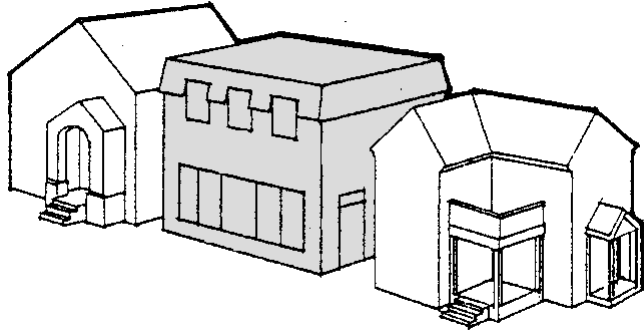


## SENSE OF ENTRY

Consider – Articulating the main entrances to the building with covered porches, porticos, and other pronounced architectural forms. Entries were historically raised a few steps above the grade of the property and were a prominent visual feature of the street elevation of the building.

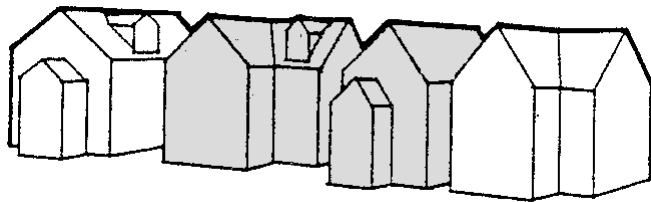


Avoid – Facades with no strong sense of entry. Side entries or entries not defined by a porch or similar transitional element result in an incompatible “flat” first-floor facade.

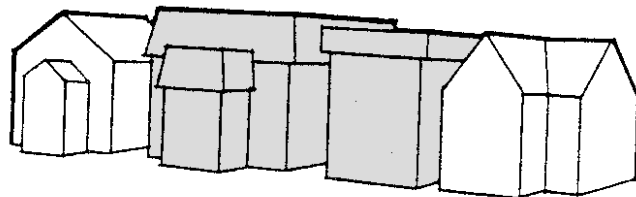


## ROOF SHAPES

Consider – Relating the roof forms of the new buildings to those found in the area. Although not entirely necessary, duplication of the existing or traditional roof shapes, pitches, and materials on new construction is one way of making new structures more visually compatible.



Avoid – Introducing roof shapes, pitches, or materials not traditionally used in the area.

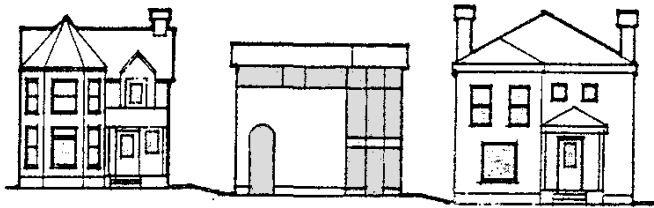


## RHYTHM OF OPENINGS

Consider — Respecting the recurrent alteration of wall areas with door and window elements in the facade. Also consider the width-to-height ration of bays in the facade. The placement of openings with respect to the facade's overall composition, symmetry, or balanced asymmetry should be carefully studied.



Avoid – Introducing incompatible facade patterns that upset the rhythm of openings established in surrounding structures. Glass walls and window and door shapes and locations shown in the example are disrespectful to the adjoining buildings.

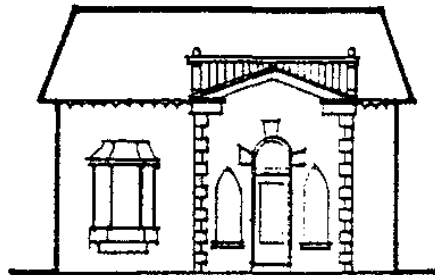


## IMITATIONS

Consider – Accurate restoration of or visually compatible additions to existing buildings, and, for new construction, contemporary architecture that represents our own time well, yet enhances the nature and character of the historic district.



Avoid – Replicating or imitating the styles, motifs, or details of older periods. Such attempts are rarely successful and, even if done well, present a confusing picture of the true character of the historical area.



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## SECTION TWO: OTHER REFERENCED GUIDELINES

\*\*\*For specific design details continue with:

For the DOWNTOWN HISTORIC DISTRICT:

**Design Review Guidelines for The Downtown Historic District   Part 1**  
**Design Review Guidelines for The Downtown Historic District   Part 2**

For the NORTHSIDE HISTORIC DISTRICT:

**Design Guidelines for the Northside Opelika Historic District**

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## SECTION THREE: APPLYING TO THE COMISSION

\*\*\*Current Applications are available:

City of Opelika Planning Department, 700 Fox Trail, Opelika, AL 36801 • (334) 705-5156  
[www.opelika.org/depts/planning/](http://www.opelika.org/depts/planning/)

## **APPENDIX A: SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR 'S STANDARDS FOR REHABILITATION**

The following Standards are to be applied to specific rehabilitation projects in a reasonable manner, taking into consideration economic and technical feasibility.

1. A property shall be used for historic purpose or be placed in a new use that requires minimal change to the defining characteristics of the building and its site environment.
2. The historic character of a property shall be retained and preserved. The removal of historic materials or alteration of features and spaces that characterize a property shall be avoided.
3. Each property shall be recognized as a physical record of its time, place, and use. Changes that create a false sense of historic development, such as adding conjectural features or architectural elements from other buildings, shall not be undertaken.
4. Most properties change over time; those changes that have acquired historic significance in their own right shall be retained and preserved.
5. Distinctive features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a historic property shall be preserved.
6. Deteriorated historic features shall be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature shall match the old in design, color, texture and other visual qualities and, where possible, materials. Replacement of missing features shall be substantiated by documentary, physical, or pictorial evidence.
7. Chemical or physical treatments, such as sandblasting, that cause damage to historic materials shall not be used. The surface cleaning of structures, if appropriate, shall be undertaken using the gentlest means possible.
8. Significant archeological resources affected by a project shall be protected and preserved. If such resources must be disturbed, mitigation measures shall be undertaken.
9. New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction shall not destroy historic materials that characterize the property. The new work shall be differentiated from the old and shall be compatible with the massing, size, scale, and architectural features to protect the historic integrity of the property and its environment.

10. New additions and adjacent or related new construction shall 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.

## APPENDIX B: GLOSSARY

**Arch**: a curved structural member spanning an opening and serving as a support.

**Baluster**: a short post or rail in a series that supports a rail and thus forms a balustrade.

**Bay Window**: a window formed in the projection of a wall beyond its general line: they are usually three-sided.

**Brackets**: supports, often located along a gable or roofline, that are used to carry a projecting weight.

**Capital**: the top portion of a column or pilaster that crowns the shaft.

**Casement Window**: a metal or timber window with the sash hung vertically and opening outward.

**Column**: an upright support element that is circular in plan; in classical style architecture is utilized to carry the weight of an entablature or other load.

**Common (American) Bond**: brick bond that has 1 row of headers and 5-7 rows of stretchers.

**Corbels**: decorative brick or concrete that projects from a building's face; these may support a beam, truss, or oriel window.

**Cornice**: the top projecting section of an entablature or any decorative molding along the top of a building, wall, door, etc. that finishes or crowns it.

**Decay**: disintegration of wood or other materials through the action of fungi or insects.

**Dormer**: an opening in a sloping roof, the framing of which projects out to form a vertical wall suitable for windows.

**Double hung window**: a sash window in which both the top and bottom sash move.

**Element**: one of the constituent parts of a building, for example, the columns.

**English bond**: alternating rows of headers and stretchers.

**Façade**: the principle elevation or elevations of a building, usually the front of a building.

**Flemish bond**: alternating headers and stretchers.

**Gable end**: triangular wall segment at the end of a double-pitched or gabled roof.

**Hipped roof**: a roof that rises by inclined planes from all four sides of a building.

**Infill construction**: buildings which are built to “fill in” areas of a historic neighborhood that are vacant. Infill construction should be designed to compliment the historic district.

**Jerkin-head roof**: a roof that is hipped from the ridge halfway to the eaves and gabled from there down, with the gable being clipped.

**Lintel**: a small member over a door or window head.

**Modillion**: a small bracket or console of which a series is frequently used to support the upper member of a Corinthian or Composite cornice, arranged in pairs with a square depression between each pair.

**Palladian window**: a window with three openings, the central section being arched and taller than the others.

**Pediment**: a wide, low-pitched gable on the face of a classical building or any triangular crowning element used over doors, windows, etc.

**Piers**: a solid masonry support, often brick, that is load bearing.

**Pilaster**: a rectangular version of a column that is affixed to a wall surface.

**Quoins**: decorative features at the corners of buildings which are laid so that their faces are  
alternately large and small, usually dressed stones or bricks.

**Setback**: the distance from a property line to a building.



## APPENDIX C: BIBLIOGRAPHY AND SUGGESTED READING

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