Juneau Downtown Historic District
Design Standards
City and Borough of Juneau Planning Department
CITY AND BOROUGH OF JUNEAU

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INTRODUCTION

In July of this year, ordinances were adopted defining the Downtown Historic District and establishing a Design Review Board which would review all proposed projects within the district. The guidelines and design standards presented in this handbook are intended to serve as an aid to applicants in preparing proposals for building in the District and to guide the Board in reviewing the projects. They were developed jointly by the Design Review Board and the City and Borough Planning staff and are based on research presented in the Downtown Historic District Plan.

Interest in preserving a sense of Juneau's past and maintaining the economic health of the Downtown Historic District is reflected in current preservation and revitalization activities occurring in both the private and public sectors. The policy of the City and Borough in establishing these guidelines is to encourage development and a diversification of uses in the Historic District while maintaining the character of the area and preserving its traditionally vital relationship with the downtown.

BACKGROUND

The Downtown Historic District evolved as a product of scarcity of land, prevalent architectural styles, imported architectural detailing, available technologies and materials, common building methods, expediency, and the values of Juneau's citizens.

These factors, which contributed to the physical presence of the District, still influence development today. However, the particular form these constraints take has changed. It is the desire of the City and Borough that the Historic District continue to reflect the values of its citizens. Today, the District houses a grocery store, theater, clothing stores, government offices, bookstores, specialty shops, giftshops and galleries. The District evokes a sense of Juneau's past, and at the same time provides for the everyday needs of both tourists and residents.

Juneau's Historic District is located in the center of the downtown, which inextricably links the health and vitality of the District to that of the downtown business core. While the Downtown Historic District may not be in the primary shopping area in the City and Borough, it does supply a wide range of goods and services to the permanent and part-time residents as well as providing giftshops, restaurants, bars, and a lively streetscape that is enjoyed by residents and tourists alike. The Historic District has also maintained an interdependent relationship with the waterfront. The use of the downtown waterfront has changed from industry, shipping, and warehousing to tourist oriented facilities, restaurants, and shops. However, it remains vitally linked with that area of the downtown now designated the Downtown Historic District. The District's proximity to the government centers and burgeoning commercial areas in the downtown, along with its strong pedestrian orientation, further emphasizes its potential to accommodate a diversity of uses and maintain its economic health. Although commercial and governmental growth has displaced much of the traditionally residential areas and structures in the downtown and Historic District, these areas have nonetheless retained a residential population, a characteristic of the downtown since its beginnings. These salient qualities—access, vitality, economic potential, and a continuing diversity of uses and users—assure the importance of the Historic District to the future of the downtown.
GENERAL GUIDELINES

This guidebook has been prepared in response to expressed concerns over the course of development in the Historic District. It is intended to serve as a handbook for those who wish to build in the Historic District, as well as for members of the general public who are interested in the future of the District. The guidelines established here are designed to provide a framework for development. Certain features of the Historic District which are the basic determinants of its form, such as the containment of the streets, three-to-four story buildings height, false fronts, continuous canopies, and the prevalence of retail storefronts, are presented as standards for emulation in development. Other typical but less easily stipulated features which promote the intimate scale and historic character of the area, such as the use of architectural detailing, materials, color and signage, are presented as suggested standards. The purpose of these guidelines and standards are not to encourage development based on precedent alone, but to encourage the replication of those elements which promote a sense of continuity with Juneau’s past and contribute to the character and vitality of the Historic District today. They are intended to aid in retaining the character of the District, while ensuring the health and enjoyment of the Historic District in the future.

The following guidelines are intended to provide the applicant with an idea of the general criteria the Design Review Board will employ when reviewing proposals for the Downtown Historic District. They are designed to preserve the characteristics which typify development in the District and provide the basis for the more specific Design Standards which follow in the next section.

1. All alterations to existing structures should be performed so as to preserve the historical and architectural character of Juneau’s Downtown Historic District.

2. The distinguishing original qualities or character of a building, structure, or site and its environment shall not be destroyed. The removal or alteration of any historic material or destruction of architectural features should be avoided when possible.

3. All buildings, structures, and sites should be recognized as products of their own time. Alterations that have no historical basis should be discouraged.

4. Changes which may have taken place in the course of time are evidence of the history and development of a building, structure, or site, and its environment. These changes may have acquired significance of their own, which should be recognized and respected.

5. Contemporary design for alterations and additions to existing properties shall not be discouraged when such alterations or additions do not destroy the historical character of the structure. The same will hold true of new construction, that is, contemporary design shall not be discouraged if it does not violate the historical character of the surrounding buildings or of the Historic District as a whole. Design proposals for both new construction and alterations to existing structures must be compatible with the size, scale, color, material, and character of the property, the immediately surrounding structures, and those in the Historic District.
DESIGN STANDARDS

The following design standards apply to both new construction and alterations to existing structures. Each standard is accompanied by background material, to give the applicant some insight into the intent of the Board in establishing these criteria. The first three standards, for heights, setbacks and roofs, collectively define the form of the streetscape. The next three standards, for retail storefronts, windows and architectural details, are all listed under “front facade.” These elements both define the character of a building and contribute to the character of the Historic District as a whole. The remaining design standards for finishing materials, color, canopies, signs, and service lines, apply to the exterior of buildings. They also contribute to both the character of the facade and collectively, to the streetscape.

The Design Review Board may, in special cases, make exceptions to the Design Standards provided the alternative does not distract from the character of the District. In such cases, the Board’s findings must include written justification for granting such exceptions.

Height and Setbacks

Background: The building and setback requirements are designed to retain the sense of enclosure and definition of the street which is characteristic of the Downtown Historic District. This experience of containment is partially a result of the prevailing two-to-four story building heights, the approximately one-to-one relationship of the street width to building height, and the continuous street wall formed by buildings which are contiguous and typically abut the street property line.

The specific purpose of the height requirements is to ensure that new buildings and building additions are compatible in height with adjacent buildings and do not violate the existing scale of the District. The specific purpose of the setback requirements is to ensure that new buildings and building additions preserve the continuous street frontage that is a prevailing characteristic of the District.

Height Standard: Building height requirements are broken down into four subdistricts, comprising thirty-five (35) foot, thirty-eight (38), forty-five (45) foot and fifty-five (55) foot height restriction areas. The location of these subdistricts is shown on the attached map.

Setback Standard: Front and side setbacks for new construction or additions shall maintain the visual continuity of the streetscape.

Roofs

Background: The prevalent roof form in the Historic District is a flat or pitched roof hidden behind a parapet wall or a “false front.” This characteristic contributes to the definition and continuity of the streetscape and has the effect of shielding mechanical equipment and other additions to the roof from view.

Standard: New construction or alterations to existing structures shall respect the original roof form, and shall create the appearance of a horizontal parapet wall from the street. Mechanical equipment and other appurtenances located on the roof must be adequately screened so as to not be visible from the street level.

Front Facades – Introduction

Just as the character of a person is thought to be revealed by their face and expression, the character of a building is represented by
its facade. In this section, the elements which make up the facade of a building and contribute to its character and the character of the Historic District are discussed. These elements are: the bays and openings at street level which collectively form a repetitive rhythm of solids and voids; the windows and doors, which create recognizable patterns in the facade; and the architectural details, which contribute to the sense of scale and intimacy and the architectural character of the District. The standards for each of these elements are outlined in the ensuing pages.

Front Facades – Retail Storefronts

Background: The continuous and narrow storefronts typical of the Historic District reflect the District's traditional role as the retail center of downtown and is one of the principal attractions of the area. These storefronts are typically comprised of large picture windows at the street level and small, recessed entrances with clerestory windows above them. Replicating the pattern of these elements and their proportions will be encouraged in all new construction and alterations. The intent is to promote pedestrian activity, visual interest at the street level, and to strengthen retail continuity along the street front, as well as to maintain a historical pattern of development.

Standard: Alterations to the facade of a building at the first floor level shall conform as nearly as possible to the original design of the building if that building is on a major street and if the original building employed a typical storefront type of facade. A proposed change of use in itself shall not justify an exception and shall require that the building employ mitigating elements to satisfy this guideline. New construction on a major street shall also utilize the elements and proportions of a typical storefront facade at street level.

Front Facades – Windows

Background: The proportion of windows and their placement in the facade is a key determinant to the character of a building. In the Historic District as a whole, the type of windows utilized was limited by available materials and technology. Today stock windows and doors of standard sizes are a typical feature of the District. These are usually double-hung wood sash windows, in the proportions of approximately three units horizontal to five units vertical, and arranged singly or in pairs above the ground floor. Thus the type of windows used, their proportions and their placement in the
façade has become an identifiable element which contributes to the architectural consistency and scale of the District.

Standard: Windows utilized in new construction shall conform in outward appearance to the style, materials, proportions and placement of windows typical of the Historic District. If altering an existing structure, the replacement windows shall match as nearly as possible the dimensions and subdivisions of those original to the structure. The suggested material for windows, including all elements associated with the exterior fenestration such as the trim, sash, frame, sill and transom is wood. Windows of other materials and styles are not acceptable, unless they are found to match in size, proportion, color and detail the wood sash typical to the Historic District.

Front Facades – Architectural Details

Background: Architectural details such as moldings, cornices, brackets, columns and pilasters break down the scale of a building and enable us to identify it as belonging to a particular place at a particular time. In the Historic District as a whole, they lend an air of consistency and a feeling of scale and intimacy to the area. Architectural detailing on buildings in the District tends to be somewhat simplified in comparison to buildings in the same architectural style and of the same era in other parts of the country. Nevertheless, the straightforward detailing of cornices and parapets, as an example, forms identifiable elements which have come to typify the Historic District today.

Standard: The original architectural details (e.g. moldings, cornices, brackets, columns, pilasters, etc.) of a building shall be maintained in good repair. If they must be replaced for maintenance purposes or during the course of minor alterations, they should be replaced as nearly as possible with elements of the same type and in similar or compatible materials. If substantial replacement is required due to deterioration or a major alteration to the building, the elements must conform in dimension and detail to those on the original structure. In the case of new construction, architectural details must be suitable to the building itself and shall conform in dimension and detail with precedents found on comparable buildings or within the District.
Finishing Materials

Background: Nearly all the older buildings in the Historic District are of wood frame construction, which reflects the available materials, building technology and architectural styling of the era. Buildings were most often finished in clapboard or drop siding, with shingle or composition roofs. Later, stucco veneer was added to some wood finished buildings, to the extent that both wood siding and stucco finishing typifies the District today. Some buildings of concrete with stucco finishing were constructed at later times. However, both wood and stucco finished buildings tend to be painted; a unifying element of the District today.

Standard: Finishing materials used in repairing or partially replacing exterior walls should match as closely as possible the materials used on the existing buildings. Where appropriate to the rehabilitation of the building, finishing materials used in major alterations to a building should match as closely as possible the original material used on the building in dimension, texture, and finish. Recommended finishing materials for both new construction and alterations to existing structures are horizontal wood siding, such as shiplap, tongue and groove, clapboard siding, and smooth stucco finish. All buildings must be painted or finished with semi-transparent stain.

Color

Background: The color of the exterior of a building should be chosen with the prevailing grey light of Juneau in mind. The purpose of the trim and accent colors is to highlight or “pick-out” the details and projecting parts of the structure against the color of the main body of the building. For this reason the buildings of the post-Victorian era, in which many of the structures in the Historic District were built, were traditionally painted with light colored trim against a darker color on the main body of the building. However, the main concern of the Design Review Board is that the color of the main body of the building should contrast with the color(s) of the trim, front door, projecting cornice and other architectural details and ornamentation.

Standard: All siding, wood trim and window trim is to be finished with paint or a semi-transparent stain. All colors and the placement of color on the building should preserve or emphasize the structural detailing. All colors and color combinations shall be subject to approval by the Design Review Board.
Canopies

Background: Although the horizontal canopies now prevalent in the Historic District were not always the most common type used, the merchants and building owners in Juneau have always made the attempt to shield their customers from inclement weather. The horizontal canopies have become, over time, a typical feature of the downtown and the Historic District. In addition to protecting pedestrians from the rain, they contribute an element of consistency to the streetscape, visually emphasize the continuous street frontage of the buildings, and break down the scale of buildings at the street level.

Standard: If canopies are removed during alteration, they must be replaced by canopies in accordance with the following design standards. Canopies must be provided in new construction as well, and where appropriate must allow for a horizontal continuation of the canopies on adjacent or contiguous buildings. Materials traditionally associated with “add-on” or temporary canopies or awnings, such as corrugated fiberglass, canvas or aluminum are not appropriate. Cantilevered concrete, with suitable finishing materials, or wood frame construction should be employed with suitable roofing materials such as asphalt. Canopies shall not follow the grade, but be hung horizontally and step up with changes in grade, so as to keep within the character of existing canopies in the Historic District.

Stepping Up of Canopy Line
Canopies should not be more than one foot in thickness at the outer edge and should be a minimum of nine feet above the sidewalk.

Signs

Background: Signage was an important element in late nineteenth century commercial architecture, as a major source of advertising. Today the signs in the Historic District that are reminiscent of this era lend a distinctive air to the building. The typical placement of signs under the canopies also contributes to the continuity and human scale of the streetscape. The purpose of these sign regulations is to recreate the historic character of signs and to ensure that some consistency is maintained in their design and placement.

Standard: Lettering style and symbols on signs shall be appropriate to the building’s style and compatible with the lettering and style of other signs on the building.

The only sign appearing above the canopy or first floor level of a building should relate to the name of the building or principal use within the building. This should be externally illuminated only and be in the place of the storefront. Signs that are hung underneath the canopy and perpendicular to the building should be no less than eight (8) feet above the finished sidewalk. The preferred material for these signs is wood, with natural stain or painted finish and externally illuminated only. Signs within or fixed to canopy edges shall not be lighted and shall not extend past the bottom or one (1) foot above the top of the canopy fascia, and shall not exceed twelve inches in overall height.

All signage proposals require approval by the Design Review Board. The Board will review plans for dimensions, placement, subject matter, lettering styles, color, materials, legibility and appropriateness of style to the character of the Historic District.

Sign Placement
THE REVIEW PROCESS

Service Lines

Standard: At a future date utility lines, (i.e. telephone and electrical lines) may be established underground. Conduits for those lines should be supplied from the street to the building in the course of new construction or alterations to existing structures. In the interim, aerial utility lines should be brought into a building as discretely as possible, so as not to detract from the appearance of the building.

Procedures used in filing an application for approval of site development plan.

Required Submittals

The following procedures are for persons who intend to undertake rehabilitation or new construction within the Downtown Juneau Historic district.

1. Application is filed with the Planning Department (page enclosed form).

2. The Planning Department schedules the application for review at the following Design Review Board meeting.

3. A Notice of Hearing is published at least three days prior to the hearing date.

4. The Design Review Board reviews and evaluates the site development plan with consideration of the following:
   a) Preservation of the historical outward appearance and original design when development or work involves modification to existing buildings.
   b) Results in harmony of scale, architectural style, sidewalk level use, and materials with existing historical character when development involves construction of a new building.

5. The Planning Director issues a site development plan permit with the Board's action.

The following items are required for major rehabilitation/renovation and new construction within the Historic District. These shall accompany the application form and must be submitted to the Planning Department for review by the Planning Staff, the Design Review Board, and the Building Department.

1. Three copies of the application signed by the applicant and, if leasing the premises, co-signed by the owner. The location of the property shall be clearly indicated on the attached map.

2. Current color photographs of the site and existing structures representing both the overall condition of the structures and accurately portraying the materials and color shall be submitted. In addition, color photographs must be provided of contiguous sites and structures to show prevalent architectural styles and the character of the area. All photographs must be leveled to indicate the direction of the view and must be mounted on 8½x11 inch heavy artist display board, matte board, or heavy bond.

3. Major exterior modifications shall require the submittal of three copies of a site plan showing the existing structure and its relationship to the site and all proposed alterations and additions. These drawings must be to scale, and copies
may be blue lines, black lines, or of similar quality.

4. Three copies of elevations of all facades with street frontage and any facades which are visible from the street showing proposed fenestration, canopies, signage, exterior equipment, and appropriate architectural detailing. Proposed building materials and finishes must be indicated with color and texture and must be of a scale appropriate to show the required detail. These drawings must be to scale, keyed to the sample required in item 6, and may be hand-colored blue lines, black lines, or of a similar quality.

5. Samples of materials and photographs of products to be used in exterior finishing must be provided. These may include color chips, samples of molding, and/or photographs of architectural details to be incorporated in the exterior finishing. These must be keyed to the elevations required in item 4 and must be mounted on heavy artist display board.

6. If the Design Review Board requires modification to the submitted exhibitions or additional submittals due to unusual conditions, then these must be submitted by the applicant as requested by the Board prior to the applicant receiving a Site Development Plan Permit.
Juneau Downtown Historic District Boundaries

District Boundary

Height Requirements

- 35 ft.
- 45 ft.
- 55 ft.
- 38 ft.