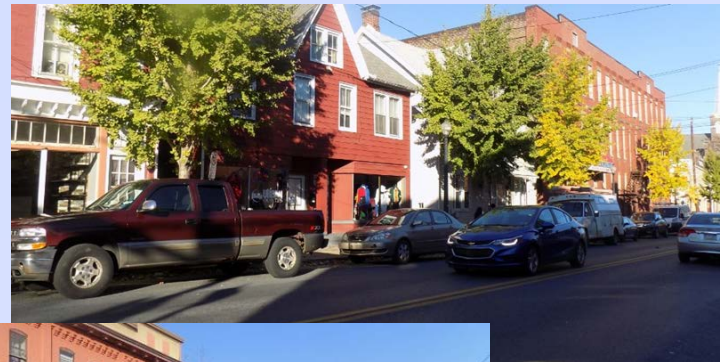


South Side Bethlehem Historic Conservation District Study



Urban Research & Development Corporation (URDC)

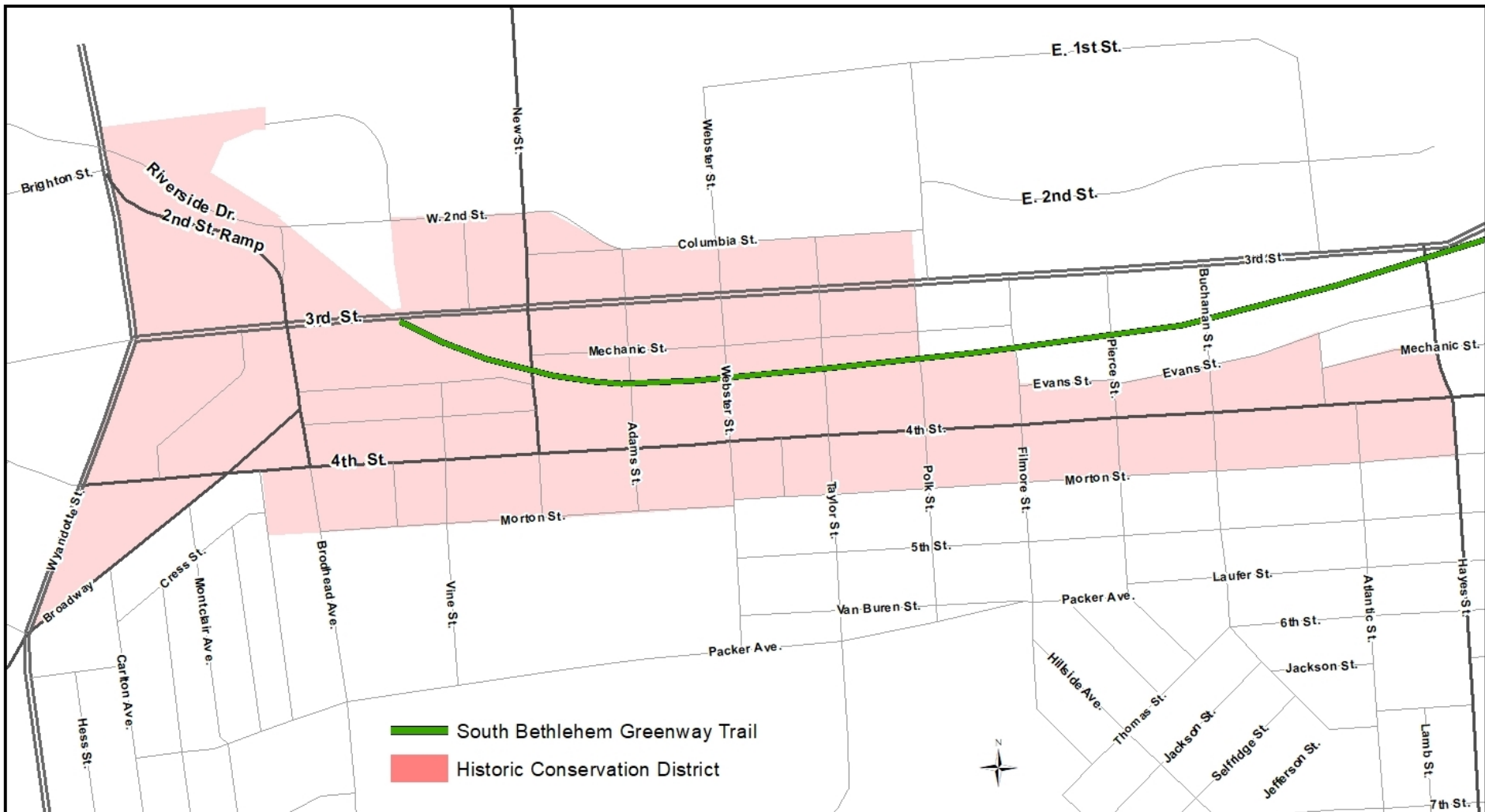
Bethlehem, PA, In Association With

Artefact, Inc.

Bethlehem, PA

Under the Direction of the City of Bethlehem Planning & Zoning Bureau

This Plan Primarily Addresses the portions of S. Bethlehem that within the Historic Conservation District, including much of the western portions of the 3rd and 4th St. corridors.



Public Participation

- ❑ A Task Force has been providing input into the development of the Plan.
- ❑ Interviews were conducted with many knowledgeable persons
- ❑ Surveymonkey.com public survey is still available in English and Spanish
- ❑ English version <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/SouthBethlehem>
Spanish version <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/SurBethlehem>
- ❑ This is the second online public meetings,
plus will be future meetings on the
topic before the City Planning
Commission and City Council
- ❑ Draft materials will be posted on the
City website, including a Summary
of the Draft



Summary of Citizen Survey Results

- Types of businesses to be most emphasized: 1. small retail stores and services, 2. restaurants, 3. arts and entertainment, 4 research and technology, 5. offices, 6. day care, 7. large retail stores, 8. hotels/motels.
- Which is most important goal? 56% emphasize preservation of older buildings and features. 44% promote variety of architectural styles, including modern and artistic.
- Which should receive the most emphasis? 55% attract more businesses. 47% attract more housing.
- How important is it to control building heights? 41% extremely important, 37% moderately important
-

Citizen Survey Cont.

- How important is it to control the exterior appearance of new buildings? 54% very important, 35% moderately important.
- How important is it to control the exterior appearance of changes to existing buildings? 50% very important, 39% moderately important
- How important is it to control the demolition of older buildings in the Historic District? 55% very important, 27% moderately important.

Community Survey cont.

- What do you like most about the Historic District? Walkable, community, greenway, variety of styles, cultural diversity, older charm, historic character
- What do you like least about the Historic District? Traffic congestion, new development that does not fit in, disrepair of buildings, empty storefronts.

Balancing Various Public Concerns

Historic preservation and height and density limits needs to be balanced with the need for additional housing, for persons of various income levels and for persons with disabilities.

New construction also generates increased tax revenues and results in new residents supporting local businesses.



Affordable housing

There are serious concerns about providing affordable housing, particularly as rental and sale housing prices have greatly increased in recent years.

It can be difficult for families to compete for housing with college students.

The City is investigating various incentives that could be offered for affordable housing, such as possibly a slightly taller maximum building height, increased densities, reduced parking requirements and more attractive tax incentives.



Allowed Business Uses

The City's Zoning Ordinance allows different types of businesses in different zoning districts. In the commercial areas in this area, offices, day care centers, retail stores, personal services, and restaurants are allowed.

New drive-through restaurants, gas stations, auto repair and auto sales are not allowed in the area within the South Bethlehem Historic District.

There are limits on types of commercial uses allowed on 1st floor storefronts along major streets.

New buildings are required to be built close to the sidewalk.





Existing Historic District Regulations

The Ordinance regulates new construction of buildings, building additions, demolition of a building in whole or in part, and major alterations to a building, including removal of architectural features.

The Ordinance addresses exterior architectural features which can be seen from a public street or sidewalk.

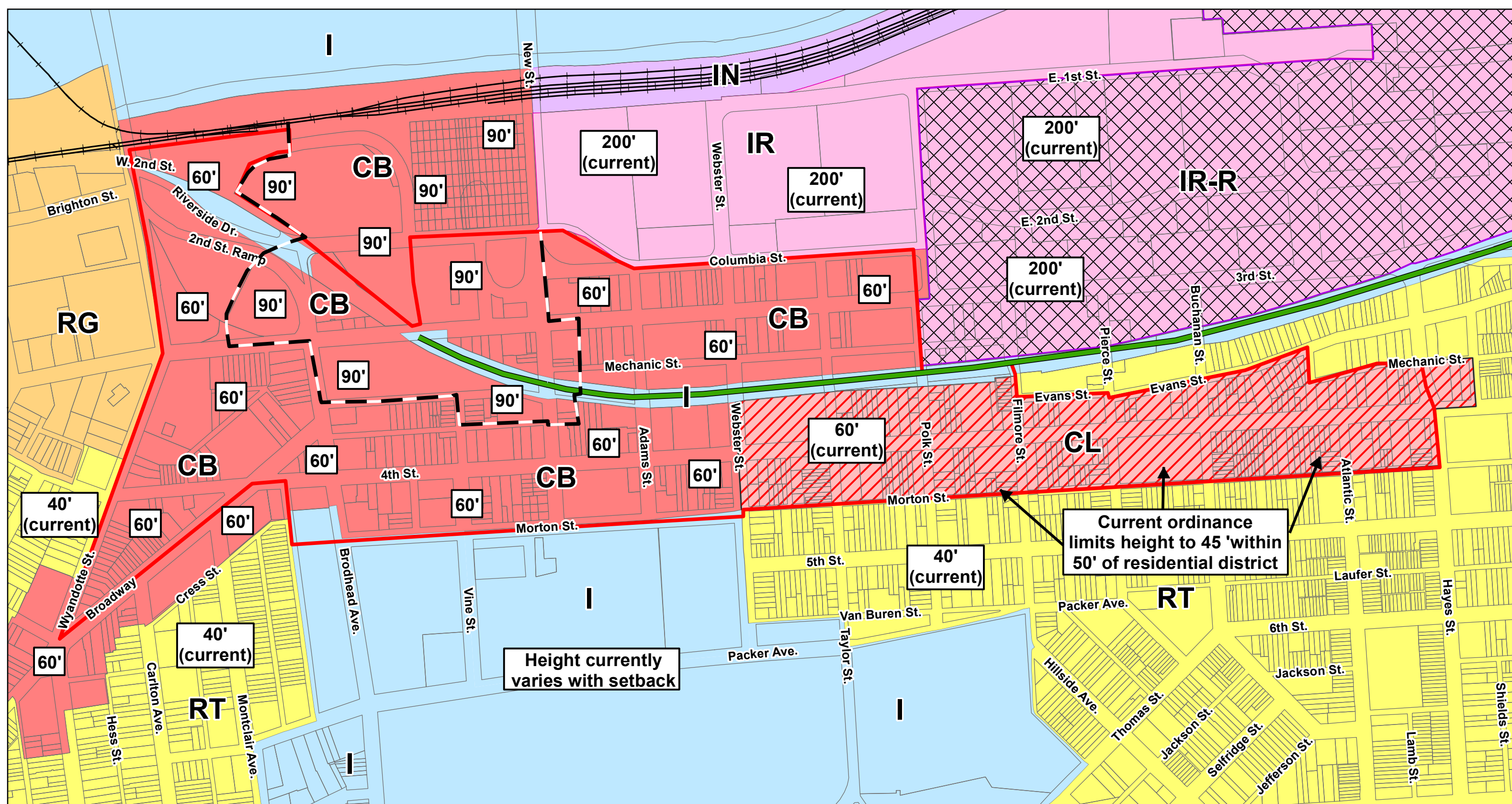
A Historic Conservation Commission makes recommendations, with the final decision made by City Council.

What heights of buildings are appropriate in different areas?

The Central Business district effectively allows up to 14 stories. This district extends west of Polk Street north of the Greenway, and west of Webster Street south of the Greenway Trail, down to Morton Street.

The portion of the Historic District south of the Greenway and east of Webster Street is zoned Commercial Limited. That district effectively allows up to 5 stories.





Source: ESRI and PASDA.

0 350 700 Feet

Urban Research & Development Corporation
81 Highland Ave. Suite 120 Bethlehem, Pennsylvania 18017 610-865-0701
URDC

Zoning Districts

- RT** Residential District
- RG** Residential District
- CB** Central Business District
- CL** Limited Commercial District

- IR** Industrial Redevelopment District
- IR-R** Industrial Redevelopment Residential Option District
- I** Institutional District
- IN** Industrial District

- South Bethlehem Greenway Trail
- Historic Conservation District

Revised January 2021

South Bethlehem Planning Study

EXISTING ZONING
with
Potential Maximum Heights

Example of Step Back of Top Floors



- Example of an Insensitive Addition to a Roof



Examples of Step backs of Tops of Buildings



Examples of Buildings with Top Floor Setbacks



Example of Buildings With Little Articulation and No Variation in Setbacks





Ordinance and Design Guideline Revisions

Draft revisions have been prepared:

- to the City's Historic Conservation District Ordinance for the South Side;
- the City's Zoning Ordinance as it affects the South Side, such as adjusting allowed building heights in certain areas; and
- to provide additional Design Standards for new construction and building additions.

Staff Approvals of Routine Matters

- Certain routine changes could be approved by the City Staff, without needing Historic Conservation Commission and Council approval. This could include a process of having the HCC and City Council pre-approve a set of designs, such as certain types of fencing, and certain types of window replacements that are not on the primary facade and that have a similar appearance. This staff approval process could also be used for certain types of roof repairs, particularly since roof repairs often need to be done quickly.
- This type of staff approval is regularly used in Philadelphia, Allentown, Reading, Raleigh and other cities.



DESIGN GUIDELINES

FOR NEW CONSTRUCTION & ADDITIONS IN THE
SOUTH BETHLEHEM HISTORIC CONSERVATION DISTRICT



CITY OF BETHLEHEM, PENNSYLVANIA



BLENDING OLD & NEW: STRATEGIES FOR SENSITIVE NEW CONSTRUCTION IN SOUTH BETHLEHEM

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE HISTORICALLY COMPATIBLE?

While it is important for the City of Bethlehem to continue to evolve, the design of new buildings and additions to historic buildings in the Historic Conservation District must be carefully considered. New construction should be compatible visually with the existing buildings and district. While new design may be inspired by existing traditional forms and detailing (i.e. Neoclassical, Italianate, Victorian, etc.), a less traditional approach may also be deemed historically appropriate if the massing, size, and materiality of architectural elements are sensitive to and complementary to the surrounding context. In general, the federal standards that guide historic preservation and historic commissions recommend against exact replication of historic styles. A new building or addition, like the old, should be clearly reflective of its time.

This section provides supplemental design guidelines for construction of standalone and infill development for residential, commercial and mixed-use projects in the SBHCC. Sub-areas of the larger conservation district have been identified that exhibit less cohesive historic architectural character due to the loss of historic buildings or newer construction that is not historically compatible. New development, especially taller new construction, should target these areas.

PRESERVING CHARACTER AND A “SENSE OF PLACE”

Preservation traditionally has favored a narrow and somewhat inflexible definition of a historic resource—prioritizing the physical aspects of a property over more intangible, yet still valuable factors. These less tangible attributes may include:

- Cultural or social context associated with the individual resource or larger district
- Pedestrian scale
- Type of Building
- Architectural context

These attributes should also be considered in the design of new construction in the historic district. Regardless of architectural style, all buildings in a district share similar underlying principles of relation to the street, cultural and social context, materials, shape, composition, proportion, and ornament. When perceived together, these elements create a district’s “sense of place”.

Even if a district contains many styles, a cohesive character is achieved when most buildings, old and new, follow an approach to design that reflects the spirit of that specific place and creates a sense of continuity over time, rather than contrast or disruption. The following sections provide guidelines for how to insert architecturally compatible and historically sensitive new construction in South Bethlehem’s Historic Conservation District (SBHCC), while preserving the district’s historic character and unique “sense of place”.

BLENDING OLD & NEW:

STRATEGIES FOR SENSITIVE NEW CONSTRUCTION IN SOUTH BETHLEHEM

DIFFERENT APPROACHES FOR NEW CONSTRUCTION IN A HISTORIC CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Based on a document published by the Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia, *Sense of Place: Design Guidelines for New Construction in Historic Districts* (2007), there are four **basic strategies** for approaching new construction in a historic district. It is important to understand the range of possibilities before selecting a strategy for any new building. The bolded strategies are the encouraged approaches for most new construction in South Bethlehem's Historic Conservation District.

- **Literal Replication** - While historically deemed to be “most compatible”, the thinking around this issue has changed over time, and generally, direct replication of historical styles is expensive and not required for a new building or addition. New construction should bear a stamp of its own time and place. Stylistic replication may be appropriate depending on the building and context; for instance, when restoring or reconstructing a highly significant building or architectural feature, or for historical interpretive opportunities (ex. Sun Inn in Bethlehem or Franklin Court in Philadelphia). If this approach seems like an appropriate strategy, guidance from the City should be requested.



Sun Inn, Bethlehem, reconstructed to resemble original (1758); important resource of Bethlehem's colonial history



Franklin Court in Society Hill, Philadelphia; replication of the style as an interpretive opportunity in the National Historic Park

- **Invention within the Same or Related Style** - This approach tips the balance towards compatibility. This approach is often most appropriate in areas of a historic district which have higher protection priorities, such as attached or directly adjacent to buildings of the greatest level of historic significance and integrity in the district. These buildings or sub-areas exhibit greater architectural consistency, and over time, highly contrasting new design will diminish the overall district's integrity, character, and sense of place. A more compatible, complementary approach to new design next to historic resources may include making reference to, but reinterpreting, existing lines, forms, or massing, while using new materials or creatively reusing salvaged historic materials (Ex. 211 Elizabeth Street in Manhattan; see image below). These areas or buildings of “protection priority” are identified on the provided map.



211 Elizabeth St., NYC, historically compatible mid-rise construction in a high-density urban context



Compatible mid-rise construction in a medium density, urban neighborhood in downtown DC

BLENDING OLD & NEW:

STRATEGIES FOR SENSITIVE NEW CONSTRUCTION IN SOUTH BETHLEHEM

- **Abstract but Related Reference** - This contextual approach to new design draws inspiration more abstractly and often more broadly from the surrounding setting, making reference to existing massing, size, materiality, and structural and architectural elements of directly adjacent and nearby buildings. More abstractly referenced new design leans heavier on differentiation than compatibility, and is typically more appropriate in areas of the district that are considered to be lesser priorities for protection. These sub-areas, as identified on the map, are less cohesive architecturally and consist of a mix of contributing resources (though not of primary historic significance), and non-contributing or highly altered historic buildings. New construction that creates slightly more visual juxtaposition and contrast with the existing fabric (i.e. through greater heights or more abstract, though related, forms or materials) will be less overtly noticeable to the observer since change to these areas has already occurred. The following two buildings are examples of abstract but related new construction (infill and an addition) in mid-rise urban contexts.



Curtis Institute in Philadelphia; example of new construction with compatible use of materials (brown sandstone) and scale



Example of an abstract, but related addition to a historic mid-rise office building in a downtown context

- **Intentional Opposition** - This strategy is considered the least compatible and most highly differentiated approach. While taking some note of historic elements and context for inspiration, the goal of this new construction strategy is to celebrate extreme contrast and juxtaposition with the historic fabric, which becomes highly noticeable and sometimes visually jarring to the observer. This strategy is often employed most effectively in larger city historic districts, where interventions of extreme contrast will not erode the character of the district over time and be as visually impactful as in a smaller district. On the other hand, highly selective and deliberate instances of this approach in smaller districts, such as the SBHCC, may be appropriate if implemented sensitively for a smaller building and in more intact areas of the district (ex. Sigal Museum in Easton, PA and the Spertus Institute in Chicago). In this way, these higher contrast interventions can create accents of visual interest and enhance the district's overall character.



Spertus Institute in downtown Chicago, high-contrast in a high-rise urban context but compatible setback, scale



Sigal Museum in downtown Easton, high-contrast in a mid-rise urban context but compatible massing, scale

By placing an emphasis on compatibility over differentiation, but achieving a harmonious balance between the two, buildings such as those in the SBHCC, may evolve within the context of their defining historic patterns, styles, scale, and contexts, which therefore assures a greater continuity of character and the district's "sense of place" over time.

SUB-AREAS OF THE HISTORIC CONSERVATION DISTRICT:

SUB-AREA #1:

Sub-area #1, as indicated on the provided map, defines a zone of the SBHCC that may allow a maximum height of **90 feet** for new construction, if certain design guidelines are followed, as defined in the next section.

This sub-area of the district is less intact, meaning that contributing historic resources are not considered to be of the highest priorities for protection and/or have been substantially altered or demolished. Sub-area #1 also contains several parcels which are vacant/undeveloped and parcels that have been redeveloped already with higher or less compatible new construction such that introducing greater height in this zone would have less adverse impacts on the overall historic character and integrity of the district.

SUB-AREA #2:

Sub-area #2, as indicated on the provided map, defines a zone of the SBHCC that may allow a maximum height of **60 feet** for new construction, if certain design guidelines are followed, as defined in the next section.

This sub-area encompasses the majority of the conservation district, which is more intact overall than sub-area #1, but still contains pockets where historic integrity has been diminished, either due to inappropriate alterations to historic properties or incompatible infill construction on vacant parcels. Building taller in this sub-area (up to 60 feet) may be appropriate depending on the proximity to higher protection priority resources, or Class I buildings, and the surrounding context. See the **Classification of Existing Buildings** map provided and described below. Blocks of sub-area #2 with several consecutive Class 1 buildings, such as the first block of E. 3rd Street, would not be encouraged as potential sites for new construction that is substantially higher or intentionally contrasting design.

CLASSIFICATION OF EXISTING SBHCC BUILDINGS

The following categories of properties have been defined in the SBHCC:

- Class I** Properties that are considered most historically significant and to be the district's highest protection priorities
- Class II** Properties that are considered contributing historic resources, but are of a secondary level of historic significance or integrity
- Class III** Properties that are considered non-contributing either due to a lack of historical significance and/or exhibit substantial alterations to the historic fabric



3rd Street between Vine and New streets, adjacent to high-rise new construction (corner of 3rd and New streets)



3rd Street in South Bethlehem looking east from above



Example of Class II buildings which are contributing to the overall character of the historic district, but are not considered individually significant

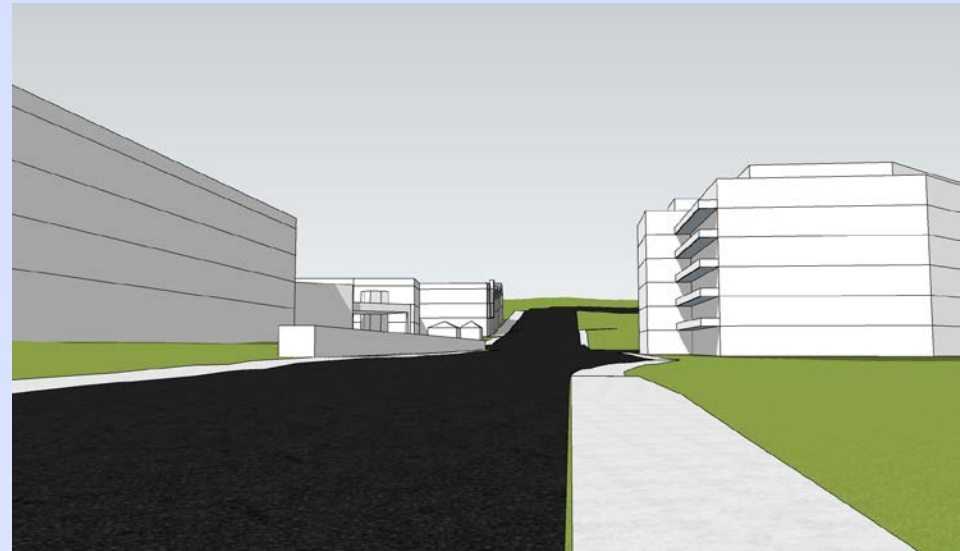
Google Sketchup: View from Hill to Hill Bridge – Current and with a new building east of Perkins



View from Hill on 3rd St. Looking East – Current and With a Potential New Building



View from Banana Factory Looking West – Current & With Potential New Building



View from the Tally Ho – Current and With a Potential New Building.



If we want to maintain the best features of the community, we need to act.
Questions and Comments?

