

DESIGN GUIDELINES

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



CITY OF BETHLEHEM, PENNSYLVANIA

FUNDING

This project was partially funded by a grant from the Bureau of Historic Preservation of the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission.

PREPARATION

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GUIDELINES FOR NEW CONSTRUCTION IN THE SOUTH BETHLEHEM HISTORIC CONSERVATION DISTRICT



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 South Bethlehem Downtown National Register Historic District known locally as the South Bethlehem Historic Conservation District (SBHCD) 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. Italianate, Queen Anne, Classical Revival, 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 reflective of its time.

This section provides supplemental design guidelines for construction of major additions and standalone or infill development for commercial and mixed-use projects in the SBHCD. Areas of the larger historic 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 construction and development should target these areas.

PRESERVING CHARACTER AND A “SENSE OF PLACE”

Preservation traditionally has favored a narrow and somewhat inflexible definition of a historic building - prioritizing the physical aspects of a property (what the building looks like and its style) over more intangible, yet still valuable factors. These less tangible attributes may include:

- Cultural or social importance associated with a building or group of buildings
- Pedestrian, human-scale scale of a building
- Unusual type of building (e.g. an early automobile showroom)
- A building in an intact group of buildings of a similar date and having similar relationships to the sidewalk

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, window sizes and patterns, 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 (SBHCD), 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 that could be considered. It is important to understand the range of possibilities before selecting a strategy for a new building. Of the approaches below (ranging from more historically compatible to less compatible, 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 by the ordinance or design guidelines for new building or addition. New construction should bear the stamp of its own time and place. However, stylistic replication may be appropriate depending on the building and context; for instance, when restoring or reconstructing a highly significant building or for historical interpretive purposes.
- **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 areas exhibit greater architectural consistency, and over time, highly contrasting new design will diminish their overall integrity, character, and sense of place. A more compatible, complementary approach to new design next to such historic resources may include making reference to, but reinterpreting, existing styles, forms, or massing, while using new materials or creatively reusing salvaged historic materials (for example, 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 new construction on the corner property in a medium density, urban neighborhood in downtown DC

- **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 height limit areas, as identified on the map, are less cohesive architecturally or consist of many non-contributing or highly altered buildings. New construction that creates more visual contrast with the existing fabric (i.e. through greater heights or more abstract, though related, details and forms, or more modern 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.

BLENDING OLD & NEW:

STRATEGIES FOR SENSITIVE NEW CONSTRUCTION IN SOUTH BETHLEHEM



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 Counterpoint** - This strategy is the most highly differentiated and, in essence, the least historically compatible approach. While taking some note of historic elements and context for inspiration, this approach maximizes contrast with the historic fabric. Only a small percentage of new buildings and construction can be designed with this approach without eroding the historic district's character and sense of place. Highly selective and deliberate instances of this approach may be appropriate if implemented sensitively for a smaller building even in more intact areas of the district (ex. Sigal Museum in Easton, PA). In this way, these higher contrast interventions can create visual interest through counterpoint with the existing historic fabric and enhance the district's overall character. This approach is also recommended for limited building types such as museums, schools, or art centers with public or civic function.



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

Invention within the styles seen in South Bethlehem or abstraction of existing historic styles are the recommended approaches for most new building in the SBHCD. By placing an emphasis on compatibility over differentiation, but achieving a harmonious balance between the two, new buildings will better fit within the context of the defining historic patterns, styles, scale, and contexts, which will assure a greater continuity of character and the district's "sense of place" over time.

HEIGHT LIMIT AREAS OF THE HISTORIC CONSERVATION DISTRICT:

AREAS RECOMMENDED TO HAVE A 90 FEET MAXIMUM HEIGHT LIMIT:

As indicated on the provided map, this area defines a zone of the SBHCD that allows a maximum height of **90 feet** for new construction. This area of the district is less intact, meaning historic buildings that remain are not considered to be of the highest priority for protection and/or have been substantially altered. The 90 feet area also contains several parcels which are vacant or undeveloped and parcels that have been redeveloped already with taller or less compatible new construction. In this area, introducing buildings of greater height (up to 90 feet) would have less adverse impacts on the overall historic character and visual cohesiveness of the district. New buildings in this area up to 90 feet are permitted subject to certain design requirements defined in the next section.



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

AREAS RECOMMENDED TO HAVE A 60 FEET MAXIMUM HEIGHT LIMIT:

The 60 feet area, as indicated on the provided map, defines a zone of the SBHCD that allows a maximum height of **60 feet** for new construction. This area encompasses the majority of the conservation district, which is more intact overall than the 90 feet max. height area, 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. Buildings in this area up to 60 feet are permitted subject to certain design requirements defined in the next section. See the Classification of Existing Buildings and Potential Maximum Heights maps provided.



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

CLASSIFICATION OF EXISTING SBHCD BUILDINGS

The following categories of properties have been defined:

Class I Buildings and groups of buildings that are considered most historically significant and to be the district's highest protection priorities.

Class II Buildings and groups of buildings that are considered contributing historic resources, but are of an average level of historic significance or integrity

Class III Buildings or areas that are considered non-contributing either due to a lack of historical significance, substantial alterations, or demolition

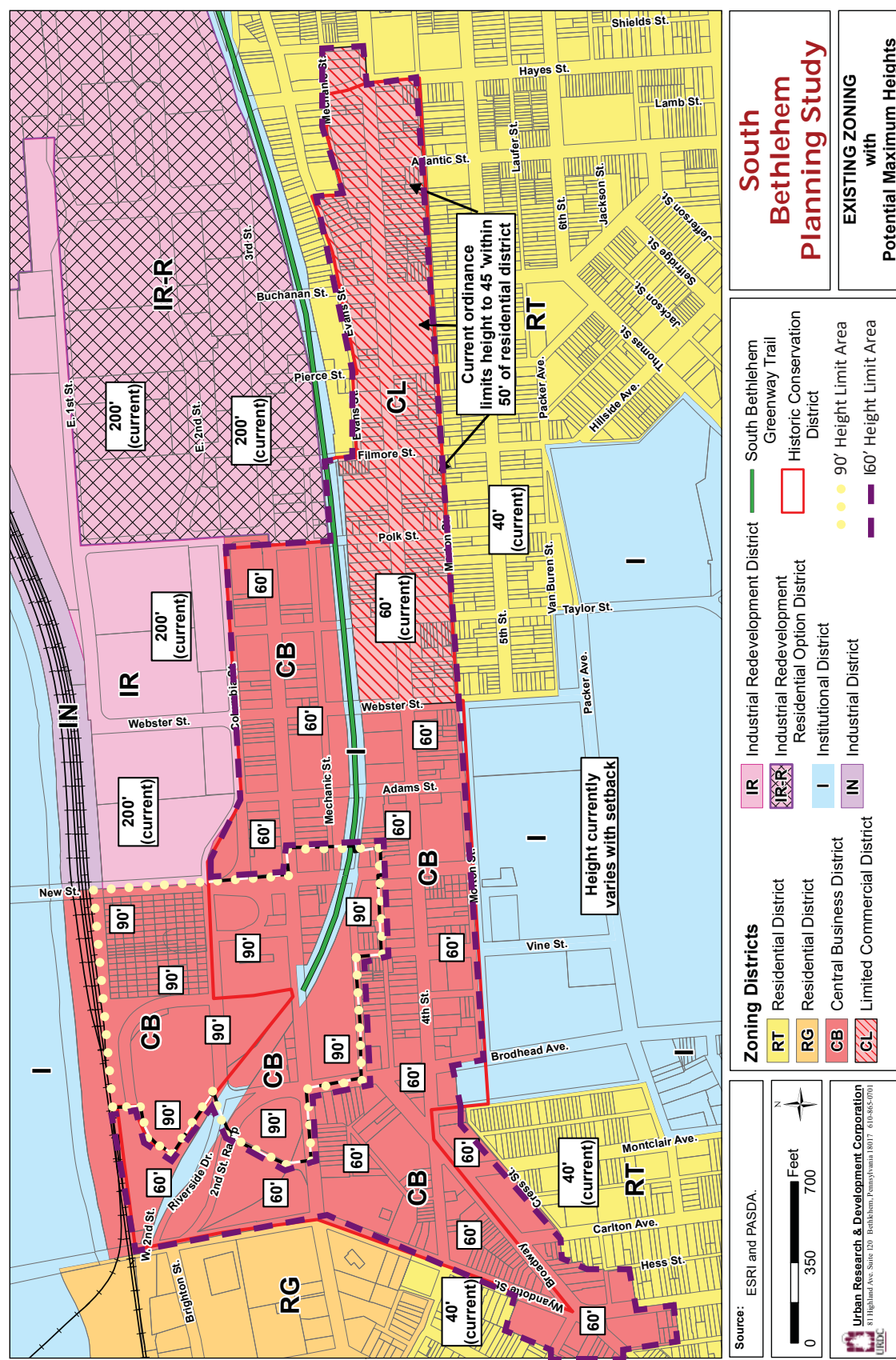
Demolition of Class I and II buildings is strongly discouraged and rarely approved. The classification, however, does not indicate a different level of review by the SBHCC. Class I buildings are not regulated to a higher standard than those in Class II and III.

IMPORTANT TO CONSIDER BEFORE PLANNING NEW CONSTRUCTION OR A NEW ADDITION

1. Is full new construction necessary to achieve the desired goals?
2. Could a vacant building, especially if Class II or Class III, be adapted or reconfigured to fit the same needs?

A 20% federal income tax credit is available as an incentive to offset the cost of rehabilitation of historic, income-producing buildings that are determined to be "certified historic structures". Visit <https://www.nps.gov/tps/tax-incentives.htm> to learn more. A limited number of 25% PA tax credits are also available for eligible properties. Visit <https://dced.pa.gov/programs/historic-preservation-tax-credit-hptc/> to learn more.

SBHCD POTENTIAL MAXIMUM HEIGHTS MAP



SBHCD CLASSIFICATION MAP

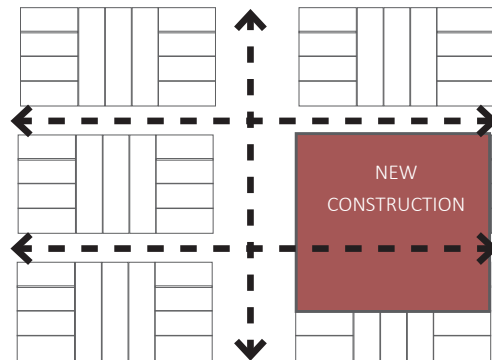


1 SITE & CONTEXT:

SETTING, SETBACKS, ZONING & ORIENTATION

PRINCIPLE

Alterations to existing buildings and new construction should reflect the historic relationships to sidewalks, streets, property lines, circulation patterns, property uses, and site layouts of the historic district in which it is located. This can be accomplished in several ways, including: orienting buildings on their lots to reflect historic development and streetscape patterns; placing appropriate commercial uses on the first level in commercial areas; and respecting existing circulation patterns and entry locations. Front and public entries should be at a primary facade (recessed and corner entries depending on the site). Additionally, small local streets should not be closed off, so as to preserve the historic relationships of streets and circulation within the district.



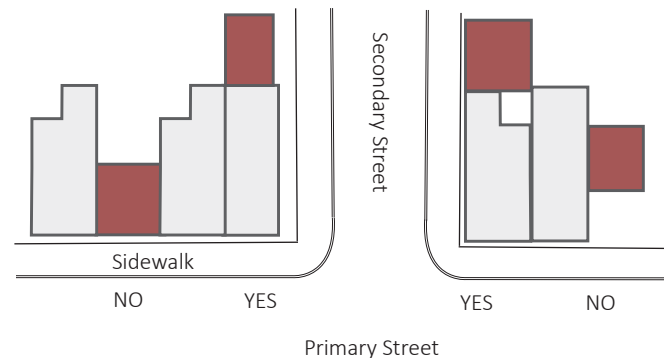
Maintain historic patterns of circulation and access (pedestrian and vehicular) of adjacent blocks around and through the proposed construction site

RATIONALE & GUIDELINES

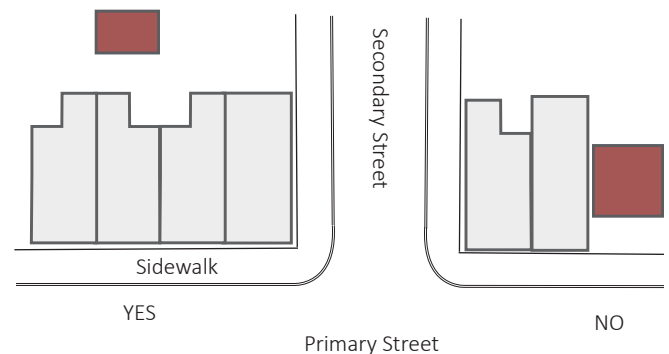
Building setbacks (or build-to lines), site orientation, frontage dimensions, property type, and circulation patterns determine the overall rhythm and visual continuity of a street and experience of a neighborhood. South Bethlehem's street grid and parcel sizes date back to the 1880s and 90s, when the city was first laid out. Buildings have historically been oriented within this grid with narrow front facades facing the street, creating a variety of pedestrian-friendly storefronts and walkable public environments.

Building setbacks (or build-to lines) reinforce the rhythm and visual cohesiveness of a street and help to delineate public and private space. Buildings of the SBHCD, including both residential and commercial, are predominantly oriented towards a primary street (with main entries located at the front facades) and are constructed directly at the lot line (up to the sidewalk).

- New buildings should follow the orientation, front dimensions, circulation, and setback patterns of neighboring properties and of the respective block
- New additions and accessory buildings should not distract from the front facades of historic buildings and not be highly visible from primary streets
- New residential construction is not permitted on street level in the historic district. It is recommended to place balconies and roof decks at the rear of the building if upper floors are residential



New additions should not be highly visible from the primary street and if necessary, public access should be on a secondary street



New secondary structures or accessory buildings should not be highly visible from the primary street

1 SITE & CONTEXT:

SETTING, SETBACKS, ZONING & ORIENTATION

EXAMPLE IMAGES



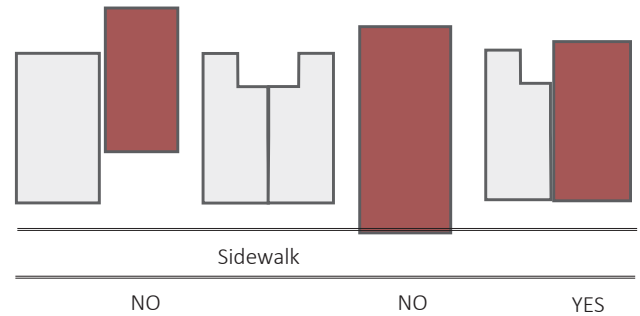
This dense mixed-use block (residential over commercial) is a good historic example of the rhythm and cohesiveness of many blocks in South Bethlehem. New construction at the ends of such a block should repeat its setbacks, orientation, height, and window patterns



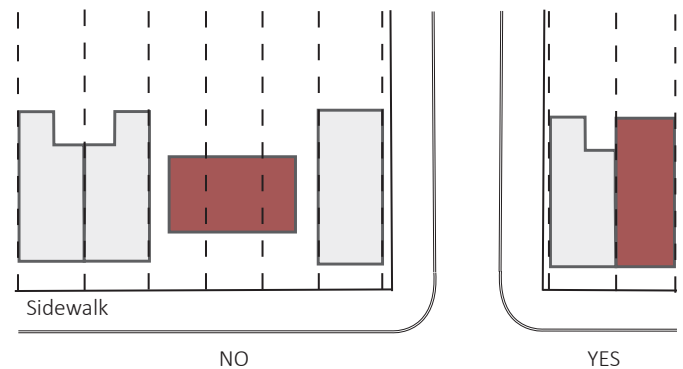
Example of historically appropriate additions which are oriented towards a secondary street



New Street in South Bethlehem looking north; new construction at the west side of the street has compatible setbacks and orientation



New buildings should respect the setback distances of adjacent buildings on the street to provide adequate spacing and preserve the existing ratio of building-to-open-space lot coverage



New buildings should respect the existing orientation and relationships to property lines, adjacent buildings, the street, and sidewalk to preserve existing development patterns. The spaces between buildings should not be too great, since historic streets feel more enclosed, or like an outdoor “room”, where people will want to linger

2 BUILDING FORM: MASSING, HEIGHT, & SCALE

PRINCIPLE

The building form of new construction, which is determined by its massing, height, and scale, should be compatible with those characteristics of adjacent contributing resources of the district. New buildings should exhibit similar proportional spatial relationships at the most visible facades.

WHAT IS:

MASSING? The perception of a building in three dimensions, defined primarily by its shape, size, and volume. Massing can be impacted most by a building's height (or variations in height), width, setbacks, and materials. Mass can also refer to a building's sense of lightness or heaviness.

HEIGHT? The maximum vertical distance of a building measured from the average front sidewalk level to the highest point on the building.

SCALE? The relationship between a building's size and visual presence with that of the adjacent buildings. In very general terms 'scale' refers to an item's size in relationship to something else. For example, a building can be designed to be in scale with the surrounding buildings. Or, components of a **building** may be designed so they are at a human **scale**; for example, the detailing of the storefront of a building should relate to people who walk by and enter the building.



Compatible addition which features a setback and appropriate massing with the primary building, as well as similar but differentiated proportions of solid to open areas

RATIONALE & GUIDELINES

Buildings that respect the existing massing (vertical and horizontal), total building height, floor-to-floor and floor-to-window heights of neighboring buildings reinforce the district's visual continuity. The buildings of the SBHCD are predominantly two to three stories in height and feature repeating rectilinear massing. Many of the buildings are constructed of masonry and feature smaller windows at the upper stories (residential) with larger storefront windows below (commercial).

While massing and heights do not need to be identical to that of neighboring buildings, new construction that does not substantially exceed widths or sizes of existing adjacent buildings will help maintain character and sense of place. New buildings that are substantially more massive than surrounding buildings may appear out of scale and may diminish the visual cohesiveness of the district.

New construction should also echo the overall aesthetic ("lightness" or "heaviness") of neighboring buildings and complement the dominant proportions and rhythms of the streetscape. Primary, or highly visible, facades should:

- Maintain or relate to existing vertical massing (i.e. floor-to-floor heights, windows, roof or cornice lines)
- Maintain or relate to existing horizontal massing (i.e. proportion and rhythm of street frontages on the streetscape and surrounding blocks)
- Reflect proportions of solid areas (walls) to negative space or voids (storefronts, windows, doors); and porches, stoops, bays, and overhangs



The new building features compatible massing, height, scale, and rhythm with the adjacent existing historic buildings and the multiple storefronts help break up the massing at the street level and maintain a "lighter" feeling (Image: NPS.gov "Preservation Briefs")

2 BUILDING FORM: MASSING, HEIGHT, & SCALE

RATIONALE & GUIDELINES

NEW ADDITIONS & SECONDARY BUILDINGS

While additions and secondary, or accessory, buildings should be compatible with the existing primary building, an evident distinction is generally recommended between the new and old so that it is clear the new design is not part of the original building. As mentioned, pure replication is generally not required.

A contrasting design for an addition may be considered appropriate if it is at the rear of a property and as long as the massing, size, and relationships between windows, cornice lines, and wall areas are compatible primarily with the parent building, and secondarily with the surrounding buildings.

Additions and accessory buildings should be designed to appear secondary to the primary building and façade and should not impact the essential form or massing of the existing building. This can be achieved through:

- Setbacks and subordinate massing. The placement and setbacks of an addition and accessory building should be consistent with the patterns of neighboring properties and should not be highly visible from primary streets or public rights-of-way (see Guidelines and Diagrams of previous section)
- The cornice and ridge lines of a new addition should be equal to or lower than those of an adjacent historic building's primary façade to ensure the addition remains secondary to the primary façade

In cases where the street does not have an obvious dominant cornice height or roof lines, the SBHCD will make a recommendation based on the actual height and massing of the proposed building within the streetscape.

TALL BUILDINGS IN THE SBHCD

In South Bethlehem, the majority of buildings are two and three stories. Taller buildings that step back at the fourth or fifth stories will fit better in this context and help maintain character and a sense of granularity in the streetscape that contributes to the sense of place. A large and/or tall building can feel monotonous at the street level. A building with stepped massing, facade material variations, and varied cornice locations and treatments will help control the sense of the building's perceived height and size in the streetscape. In general, designs for tall buildings in both **height limit areas** should:

- Have upper story or stories stepped back from the lower facade so as to reduce the tall building's visual dominance on the block and minimize shadowing on the street and opposing buildings
- Employ design strategies to stop the eye at the average height of surrounding buildings, such as building cornices one level below the top of buildings or level of step backs
- Employ "lighter" materials at the top floor levels, such as more glass and less solid wall



3rd Street in South Bethlehem looking east from above

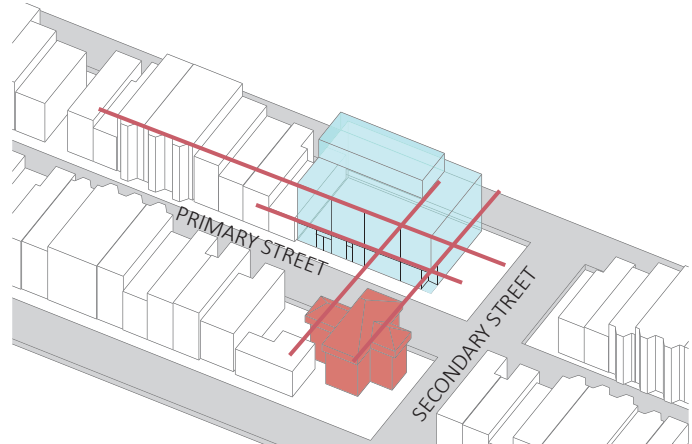
2 BUILDING FORM: MASSING, HEIGHT, & SCALE

TALL BUILDINGS IN THE SBHCD CONTINUED

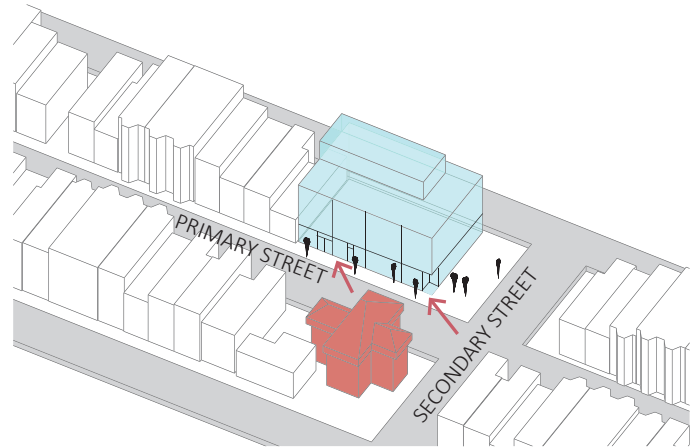
Specifically in the 60' height limit area for new construction, it is recommended for tall buildings to:

- Step back vertically at facade(s) where directly adjacent to Class II buildings and where in close proximity to Class I buildings (a few buildings away or across the street). Stepping back the massing will help prevent a taller building from dwarfing or visually distracting from significant historic resources. (See provided map for locations of Class I and II buildings).
- Exceed the height of adjacent Class I buildings by no more than two stories
- Consider the heights of adjacent Class III buildings (non-contributing); while more latitude next to these buildings, the height of new construction is still important to consider so as not to substantially impact the 'skyline' of the streetscape as a whole

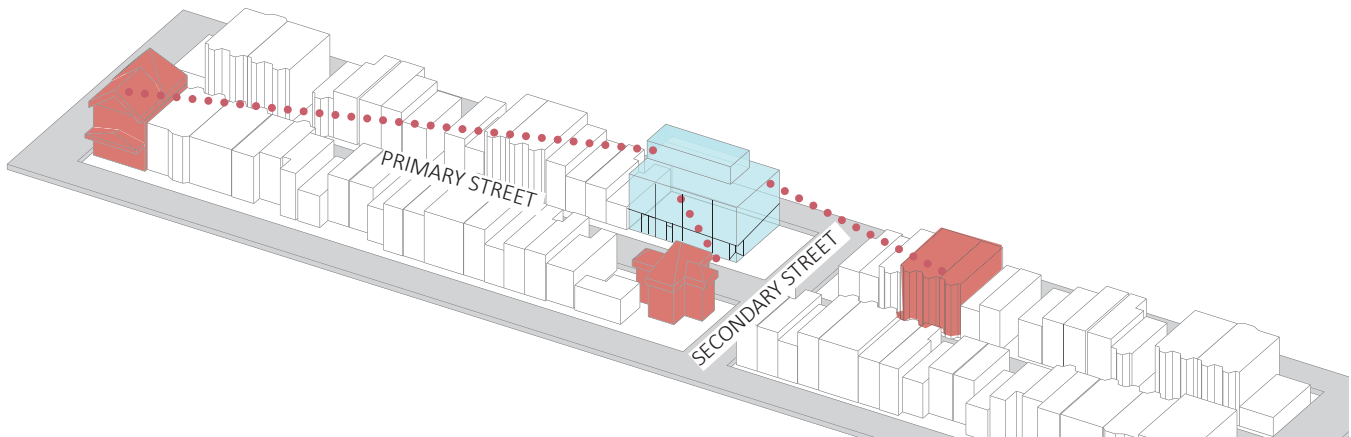
In general, sensitively designed tall buildings in the SBHCD can maintain an appropriate street presence, preserve the urban street wall, reduce potential shadowing on the street, and enhance the streetscape's existing historic character.



This new tall building (blue) steps back to avoid excessive shadowing at the street, and relates to neighboring building heights



The new tall building (blue) has public entries at the primary facade and corner, which activates the streetscape and creates opportunity for a public space at the end of the block. The building features rectilinear massing and a street frontage rhythm compatible with that of surrounding buildings on the block.



The new tall building (blue) is appropriately placed on the primary street and does not overwhelm Class I & II buildings.

2 BUILDING FORM: MASSING, HEIGHT, & SCALE

SIGHTLINES, ROOF ADDITIONS & UPPER STORY SETBACKS

The guidance provided on designing a compatible new building or addition to a historic building applies equivalently to new rooftop addition on a contributing historic building. It should similarly aim to preserve the integrity of the historic building by not altering its character-defining materials, features or form; it should also be compatible yet differentiated from the historic building.

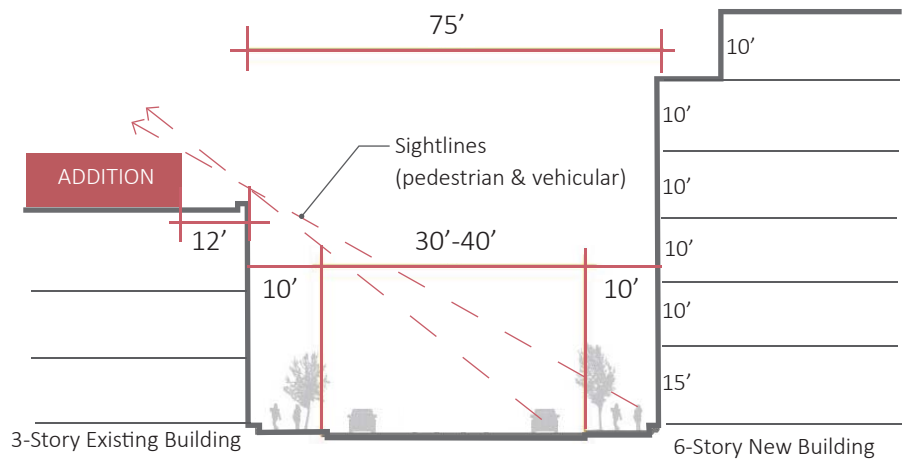
Specific guidelines for rooftop additions in the SBHCD include the following:

- In general, a rooftop addition **should not be more than one or two stories high** to minimize its visibility from a primary street and not distract from the proportions or profile of the building
- In general, a rooftop addition **should be set back at least 12 feet** from the primary facade(s) of the building, to reduce visibility from public rights-of-way. There may be cases, however, where a 1 or 2 story building could have an additional story built above aligned with the primary facade. These cases should be limited to buildings that are not Class I, and to buildings whose facade details and style allow for appropriate extension.

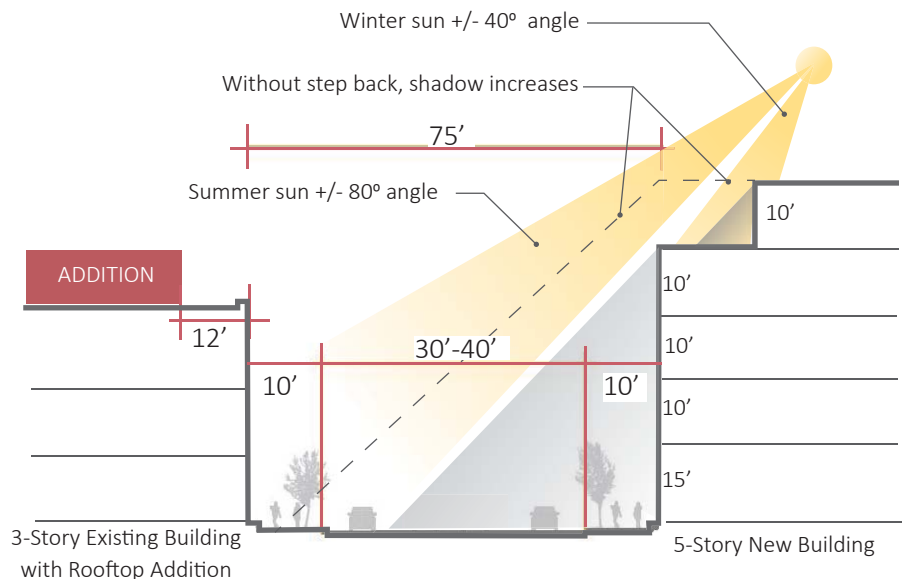
HORIZONTAL MASSING

New construction massing should relate to the proportions and rhythm of street frontages on the block. Primary, or highly visible, facades of new buildings should:

- Be broken down into a series of smaller horizontal volumes or sections no greater than 40-50 feet maximum. Example approaches may include a slightly recessed portion or portions of the facade (as minimal as 4" can be effective), variation of upper window types by section, storefront spacing and variation in design at street level, a variety of cornice treatments, variation of roof or parapet levels, or changes in wall materials.



Typical street section in South Bethlehem; the rooftop addition is appropriately set back min. 12 feet and minimally visible from the street



Typical street section showing a new 5-story building and sun angles; the taller the building, the more sunlight gets blocked and creates shadowing



Examples of set back rooftop additions; A is not visible from a primary street and B is visible from a secondary street, but appropriately set back and scaled

3 RHYTHM: WINDOWS, DOORS, & PATTERNS

PRINCIPLE

Windows, doors, other openings, and repeating details in a building provide articulation to a facade, reinforce patterns of pedestrian scale, visual continuity, and solid-to void ratios within the building and in relation to neighboring buildings. New buildings should exhibit similar architectural rhythms and patterns of existing windows, doors and detailing, especially at the most visible facades and at the street level where most visible to pedestrians and motorists.

WHAT IS RHYTHM?

The recurrence and repetition of architectural elements or motifs such as openings (windows and doors), lines, shapes, forms, or colors, which create visual interest through patterns at both regular and irregular intervals



The buildings on 3rd Street feature a typical fenestration pattern in the district with three windows at the upper stories, large storefront windows and centered doorways at the street level.



An example of appropriate new construction with similar window rhythm, configuration, and floor to floor heights with set back upper level

NEW CONSTRUCTION in the SBHCD

RATIONALE & GUIDELINES

Buildings that relate to the existing rhythm and pattern of openings and architectural detailing enhance the district's visual cohesion. As mentioned, many of the South Side's buildings feature smaller repeating windows at the upper stories (typically two or more evenly spaced) with storefront windows below, often flanking an entry door (single or double). Common historic window types include double and single-hung, casement, and large fixed panes. Double-hung are by far the most commonly used upper story window type and are generally in a 3'x5' or 3'x6' proportions. Shutters are common on residential buildings but generally not commercial buildings.

New construction should echo the existing rhythms and spacing of windows, doors, and other details on the streetscape. Primary, or highly visible, facades should:

- Maintain or relate to existing fenestration patterns (vertical and horizontal spacing) and type (i.e. double-hung and with similar window pane patterns)
- Maintain or relate to existing doors; new doors should reflect the historic proportions of glass and panels and new proposed entry points should consider existing circulation patterns



Inappropriate new construction since the window rhythm, size, and proportions are inconsistent with adjacent buildings (Source: *A Typical Historic Main Street*, Wikimedia Commons)



Appropriate since the rhythm and size of new windows and floor to floor heights are similar to adjacent buildings

4 ARCHITECTURAL CHARACTER:

MATERIALS, FINISHES, COLOR, & DETAILING

PRINCIPLE

Building materials, finishes, and types of detailing or ornament employed in new construction should be compatible with the proposed architectural style and that of surrounding buildings, and of a quality, scale, color and texture that is complementary to those of the historic district.

RATIONALE & GUIDELINES

The materials, finishes, and detailing of a building help to define its style, quality, relationship to the pedestrian and building occupant, and the color and texture of an overall neighborhood. The details, ornament, and materials are typically the “character-defining” features of a building and what most contributes to the building’s distinctive historical significance. Compatible materials and architectural detailing selections for new construction offer a unique way to provide visual consistency and enhance the character of the streetscape and overall district, but also create meaningful and creative juxtapositions between the new and the old.

New construction and additions should:

- Reflect the character-defining features and detailing of the surrounding historic buildings (i.e. cornice and parapet details, roof forms, lintels, arches, projecting bays, and the shapes of windows, sills or door headers)

Often compatibility can be achieved when these architectural details are simplified or distilled in the new design to convey a similar essence or overall visual effect and not simply mimic historic features.

- Use materials that have a similar or complementary composition, appearance, size, texture, scale, and color with surrounding buildings
- Use similar window height-to-width ratios and proportion of glazing to solid wall as adjacent facades
- Use high quality, long-lasting building materials that can be reasonably maintained
- New addition materials should either match or be distinctive, yet secondary, to the existing materials

Appropriate new building materials to use typically in the SBHCD include brick, stone, wood, terra cotta tile, cement based smooth stucco, and fiber-cement panels and siding. The predominant building material of the SBHCD is brick.

The following materials are not typically recommended for approval by the SBHCD:

- Vinyl or aluminum siding which is intended to imitate wood lap siding (standard 4”-5” width) or capping
- Asphalt siding on wall surfaces
- EIFS (Exterior Insulation and Finish Systems) or other synthetic building materials
- Painted or exposed concrete or concrete (cinder) block
- Ornamental pierced concrete masonry walls and screens, chain link fencing, vinyl fencing
- Unpainted wood
- Carpeted entries
- Flush exterior doors (without doors or panels)
- Colonial “picture” windows, jalousie windows, vinyl windows without appropriate profiles
- Tinted glass or mirrored glass
- Large areas of glass curtain wall



Close-up view of intricate architectural detailing at the cornice and window headers on a building in downtown Bethlehem



New addition to the Berkeley Public Library (right) that features compatible materials, color, window detailing, and reflects the aesthetics and character of the original building while also appearing distinctive of its own time

ARCHITECTURAL CHARACTER: STYLE AND CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

PRINCIPLE

New construction should enhance the visual composition and quality of the experience of a historic district by exploring new creative, artistic concepts that respect and respond to the area's established range of architectural styles, cultural character, social influence, and historic context.

WHAT IS STYLE?

A set of characteristics and features that make a building notable or historically identifiable. A style is defined by features such as form, materiality, method of construction, and regional or 'contextual' character. Styles reflect evolving trends in fashion, beliefs, religions, and are markers of the emergence of new ideas and technology, such that they are tangible references to specific places and times in a culture or society.

RATIONALE & GUIDELINES

The variety of architectural styles in a historic district is an essential physical attribute that contributes to the visual character and experience of a district's "sense of place". Style, however, is only one of the key characteristics that contribute to the historic character and appealing qualities of a neighborhood. Buildings also engage people at a more intangible level, serving as important gathering spaces or landmarks for different groups or cultures over time, and hold particular cultural value for a community in this way. New construction should address the more intangible aspects of historic character by:

- Addressing the cultural or social significance of surrounding buildings, such as through deliberate massing relationships with them, site orientation, or designing view corridors and circulation routes that highlight their connectivity and proximity
- Considering how to design at the human-scale: how can people best engage with the building at the street level- Are there enough doors and windows to provide a sense of comfort, access, and transparency?
- Celebrating the rich social and cultural histories of the South Side (even if associated with buildings that are Class II or III) through the integration of public space, public art, murals, or historical interpretive displays in new construction

New design that helps maintain a place's value in the long term, by responding to its existing physical, cultural, and social contexts, will enhance the existing character and relationships within the district and should be encouraged.



COMMERCIAL PROPERTIES:

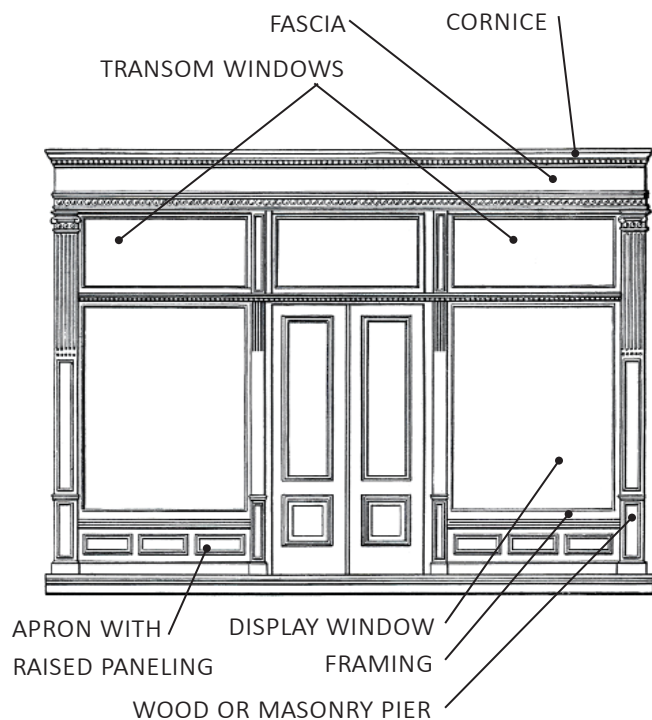
STOREFRONT DESIGN

PRINCIPLE

A large part of the South Side of Bethlehem's vitality can be attributed to the variety of its businesses and historic commercial properties should be preserved or renovated when possible and new storefronts made a vital part of new construction. The visual appeal, human scale, and openness of a storefront greatly influence a pedestrian's overall perception of a building, the business inside, and the overall streetscape. Since a positive impression is essential to draw new customers, careful design of new storefronts is important for the SBHCD's continued success as a vibrant, commercial destination.

RATIONALE & GUIDELINES

The storefront is one of the most significant architectural features of a commercial building and overall streetscape. New storefronts should be modeled on the historic storefront formula: historic storefronts were typically framed with wood or metal, and feature glazed transoms and large glass display windows and recessed entries, allowing business owners to maximize the visibility of their wares and draw customers into their shops. Although the specific configuration of a storefront can vary widely based on architectural styles, new storefronts should be based on historic precedents described in the following sections and should be compatible with existing storefronts in the historic streetscape.



Typical historic commercial storefront terminology



Historic commercial storefronts on 3rd Street in Bethlehem

DISPLAY WINDOWS & ENTRYWAYS

Display windows are typically large expanses of untinted glazing to provide ample space and visibility for merchandise. Display windows typically flank the entry doorway or alcove to a store and can include advertising or signage to further attract potential customers. Recessed entry alcoves are often sloped, providing access to customers in wheelchairs or with strollers.

STOREFRONT APRONS (KNEE WALLS)

Aprons or knee walls serve as the bases of storefronts and at the interior can provide a raised platform for display. Aprons are typically constructed of wood or masonry and can be painted or clad with ceramic tile or stone.

STOREFRONT CORNICES & FASCIAS

Storefront cornices are protective, slightly projecting moldings at the top of storefronts, providing a visual cap to the first floor and separation from the upper floors. Cornices are typically constructed of wood, pressed metal, limestone, terra cotta or decorative brick patterns. A fascia is a flat wood or metal band under a roof or cornice edge, which can display storefront signage.



NEW CONSTRUCTION in the SBHCD

COMMERCIAL PROPERTIES:

STOREFRONT DESIGN

STOREFRONT TRANSOMS

Storefront transom windows are located above the display windows and doors and below cornices and fascias. They provide additional daylight and can be either fixed or operable for ventilation. Transoms can be either single or multi-light and historically were often leaded (see below), stained, or textured glass. Transoms can also include signage or lettering to identify the business, or other ornamental details.

STOREFRONT ORNAMENT & DETAILS

Storefronts can feature a range of architectural ornament to catch pedestrians' attention and create visual interest at the street level. Types of ornament and detailing include raised wood paneling, cast ironwork, brackets and more decorative curved brackets called corbels, dentils on the frieze or fascia, pilasters, and arched windows and transoms, to name a few. Designing new storefronts with some of these decorative features can help retain compatibility with the existing building and surrounding streetscape.



Example of storefront ornament (pilasters, corbels, brackets, decorative moldings and raised paneling)

STOREFRONT FORM & PROPORTION

New storefronts should exhibit human-scale design features, including transparency into and engagement with the store interior, awnings for protection and shade, exterior materials such as masonry (brick is related to the ability to lay by hand), or detailed ornament that is best appreciated up close. A storefront or building that achieves a good “human scale” design is of a size and scale that feels comfortable, navigable, and inviting to pedestrians.

STOREFRONT MATERIALS

Appropriate new materials at existing historic storefronts or proposed new storefronts include: wood or aluminum framing (anodized or powder coated finish), cement plaster or brick masonry. It is not historically appropriate to install vinyl siding, some types of wood siding, artificial brick, mirrored, tinted, or opaque glass.

STOREFRONT SIGNAGE & AWNINGS

Flat mounted and blade signs are the most common historical types of storefront signage. Signs were typically made of wood but later included metal, vinyl on glass, tile (in floors), among others. New signage materials should be durable and remain compatible with the appearance of more traditional materials. Durable materials to consider include medium density overlay plywood (MDU) and high density urethane (HDU). New signs should also be compatible with the scale of the storefront and building. Small-scale signs are usually appropriate for smaller buildings with primarily pedestrian traffic, while larger signs are more appropriate for vehicular traffic.

Awnings are a historically common means of sheltering an entry, advertising, and protecting merchandise from excessive sun exposure. Awnings can be fixed or retractable, and project at a continuous angle away from a building on a metal frame, terminating at a skirt or valance. The most appropriate awning material is acrylic canvas, such as “Sunbrella” or similar, while inappropriate materials include vinyl-coated or glossy fabrics. Arched or bubble-shaped awnings are not recommended, and backlit and internally illuminated box signs are typically not appropriate.

STOREFRONT LIGHTING

In many cases, ambient street and building exterior lighting can illuminate storefront signs sufficiently, which is preferred to installing additional lighting. Gooseneck light fixtures are often the most appropriate selections. Where possible, conduit and mounting connections on the storefront facade (fascia or cornice) should be concealed.



Gooseneck fixtures with concealed mounting

