

Design Guidelines

Historic Downtown Toccoa

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I. Introduction to Design Guidelines and Design Review

A. Certified Local Governments

The purpose of Toccoa's Historic Preservation Ordinance is as follows:

In support and furtherance of its findings and determination that the historical, cultural and aesthetic heritage of the City of Toccoa is among its most valued and important assets and the preservation of this heritage is essential to the promotion of the health, prosperity and general welfare of the people; in order to stimulate revitalization of the business districts and historic neighborhoods and to protect and enhance local historic and aesthetic attractions to tourists and thereby promote and stimulate business; in order to enhance the opportunities for federal or state tax benefits under relevant provisions of federal or state law; and in order to provide for the designation, protection, preservation and rehabilitation of historic properties and historic districts and to participate in federal or state programs to do the same; the Toccoa City Council hereby declares it to be the purpose and intent of this Ordinance to establish a uniform procedure for use in providing for the protection, enhancement, perpetuation and use of places, districts, sites, buildings, structures, objects, and landscape features having a special historical, cultural or aesthetic interest or value, in accordance with the provisions of the Ordinance.

The Historic Preservation Ordinance establishes and provides for the following:

Toccoa Historic Preservation Commission

The Commission shall consist of a minimum of five (5) members appointed by the Mayor and ratified by the City Council. All members shall be residents of Toccoa and shall be persons who have demonstrated special interest, experience or education in history, architecture or the preservation of historic resources. The Preservation Commission shall be authorized to:

1. Prepare and maintain an inventory of all property within the City of Toccoa having the potential for designation as historic property;
2. Recommend to the Toccoa City Council specific districts, sites, buildings, structures, or objects to be designated by ordinance as historic properties or historic districts;
3. Review application for Certificates of Appropriateness, and grant or deny same in accordance with the provisions of this Ordinance;
4. Seek out local, state, federal or private funds for historic preservation, and make recommendations to the Toccoa City Council concerning the most appropriate uses of any funds acquired.

Local Designation of Historic Properties and Districts:

A historic property is a building, structure, site, or object, including the adjacent area necessary for the proper appreciation or use thereof, deemed worthy of preservation by reason of value to the City of Toccoa, the region or the State of Georgia for one of the following reasons:

1. It is an outstanding example of a structure representative of its era;
2. It is one of the few remaining examples of a past architectural style;
3. It is a place or structure associated with an event or persons of historic or cultural significance to the City of Toccoa, State of Georgia, or the region; or
4. It is the site of natural or aesthetic interest that is continuing to contribute to the cultural or historical development and heritage of the municipality, county, state or region.

A historic district is a geographically definable area, which contains buildings, structures, sites, objects, and landscape features or a combination thereof, which:

1. Has special character of unique historic/aesthetic value or interest;
2. Represents one or more periods, styles or types of architecture typical of one or more eras in the history of the municipality, county, state or region; and

Designations may be proposed by the Toccoa City Council, the Historic Commission, a historical society, a neighborhood association or property owner(s).

B. Certificates of Appropriateness

After the designation by ordinance of a historic property or a historic district, no material change in the appearance of such historic property, newly constructed property, contributing property, non-contributing property, structure, site or object within such historic district, shall be made or be permitted to be made by the owner or occupant thereof, unless or until the application for a Certificate of Appropriateness has been submitted to and approved by the Commission. A Building Permit shall not be issued without a Certificate of Appropriateness.

The design review process allows the Historic Preservation Commission to evaluate proposed changes to individual properties and structures located within designated historic districts and approve Certificates of Appropriateness accordingly. Any proposed endeavor to a locally designated property or district that necessitates a building permit will also require a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA). The following steps should be undertaken in order to ascertain whether a Certificate of Appropriateness is necessary:

1. Determine whether verbal approval is necessary for the proposed endeavor.

Routine maintenance that does not necessitate the issuance of a building permit typically does not require a Certificate of Appropriateness. Routine maintenance refers to work that does not involve a significant change in the appearance, design, or materials of a structure. Property owners should contact the appropriate staff member in order to discuss the scope of the proposed endeavor and obtain verbal approval as necessary.

2. Determine whether a Certificate of Appropriateness is necessary for the proposed endeavor.

If the proposed endeavor involves a significant alteration or renovation to a historic property such as the removal of architectural detailing, the replacement of original siding or materials, or the construction of new additions, a Certificate of Appropriateness is necessary before a building permit can be issued. Proposed new construction as well as the demolition or relocation of an existing structure located within a designated district also must undergo the review process before a building permit can be issued.

3. Submit an application for a Certificate of Appropriateness.

The Toccoa Planning Department can provide an application for a Certificate of Appropriateness. Completed applications should be returned to the Planning Department three weeks prior to the Historic Preservation Commission Meeting in which the COA is to be reviewed. Applications should also include photographs, drawings, or plans of the existing structure as well as the proposed changes. Any applications for projects involving new construction should include detailed drawings and plans of the proposed structure and the existing site.

4. Commission review of the application for a Certificate of Appropriateness.

The Toccoa Historic Preservation Commission shall hold a public hearing at which each proposed Certificate of Appropriateness is discussed. Notice of the hearing shall be published in the principal newspaper of local circulation in the city and written notice of the hearing shall be mailed by the Commission to all owners and occupants of the subject property. The written and published notice shall be provided in the same manner and time frame as notices are provided before a Public Hearing for Rezoning.

The Commission shall give the property owner and/or applicant an opportunity to be heard at the Certificate of Appropriateness hearing. The U.S. Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation will be used by the Commission in their consideration of the application, as will the Toccoa Design Guidelines manual.

The commission may approve the Certificate of Appropriateness as proposed, approve the Certificate of Appropriateness with any modifications it deems necessary, or deny it. The Commission shall approve the application and issue a Certificate of Appropriateness if it finds that the proposed material change(s) in the appearance would not have a substantial adverse effect on the aesthetic, historic, or architectural significance and value of the historic property or the historic district. In the event the Commission rejects an application, it shall state its reasons for doing so, and shall transmit a record of such actions and reasons, in writing, to the applicant. The commission may suggest alternative courses of action it thinks proper if it disapproves of the application submitted. The applicant, if he or she so desires, may make modifications to the plans and may resubmit the application at any time after doing so.

The Commission shall approve or deny an application for a Certificate of Appropriateness within forty-five days after the filing thereof by the owner or occupant of a historic property, or of a building structure, site, or object located within a historic district. Evidence of approval shall be conveyed by a Certificate of Appropriateness issued by the Commission.

II. Orientation and Setback:

A. Orientation and Setback:

The placement of a building on its site is called its orientation. The distance between the façade of a building to the street is referred to as its setback.

Within the commercial district of Toccoa, buildings are generally oriented towards the street, with a front setback that is generally commensurate with the width of the sidewalk.

1. The historic orientation and setback of a building should be maintained.
2. The setback and orientation of any new buildings constructed within the Toccoa Downtown Historic District should reflect the existing patterns already present within the district.
3. New structures should be aligned with adjacent buildings and should be flush with the sidewalk.

B. Proportion and Scale:

All historic buildings located within a district relate to one another through proportion, height, and scale regardless of each structure's individual architectural details. In particular, scale is used to compare the size, massing, and shape of two separate buildings.

1. The height of existing buildings should not be increased through non-historic additions or alterations, thereby distorting the historic height or proportion of the structure.
2. Any newly constructed buildings located within the Toccoa Downtown Historic District should not exceed three stories in height.
3. Newly constructed buildings should employ a vertical emphasis in keeping with existing patterns.

III. Streetscape

The term streetscape encompasses a number of different components, including lighting, landscaping, signage, awnings, and parking lots. Original streetscape elements should be preserved. If replacement elements are required, the original type and design of the elements should be duplicated. Replacement elements should be appropriate to the time and era of the structures; usage of older, more "historic" replacements should be discouraged. When possible, the original traffic patterns should be utilized.

A. Lighting Guidelines (Streetlights and Building Fixtures):

1. If the original lighting fixtures have been removed from the district, historic photographs should be consulted to ascertain appropriate replacement.
2. Replaced fixtures should be appropriate to the character of the building and should not reflect an earlier time period.
3. If historic photographs are not available of original lighting, replacements should be simple, contemporary fixtures that could not be mistaken for original historic fixtures.

B. Landscaping:

1. The Toccoa Courthouse is an important landmark within the Toccoa Downtown Historic District. The greenspace surrounding the courthouse and forming the Courthouse Square is likewise an important component within the district and should be preserved as a park-like area. New landscaping should be uniform throughout the district.

C. Signage Guidelines:

1. The design and placement of signs should promote downtown businesses while also complimenting the character and scale of the downtown commercial district.
2. Signs should respect the size, scale, and design of the building. Projecting sign should not be mounted higher than eighteen feet.
3. Signs should be attached at mortar joints when possible in order to avoid damaging historic masonry.
4. The placement of signs should emphasize historic architectural elements. It should not obscure any historic architectural details or extend beyond the outer edges of the buildings.
5. Signs should be characteristic of the style and period of the building and district without appearing to be the original signs associated with the building.
6. When several business occupy a single building, the signage should be coordinated.
7. This section of the Toccoa Design Guidelines should be supplemented by the sign ordinance located at the planning commission.

B. Awning Guidelines:

1. Awnings should not destroy, alter, or obscure architectural details.
2. Awnings should be aligned with others located on the same block.
3. The removal of awnings should be possible without damaging the historic fabric of the building.
4. Plastic bubble and permanent shingle awnings should be removed and replaced with canvas or similar awnings.
5. Permanent awnings should not be used, unless historically accurate.

C. Parking Lot Guidelines:

1. Existing parking lots should be improved with appropriate plantings to screen and buffer the spaces.

IV Physical Appearance

A. Storefront:

1. Original elements of a historic storefront should be retained during restoration.
2. Applied false facades should be removed. Buildings that have been structurally altered should use historic photographs to determine original elements of the historic storefront. If historic photographs are not available for a particular structure, then any renovations made to the structure should echo the architectural features, arrangement, and materials of similar buildings.
3. If the alteration to the building has become significant in its own right, these alterations can be maintained as part of the historic architectural evolution of the building.

B. Architectural Detailing:

Original architectural details can include display windows, transoms, bulkheads, beltcourses, cornices, capitals, pilasters, arches, parapets, pediments, medallions, and a number of other elements.

- 1 Original architectural details should be retained and repaired in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation.
2. If the application of a false storefront or extensive remodeling has resulted in the loss of original architectural details, historic photographs should be used for the replacement of these details during subsequent renovations.
3. If the initial application of a front facade has resulted in the removal of original storefront transom windows and framing, these features should be re-established during rehabilitation work.
4. If interior renovations have lowered the original ceiling below the transom windows or clerestory line, the drop ceiling should be raised up from the windows in order to maintain historic dimensions and the original exterior appearance.

C. Windows:

1. When the replacement of a window is necessary, the replacement windows should be similar to the original window in size, proportion, materials, design, and hardware.
2. Ground floor display windows should not be replaced with "fake historic" multi-paned windows in an attempt to make the windows appear older and more "authentic".
3. A window typically consists of the frame, sash, lights, lintel, and sill.
4. Ground floor level wall surfaces of retail spaces should include a high proportion of glass.

5. Historic photographs should be consulted in order to ascertain the original configuration of windows. If the original windows have been replaced with non-historic fixtures, storeowners are highly encouraged to restore the building to its original appearance during subsequent renovations.
6. If possible, original windows should be retained and restored.
7. The restoration of historic windows that have been filled in is highly encouraged.
8. Glass that has been highly tinted or has been treated with a reflective finish should be avoided.

D. Entrances:

1. The original storefront (primary) entrance should be retained.
2. Residential door types are not acceptable for commercial structures. Use doors that have a wide expanse of glass above a solid panel at the base, surrounded by a painted frame. Avoid unfinished metal, bright aluminum, or stainless steel door frames.
3. Maintain traditional recessed or corner entries, as applicable.
4. If the replacement of a door is required, the replacement should be similar to the original in materials, scale, and size.
5. Historic photographs should be consulted in order to ascertain the design and style of the original historic door

E. Exterior Materials:

1. Original building materials should be maintained or restored, not replaced, covered, or altered.
2. The removal of significant architectural detailing should be avoided. However, when original materials must be replaced due to deterioration, replacements should be of the same design, texture, and color.
3. Appropriate repointing tools and methods should be used in order to avoid damaging historic masonry. The mortar used during repointing should be similar in strength, composition, texture, and joint width to the original mortar. Modern mortar typically has a high content of Portland cement, which is considerably stronger than most historic masonry, and can cause extensive damage to the brick.
4. Harsh cleaning methods such as sandblasting or the use of corrosive chemicals must be avoided lest the historic fabric of the structure be damaged.
5. Avoid painting exterior masonry if the building was not previously painted.

F. Rear Facades:

1. If the rear facade has fallen into disrepair, resulting in infilled windows and crumbling masonry, appropriate repairs should be made in order to restore the facade to its original appearance.
2. The rear facade should be well-maintained and attractive for both employees and customers.
3. False facades should not be created with decorative painting.
4. Necessary exterior features such as staircases, mechanical and electrical systems, elevator shafts, and additions should be located on the rear facade whenever possible in order to avoid detracting from the appearance of other more visible facades.
5. Dumpsters and trash receptacles can be screened from view by plantings or wood fences.
6. The appearance of rear facades can be enhanced by coordination between neighboring structures for a unified look in parking, paving, landscaping, and trash collection.

G. Roofs:

1. The original form of the historic roof should be maintained. If the historic building was originally constructed with a flat roof, any replacement roofs should also be flat in design.
2. New roof additions that would be visible from the public right-of-way should be discouraged. If a roof addition or extension is necessary, it should be placed a considerable distance away from the prominent facade.

H. Mechanical Systems:

1. Window air conditioning units should not be placed on the prominent facade of a building.
2. Mechanical equipment should be discreetly placed and should be screened from view.
3. Rooftop equipment should be low profile and invisible from the street level.
4. The placement of rooftop mechanical systems should be sensitive to the views from the upper floors of adjacent buildings.
5. Parapet walls should be retained and repaired as needed.

V. Additions and New Construction

A. Additions:

An addition is an expansion of a building that increases the original size or footprint of the structure by constructing additional space. Some additions have been present for fifty years or more and as such have attained historic significance in their own right and contribute to the overall significance of the building. These additions should be retained. New additions should adhere to specific guidelines.

1. New additions to historic buildings should be placed to the rear of the building and should not exceed established heights.
2. New additions should be differentiated from the original building but should still be compatible in massing, size, scale, and architectural features so the new addition would not be mistaken for an original component of the historic building.
3. New additions should be constructed in a way that would allow the removal of the addition without impairing or damaging the integrity of the original form and fabric of the historic buildings.
4. The roofline of the addition should be lower than that of the existing building so that the addition would not be visible from the front facade.
5. The historic entrance to the building should remain the primary ingress, with the addition assuming a secondary importance to the function of the building.

B. New Construction:

1. A modern, non-historic building constructed within the Toccoa Downtown Historic District should be compatible in height, orientation, setback, and materials while still retaining a largely contemporary feeling.
2. Buildings located within the Toccoa Downtown Historic District do not exceed a height of three stories. New buildings constructed within the district should not exceed the established height.
3. When a newly constructed building exceeds one lot width, a change in design features is suggested in order to mirror traditional building widths of structures located adjacent to the new construction.
4. A new building should not be a reproduction of a historic building. However, the usage of stylistic and material elements present on adjacent historic structures will soften the anachronistic and intrusive character of a new structure.
5. New construction should be compatible with the adjacent historic structures. Compatibility can be expressed through the usage of similar exterior materials, architectural detailing, windows, and proportions. A new building should fit into the historic district stylistically while still expressing principals of modern design.

6. Buildings located within the Toccoa Downtown Historic District were historically oriented towards the major thoroughfares. New buildings constructed within the district should also be oriented towards the major thoroughfares.
7. Buildings located within the Toccoa Downtown Historic District have a setback that is generally commensurate with the width of the sidewalk. New buildings constructed within the district should also have setbacks that are commensurate with the width of the sidewalk.
8. New buildings constructed within the Toccoa Downtown Historic District should utilize building materials that are similar to those of adjacent structures.

The physical appearance of a building is often referred to as its storefront or its front facade. A number of different elements compose the overall physical appearance of a building:

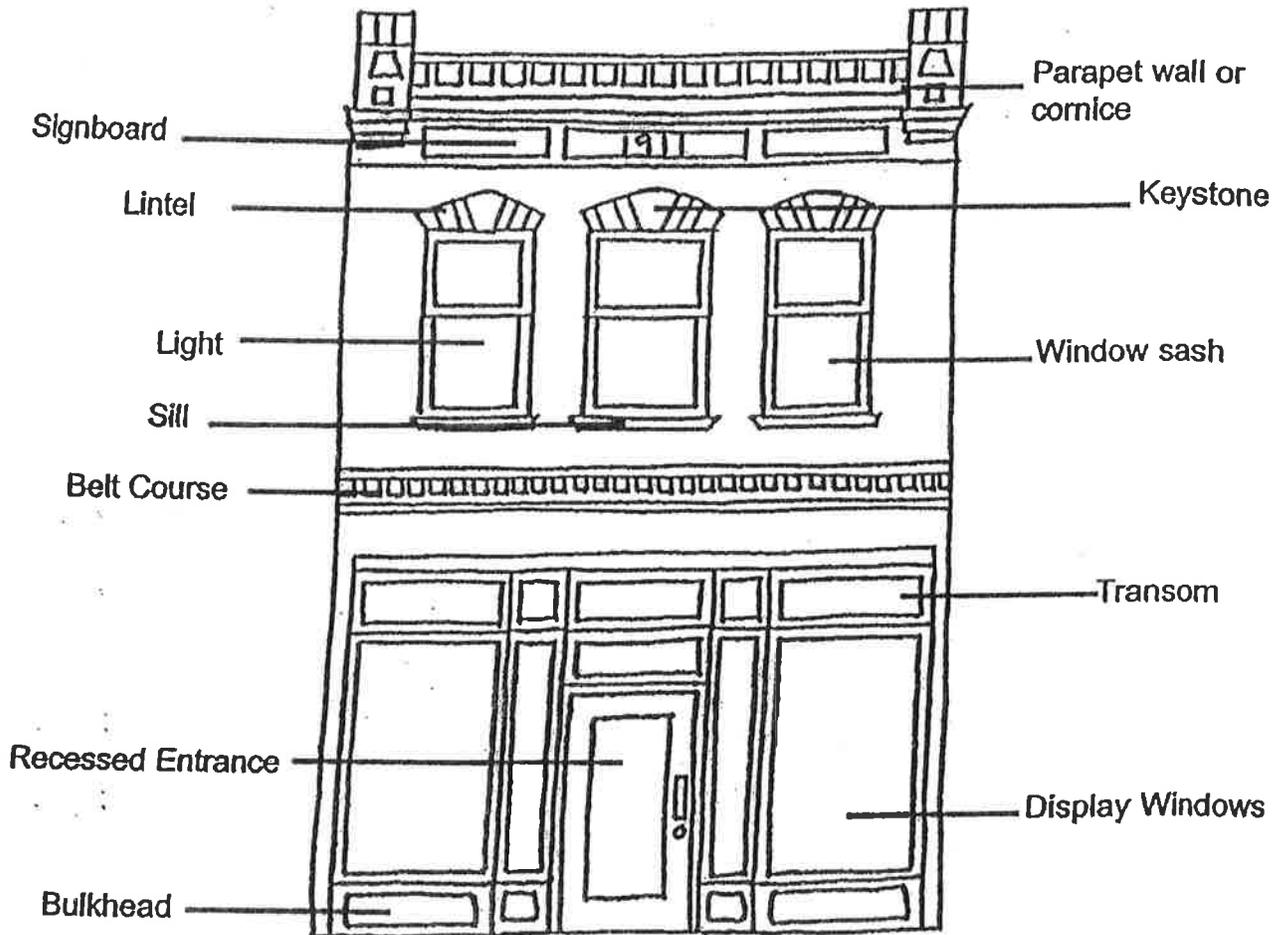


Figure 12- Typical commercial front facade

Other elements that must be considered in a discussion of the physical appearance of a building include the materials, the placement of associated mechanical equipment, and the appearance of the rear facade.