



Staff Report

Planning and Zoning Commission

DATE: September 15, 2020

CASE: Staff Report for Text Amendments to the Historic Handbook
“Chapter 5 – Section 6 “Porches”

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BACKGROUND

The structures within Concord’s three Historic Districts are classified as either “pivotal,” “contributing,” “fill,” or “intrusive.” The majority of the structures are classified as contributing. Pivotal and contributing designations identify the most historically impactful structures within the districts. These structures are the greatest assets to the fabric of the districts’ historic significance. The Historic Handbook describes changes that are appropriate or inappropriate based on those four designations.

Over the past several years, the Historic Preservation Commission has received several requests to utilize “composite materials” for projects within the Historic District. These composite products vary in composition and are designed to replicate historic materials, such as wood, but have a greater longevity. Currently, the Historic Handbook discourages, or in some circumstances disallows, the utilization of composite materials on structures designated as “pivotal” or “contributing.” Their use, however, may be allowed on fill and intrusive structures.

A recent request resulted in the Commission’s desire to consider composite materials on porch and deck floors, for historic structures within all property designations, on a case by case basis. At the direction of the Commission, Staff conducted research of other municipalities and spoke with the State Historic Preservation Office concerning the allowance of composite material on porch and deck floors. The overall conclusion was that composite material should be discouraged. However, if the Commission decided to allow composite material, it should be approved sparingly and only when at least one of four circumstances is present: 1) unavailability of historic materials, 2) unavailability of a skilled craftsman to reproduce the historic material, 3) inherent flaws in original materials or design, and 4) code-required changes. A text amendment allowing for the use of composite materials in the above referenced circumstances, has been drafted and attached for the Commission’s review.

The Historic Preservation Commission voted unanimously at their September 9th meeting to forward this text amendment to the Planning and Zoning Commission, requesting that the Planning and Zoning Commission forward the Historic Handbook amendment to City Council with a recommendation of approval.

Chapter 5 – Section 6: PORCHES



Before



After

Porches which are original or are compatible with the design of the structure should be retained. Replacement of original wooden porch columns with metal substitutes should be avoided.

The enclosure of original porches, particularly front porches, should be avoided. Enclosing original side and rear porches with solid walls should also be avoided. However, their conversion to “sun parlors” may be appropriate in some instances. Windows in these enclosures should be smaller, multi-paned, and compatible with existing windows. Larger expanses of glass are not appropriate.

Original steps should be retained and handrails should match the railing on the porch. The replacement of wooden steps with precast concrete should be avoided.

Stairs and fire escapes are often required by North Carolina State Building Code when single family residences are converted to multifamily or nonresidential uses. To the greatest extent possible, stairs and fire escapes

should be located where they are not visible from the street.

Decks are generally not appropriate for homes within the districts. However, when decks are constructed, they should be located in the rear yard only, and should not project into the interior side yard. Decks should be avoided on corner lots, since their view can not be completely obscured from both streets. Rails on decks should match those on the porches. Lattice and shrubbery around the foundations enhance the appearance of decks, and should be utilized when possible.

DESIGN GUIDELINES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Alterations to original porches that have no historic basis are not appropriate. **Repair original materials if possible. If replacement is necessary, replace with matching material.**
2. **Composite/substitute materials may be approved for Pivotal and Contributing structures by the Historic Preservation Commission for porch and deck flooring on a case-by-case basis, provided that one of the following four circumstances are present: unavailability of historic materials, unavailability of a skilled craftsman to reproduce the historic material, inherent flaws in original materials or design, and code-required changes.**
3. **Substitute materials shall be compatible with historic materials in appearance, physical properties, and general installation.**
4. Enclosure of side or rear porches and balconies is discouraged. If enclosure of a side or rear porch is required for a new use, design the enclosure so that the historic character and features of the porch are preserved.
5. Decks may only be located in the rear of the property.
6. Design decks to be compatible in material, color, and detail with the historic building.
7. Construct decks so that they can be removed in the future without damaging the historic structure.
8. Construct decks so that there is the least possible loss of historic fabric. Also, ensure that character-defining features of the historic building are not obscured, damaged, or destroyed.
9. Inset decks from the corner of the primary structure where necessary in order to prevent visibility from the street.
10. Handicap accessible ramps should be temporary structures and able to be removed once no longer needed. Ramps deemed appropriate by a Certificate of Appropriateness should not detract from the aesthetic and architectural character of the principle dwelling unit nor should the removal of a ramp jeopardize any portion of the unit's structural integrity. To the greatest extent feasible, handicap ramps should be located where they are not visible from the street.