

2017 BOARD OF ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW GUIDELINES FOR NEW
CONSTRUCTION AND RENOVATIONS AND REPAIRS

NEW CONSTRUCTION:

Building Types

The BAR must deal with issues of architectural aesthetics and quality, and also building type, as building type is a central feature of the character of Charleston.

Charleston buildings in general may be characterized as narrow to the street frontage and oriented to the environment by solar shielding to the south and west. There exist five coherent and clearly identifiable building types, to wit:

Charleston Single House:

This building type is generally very close to the street frontage on the narrow end. It generally has a covered piazza to the south and/or to the west. It varies tremendously in size from modest to palatial and the program within varies from single-family residential, multi-family residential, office, shop, lodging, and of late, educational building. Charleston sideyard Single Houses are found all over the historic city.

Charleston Shopfront:

This building type is essentially a commercial adaptation of the Single House, built tightly adjacent to one another, with the sideyard more-or-less removed but the side piazza remaining as a hyphen between buildings. This hyphen, or commercial piazza, provides gated passage to the rear and often features an open-air stair to allow side access to upper stories. The first floor is on the ground (not elevated as in the Single House) and glazed as required for retail purposes. Most of the southern half of King Street consists of Charleston Shopfronts.

Large Scale Building:

The Large Scale Building type is typically broken down into small forms to acknowledge the typical pattern of Charleston, serving the purpose of a large program such as hotel, office or apartment building. It is as thin as possible at the frontage.

Charleston Warehouse:

The Charleston Warehouse building type is the remnant of Charleston's industrial past. This building type is not necessarily narrow to the frontage, although it can be. This building type does not have piazas and is simple in massing with very high ceilings and large windows repetitively placed. For this building type, it is important that the materials—usually brickwork—be of highest quality, and that the windows have high quality, small-scale mullions. This type is suitable for newer programs such as office buildings, research labs, etc., and has proven popular for residential uses as well.

Parking Garage:

There is a fifth building type that is the parking garage. In Charleston, parking garages are

often articulated with vertical proportions and fenestrations, and often with louvers. At its most successful, the first floor frontage is assigned to retail to a suitable depth no less than 30 feet, with its parking internal.

[INSERT ILLUSTRATION]

Best Practices

The numbers below refer to illustrations on the following page.

1A. Best Practice: Charleston Single House

Notice the short setback from the sidewalk, and the fact that piazzas generally face south or west onto the side yard, a distinct difference from the usual boxy American house. Despite the repetitive discipline of the type, there is no lack of variety in the urban fabric that these houses create together, as their asymmetry enables them to front the streets in three entirely different ways: long facades without piazzas, usually on the northern or eastern sides of the houses, are massive and imposing; the narrow gable-ends, which typically feature the front door, provide the thin fronts particular to Charleston; finally, long sides facing to the south or west, with their full-length piazzas, front the street like grand mansions. This is common south of Broad Street and throughout the older Historic Districts.

1B. Best Practice: Charleston Shopfront

For commercial streets, the Single Houses can maintain the narrow facade by eliminating the gardens and sometimes retaining an adapted piazza that provides a passage to the rear. When this side piazza is large enough, it even has the ability to provide space for a small shop. This is common in the older sections of King Street.

1C. Best Practice: Large Scale Building

The Single House can also scale up for much bigger commercial purposes while maintaining the narrow front to the street and sideyard to the south. The Mills House Hotel is an example of this building type. Few problems are caused by large buildings that retain this contextual building type.

2A. Acceptable Practice: Charleston Warehouse

The Charleston Cigar Factory offers the best model for a large loft-type structure. This building type is simple in form and is most always of brick construction. Quality is derived from the pattern and proportion of the windows, the deep set nature of the windows and the simple detailing using brick for arches, window details, etc. This building type can be wide or narrow to the street.

2B. Acceptable Practice: In General

If the creation of multiple smaller buildings with sideyards is infeasible, the large building should be broken into smaller forms, which replicate the rhythm of a row of Single Houses,

while still maintaining the single, larger building. The hyphens between these small forms should take their cues from the residual piazzas that separate Charleston Storefronts, offering as much openness and transparency as possible.

2C. Discourage Practice: In General

Monolithic structures without internal divisions of any kind can be made good enough for most suburban retrofit areas or larger, non-historic cities, as they successfully mask parking, line sidewalks, and even provide commercial frontages. In the historic heart of Charleston, however, buildings of this character will degrade the character of the city.

[next page is the illustrations]

GUIDELINES:

A **guideline** activated by “shall” is a mandatory rule, unless applicant makes a compelling argument to the contrary.

A **guideline** activated by “should” is an option strongly recommended by the BAR.

A **guideline** activated by “may” is an option that can be requested by the BAR.

Building height shall be measured in number of stories, not in feet. The ground floor shall be higher than the other floors; a minimum of 14 feet, measured from floor to floor, for commercial buildings and 10 feet, measured from floor to floor, for residential buildings. .

Purpose: Higher ceiling heights present a more gracious façade to the street. On the interior, taller ceilings provide better light and ventilation.

Buildings should have a base, wherein the bottom is articulated differently from the rest of the building, either by a change of material, or a setback above the base. Material and craftsmanship on the base shall be more durable and of higher quality than the rest above. For buildings less than six stories, the base consists of the ground floor. For buildings more than six stories, the base shall be taller and proportionally appropriate to the building.

Purpose: The base serves two purposes: to present higher quality tactile and visual experience to the passerby and to help articulate the building at a human scale. The better materials and workmanship are especially critical at street level as it is within eye level and reach of pedestrians.

Buildings should be narrow towards the frontage—even commercial buildings, which may be massed as a single bar or as a series of wings.

Purpose: Narrow frontages permit a larger number and variety of structures to line the sidewalk, thereby enlivening the pedestrian experience. Additionally, vertical orientation reinforces Charleston’s visual character, which has always tended towards the vertical.

Whether large or small, building frontage should reflect the rhythm of the adjacent or fronting buildings. This can be achieved either by breaking up the project into several buildings or articulating a single mass as a series of smaller forms.

Purpose: To work in harmony with surrounding buildings. In a city, buildings should not pretend to be isolated objects, but rather work together with their surroundings to define and enhance the public realm.

Parking Garages and ground level parking in habitable buildings in A-Zones should be shielded at their frontage to a minimum depth of 30 feet of habitable space. In V-Zones and residential areas in A-Zones where flood elevation precludes habitable space at the street level, parking should be shielded by louvers, landscaped trellises, and/or crafted ornamental metal screens. Open parking lots should be screened by walls between 4.5 and five feet in height. The walls shall be masonry matching the principle building if such exists.

Purpose: To mitigate the visual appearance of parking lots and garages in support of the pedestrian experience. The habitable space may provide workspace or retail shops.

The primary entrance of all buildings should be located on street frontage and not directly on a parking lot or garage.

Purpose: To support street life on the sidewalk.

Exterior materials should be brick, cut stone, smooth stucco (stucco over frame is discouraged, but if proposed will be held to strict deflection criteria) and clapboard. Composite and processed materials, steel sections, cast stone, and cementitious boards, in limited quantity, may be approved upon submittal of a sample to the BAR. Vinyl, Styrofoam, and other synthetic materials should be avoided.

Purpose: Materials shall not emulate other materials. The authenticity of Charleston should be supported by materials that are authentic in their appearance and function.

Building materials shall express their tectonics. (For example: heavier materials below lighter materials, wood and metal above brick, and both above stone).

Purpose: To ensure the legibility of the architectural language to the passerby and to support the authenticity of construction.

Metalwork, woodwork, stucco and stone by local Charleston crafts persons is encouraged.

Purpose: Charleston has local craft traditions dating back three centuries that are integral to its cultural and architectural heritage. They strengthen the identity and character of the city, empower local crafts people and contribute to the local economy.

Storefront glazing, doors, and building signage should be conceived as a unified design.

Purpose: To enhance the harmony of the building facades and streetscape.

All glazing shall be clear. A minimum of 70% glazing shall be required on storefronts at the frontage level.

Purpose: Glazing increases interest and even security for pedestrians. Dark, opaque and/or reflective glass is not civic in character, nor is it in the local vernacular.

Wall openings, with the exception of storefronts and transoms, shall be vertical in proportion. They should display a ratio between 2/1 and 3/1.

Purpose: Vertical windows allow greater depth of light into a room and, by providing a frame in proportion with the human body, express the human occupation within.

Facades should endeavor to have several window sizes, with smaller ones above. Three sizes should be provided for buildings taller than four stories and two sizes for buildings four stories or less.

Purpose: The size and frequency of windows is one of the most significant visual

characteristics of a building. They should provide repetitive rhythm horizontally, but not be too repetitive vertically.

Thin mullions or muntins may be required on windows larger than two feet in any direction and cannot be located between or behind the outer glass surface. The depth of the mullion should not be less than the width.

Purpose: To provide small-scale texture, and provide visual structure and relief to otherwise large, unsupported pieces of glazing.

Glazed openings should show a minimum wall depth of four inches clear to the frontage.

Purpose: To provide the building with relief and avoid the impression of cheap, paper-thin facades.

The building should have an array of small scale detail derived from the modularity of the material (brick or clapboard), elements such as mullions, louvers, string courses, trim details, brackets, cornices, and/or column details.

Purpose: Richness of detail is essential to providing points of visual interest to pedestrians, and to articulating the human scale of a building.

Buildings should shade fenestration facing south and west, by means of elements such as roof overhangs, arcades, porches, awnings, loggias, balconies and piazzas.

Purpose: This is a Charleston tradition that evolved as an adaptation to climate. It is integral to the city's aesthetic identity and enhances the sustainability of its building stock.

Roofing

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GENERALLY EASIER TO APPROVE < > MORE DIFFICULT TO APPROVE

URBAN GUIDELINES

TALLER CEILING HEIGHTS < > SHORTER CEILING HEIGHT

NARROW TO THE FRONTAGE < > WIDER TO THE FRONTAGE

BASE DIFFERENTIATED < > BASE CONTINUOUS

MANY SMALL BUILDINGS < > FEW LARGE BUILDINGS

PARKING MASKED FROM FRONTAGE < > PARKING VISIBLE FROM

PARKING PROVIDED < > EXCESS PARKING PROVIDED

ARCHITECTURAL GUIDELINES

NATURAL & INTEGRAL MATERIALS < > COMPOSITE & CLADDING MATERIALS

STRUCTURAL EXPRESSION < > SURFACE EXPRESSION

APPLICATION OF LOCAL CRAFT < > ABSENCE OF CRAFT

UNIFIED STOREFRONT DESIGN < > STOREFRONT BY COMPONENT

CLEAR GLAZING < > DARK OR MIRROR GLAZING

VERTICAL PROPORTIONS < > HORIZONTAL PROPORTIONS

REPETITIVE FENESTRATION < > MIXED FENESTRATION

SMALL MULLIONS < > LARGE OR NO MULLIONS

THICKER WALL DEPTH < > THINNER WALL DEPTH

SIMPLE MASSING < > COMPLEX MASSING

SHADING ELEMENTS PROVIDED< > NO SHADING ELEMENTS

RENOVATION AND REPAIR:

The renovation and repair of existing structures shall be in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Historic Preservation, as modified by the Charleston Standards, adopted by the Board of Architectural Review on _____.

Places of Public Use or Assembly:

The predominant standard in the review of performance halls, museums, libraries or other places of public assembly shall be the architectural expression of the structure's intended use.