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# CHAPTER 7

## DESIGN GUIDELINE TERMS

The following terms are used in discussing additions and new infill construction:

### **Mass**

Mass describes three-dimensional forms, the simplest of which are cubes, cylinders, pyramids, cones, etc. Buildings are rarely one of these forms, but generally compositions of varying forms. This composition is generally described as the “massing” of forms in a building.

Massing during the design process is one of many aspects of form considered, and can be the result of both interior and exterior design concepts. Exterior massing can identify an entry, denote a stairway, or simply create a desirable form. Interior spaces (or lack of mass) can be designed to create an intimate nook, a monumental entry, or perhaps a second floor bedroom. Interior spaces create and affect exterior mass, and exterior mass can affect the interior space.

Mass and massing are inevitably affected by their opposite, open space. The lack of mass, or creation of open space, can significantly affect the character of a building. Designers often call attention to the lack of mass, by defining the open space with walls or guardrails, which would identify a porch or balcony.

The massing of a building is an important part of its style. Mass and the absence of mass also play an important role in the character of a Historic District. The massing in a district includes not only buildings, but landscapes and streetscapes as well.

The open spaces in a District can include front yards, side yards, rear yards, street widths, driveways, and alleys. All of these items should be reviewed and considered when planning work in a Historic District.

The combination of the structure massing and the site massing is also an important component of design when considering either an addition to an existing residence or a new residence. Attention should be paid to the structure and site massing at the rear of the house, particularly at sites where the rear of the house is visible from the street.

### **Scale**

Scale is the measurement of the relationship of one object to another object. The components of a building have a relationship to each other and to the building as a whole, which defines the scale of the building. The same building has a relationship to a human being, which also defines the scale of the building. In a Historic District, many factors influence the scale of the district, including the buildings, landscape, and streetscape. These components have a

relationship with each other which sets scale, and they have a relationship with human beings, which is perceived as scale.

Scale is another important consideration in the design of a building. The designer has to coordinate the many aspects of scale to implement a desired design, such as the overall relationship of the building to a human being, and how the different components, such as doors, windows, porches, etc., support the overall scale. These individual components have measurable scale in feet and inches, while overall scale is usually described in more general terms. The height, width, and spacing of a window can determine the scale of the window to other components of a building. (Scale can also help describe rhythm – as defined below.) The height, width, and length of a singular mass can be used as a measurement of that mass to another in the building.

The relationship of a building, or portions of a building, to a human being is called its relationship to “human scale.” The spectrum of relationships to human scale ranges from intimate to monumental. *Intimate* usually refers to small spaces or detail that is very much in keeping with the human scale. Intimate spaces usually relate to areas around eight to ten feet in size. These spaces feel intimate because of the compatible relationship of a human being to the space, as well as the relationship of one human being to another. In this regard, a distance of eight to ten feet is approximately the limit of sensory perception of communication including voice and facial expression. Intimate scale distance is also about the limit of an up-stretched arm. At the other end of the spectrum, *monumental* scale is used to present a feeling of grandeur, security, or spiritual well being. Monumental scale usually is best appreciated from a distance. Common building types implementing monumental scale are banks, cathedrals, and government buildings. The components of this scale can include oversized double doors, immense porticos, large domes, expansive stairways, and the placement of the building on an elevated pad.

Buildings, landscapes and streetscapes are usually closer to the human scale in residential Historic Districts than in commercial Historic Districts. The height and mass of the buildings, streetlights, signs, and other elements are usually less than in commercial districts. Landscaping in residential Historic Districts tends to be characterized by walks, planters, and canopy trees. All of these smaller scale components reinforce the human use of a home and the need to have objects in a comprehensible scale.

## **Rhythm**

Rhythm, like scale, also describes the relationship of buildings to buildings or the components of a building to each other. Rhythm relates to the spacing and size of elements and can be described in terms of proportion, balance, and emphasis.

Proportion deals with the ratio of dimension between elements. Proportion can describe height to height ratios, width to width ratios, width to height ratios, as well as ratios of massing. On a larger level, proportion can be perceived in the Historic District by the relationship of elements to each other. The location and types of buildings on a street often have a rhythm or

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proportion that should be respected. These proportions are usually seen as front, side, and rear setbacks, or as relative heights/sizes of buildings along a street.

Balance is another important item considered during the design process. Balance can be described in terms of symmetrical and asymmetrical elements. An important feature of balance is that it is very often achieved by matching differing elements which, when perceived in whole, display balance.

Emphasis describes the use of elements which call attention to themselves. Emphasis is an important feature in creating balance when using dissimilar elements.

Porches, canopies, balconies, and dormer windows are examples of elements that, when emphasized properly, can assist in presenting a balanced look. Care should be taken not to create unnecessary emphasis in historic buildings, such as adding inappropriate porches or highlighting windows with bold colors.

Emphasis can also relate to the overall feel of a historic building, such as the horizontal feel of the Craftsman style. The emphasis of the style should be realized and elements should not be modified which might change or affect it. Emphasis can be found in districts by the location of streetscape or landscape elements that create a point of reference for the inhabitants of the district.

The rhythm for contributing buildings in a Historic District should be analyzed with respect to proportion, balance, and emphasis. Rhythm should not be significantly altered, either by physical changes or the inappropriate use of color. New buildings, landscaping, and streetscapes in Historic Districts should be analyzed in terms of how they affect the rhythm of the district. Careful consideration should be given to relationships contained in adjacent areas; the rhythm found there should not necessarily be copied, but new elements should not distract from the original rhythm.

