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Recommended Draft Design Guidelines

Information



The guidelines address a variety of topics ranging from site planning to cultural history, vehicular parking to tall new buildings.

The Recommended Draft design guidelines were developed by Bureau of Planning and Sustainability staff and a consultant team with the active assistance of a volunteer Community Advisory Group comprised of area residents, architects, and historic preservation professionals. The Historic Landmarks Commission voted to support the Recommended Draft Design Guidelines on August 8, 2022.

The Recommended Draft design guidelines are intended to provide flexible approval criteria for alteration, addition, and new construction proposals in the South Portland Historic District, a small geographic area significant to the city's early immigrant history and representative of building typologies characteristic of the 1876-1926 period. The draft design guidelines include 13 approval criteria that would need to be met for alteration, addition, and new construction proposals to be approved in the South Portland Historic District.

[View the Recommended Draft document](#)

The Portland City Council will consider the South Portland Historic District Design Guidelines Recommended Draft at a public hearing on Nov. 2, 2022. Written testimony can be submitted to the City Council prior to the public hearing.

Contact

Brandon Spencer-Hartle

✉ historic.resources@portlandoregon.gov

☎ [503-823-4641](tel:503-823-4641)

Topics

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History of the South Portland Historic District



House, plex, mixed-use, and institutional building typologies dominated South Portland during the historic period. Image courtesy Portland City Archives A2005.005.1482.4.

The South Portland Historic District was designated in 1998 in recognition of its role as a gateway for Euroamerican ethnic groups arriving in Portland during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The district is a subset of the larger South Portland neighborhood, which developed as a multi-ethnic, walkable, and primarily residential suburb during that time. Despite major transportation and redevelopment projects that physically divided South Portland and precipitated waves of displacement and public disinvestment during the mid-1900s, the 31 blocks within the South Portland Historic District represent the largest collection of surviving buildings dating to the neighborhood's early development.

The South Portland Historic District encompasses the Lair Hill Conservation District, a smaller geographic area that was designated by the Portland City Council in 1977 for architectural preservation purposes.

Purpose of Historic District Design Guidelines

The Portland Zoning Code applies land use regulations to designated historic resources, such as review of certain demolition proposals as well as alteration, addition, and new construction proposals. These regulations are intended to protect significant historic structures, while allowing for the adaptation of existing buildings and the development of complementary new buildings.

To provide guidance to property owners, tenants, designers, and developers, Historic District design guidelines provide district-specific land use approval criteria for alteration, addition, and new construction proposals. For more than 20 years, the Lair Hill Design Guidelines have been used as the primary approval criteria for alterations, additions, and new construction proposals in the South Portland Historic District.



The new design guidelines encourage contemporary expressions of the house, plex, mixed-use, and institutional building typologies, such as this contemporary mixed-use building in St. Johns.

The Recommended Draft South Portland Historic District Design Guidelines are intended to replace the Lair Hill Design Guidelines, which are the oldest design guidelines in the city and no longer represent best practices. The proposed new design guidelines are intended to be more responsive to the significance of the Historic District and more accommodating of new multi-plexes and mixed-use buildings – typologies that historically proliferated in the Historic District.

In recent years, design guidelines have been adopted for the New Chinatown/Japantown and Skidmore/Old Town Historic Districts to provide district-specific approval criteria. Development of the South Portland Historic District Design Guidelines was funded in part by a Metro grant as part of a series of recent area planning projects focused on Southwest Portland.