

UNITING THE NEW AND OLD WITH HOME ADDITIONS

When planning an addition for an historic home there are several key design factors to consider such as location, height, scale and materials, but the most important factor of course is need. Ask yourself what you are trying to accomplish. Is there simply a need for additional space or a desire for a particular type of space, such as a “sunroom”? Then consider that need against the current constraints of your home to determine the most cost-effective and low-impact way of providing for that need. For instance, is there a way to gain the desired space in the attic, maybe with the addition of a rear dormer, or by finishing out the basement? Maybe there is a rear deck or patio that can be enclosed? Any addition that does not increase the footprint will be more cost effective than an addition that will require additional foundation work.

If the addition needs to increase the footprint, carefully consider its location. Front and side additions or adding additional levels to historic homes, no matter how well they are designed, can have a negative impact on the character of the district and the home. Whenever the lot allows, additions should be planned for the rear of the home.

Successful additions are ones that are subordinate to the historic house. If your house is in a Historic or Conservation Zoning Overlay, one way the Metro Historic Zoning Commission has found to accomplish this is by requiring that rear additions be set in from the sidewalls at least one foot for each story. Additions that are taller than the historic house need to be designed to minimize the impact of the additional height.

Careful consideration of location, height and scale can also assist you with obtaining timely Preservation and Building Permits. The Metro Historic Zoning Commission recently approved the ability of staff to review rear additions that meet the design guidelines, are no wider and no taller than the primary building, and no deeper than half the width of the existing house. An application of this type would not need to wait for the monthly full Commission review but could receive a Preservation Permit in a day or two, if the application is complete.

Once you have decided on the best location for the addition and have determined the appropriate scale compared to the existing house, you can now concentrate on the fun stuff: design and material choices. The design of an addition is completely up to the individual. Some like additions which mimic the design of the original house and some prefer additions that are completely modern. Either direction can accomplish great design. Likewise, some prefer to use materials which match original materials; however, newer materials such as concrete block foundations and fiber cement siding are also appropriate for additions.

Additions are a great way to fulfill your changing needs while allowing you to stay in the historic neighborhood you love. For additional direction on designing additions, the design guidelines for historic overlays are a great resource, even if your home is not in an overlay.

This article has been provided by the Metro Historic Zoning Commission which provides Preservation Permits for alterations within historic overlays. For more information, visit www.metro.gov/mhc.