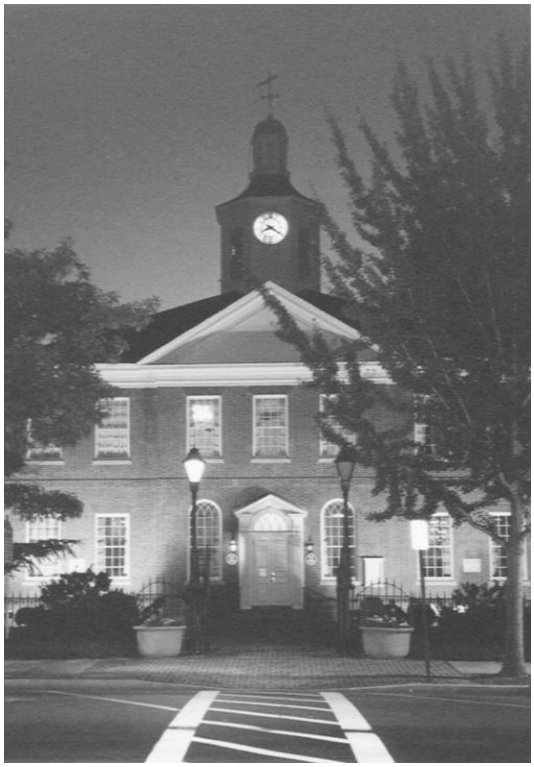
Design Guidelines for New Development



Easton, Maryland

Acknowledgements:
William T. Hunter & Cookes Hope

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The *Design Guidelines for New Development: Easton, Maryland was written by*
David H. Gleason Associates, Inc.
Baltimore, Maryland

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Introduction

The citizens of Easton have long been interested in the appearance of their community. In the 1920s, members of the Talbot County Garden Club began civic beautification projects, including Courthouse Square. In the years immediately following World War II, community leaders began discussing how to preserve and enhance the older and historic areas of town. In the 1970s, the Town Council created the Easton Historic District Commission to "enhance the quality of life and safeguard the historic and cultural heritage of Easton". At the beginning of the 21st century, the Commission adopted *The Easton Historic District Design Guidelines* to assist property owners in protecting the architectural significance of their properties when making alterations or additions. In 2005, these *Design Guidelines for New Development* were created to guide the appearance of new commercial and residential developments within the town.

Over the past quarter century, the town adopted a number of comprehensive plans, all of which stressed the need to improve the appearance of the community. For example, the *1997 Comprehensive Plan* noted:

> "…Easton's planning and development regulations need to be … more design oriented. That is tastefully designed with good site planning, including landscaping and architecture…. In order to accomplish this, a set a Design Principles needs to be adopted, and existing landscape regulations need to be strengthened and reinforced."

Five years later the town adopted the following Design Principles:

- Mixed use development that encouraged "old-fashioned, neighborhood-style development" that mixes housing, retail, offices, and civic and open spaces with a pedestrian orientation.
- Site planning should be based on the natural environment and incorporate the concepts of Maryland's Smart Growth program.
- Vehicles, streets, and parking areas should be subservient to the architectural and natural environments.
- Neighborhood development must incorporate significant open spaces, contain a variety of housing types and be "interesting places" to live.

- New development should respect Easton's historic architecture, particularly those buildings constructed prior to 1940.
- Signs should inform but not dominate.

Recently the Town Council adopted the *Town of Easton Comprehensive Plan 2004*, which incorporated the above principles to guide the future development of the community. The *Plan* is based on a growth management strategy that includes containing sprawl and increasing the density of new development on vacant land or underutilized older parcels. To accomplish its goals, the *Comprehensive Plan 2004* states that new development on vacant or underutilized parcels should reinforce the traditional architectural and townscape character of Easton in overall plan, site design, appearance of buildings, and design of public improvements. It also recommends developing Traditional Neighborhood Zones, altering existing subdivision regulations to encourage more density and neighborliness, and creating Design Guidelines for all new development.

These Design Guidelines apply to all New Development in Easton that is not within the historic districts. New Development is defined as any new construction that requires a building permit located on a vacant parcel or new construction that is replacing in part or in whole an existing building.

The key to designing new buildings and structures that meet these Design Guidelines is a detailed understanding of the existing architectural and urban character of the community's traditional residential neighborhoods and commercial districts as well as their landscapes. Understanding the existing character is accomplished through observing and analyzing existing setbacks, scale, proportion, materials, details and other architectural and urban elements that make up the buildings, streetscapes, and landscapes. Once the existing character is understood, new buildings and structures that are compatible with Easton's traditional character can be designed. Compatibility does not mean exact duplication. New buildings and structures should be seen as products of their own time. To reproduce an historic neighborhood, or a portion of the downtown or exactly copy an existing building, will create a false sense of history. Rather new buildings and structures should seek to show Easton's continuing evolution, tied to its past while creating its future. In short, new development should be a good neighbor, changing Easton for the better.

Design Principles for New Development

New development that is compatible with the traditional architecture and town character of Easton should be based on the character-defining features of the buildings, public space, and landscapes found in the town's older and historic residential neighborhoods and commercial district. Typically these character-defining features include a building's setback, orientation, scale, proportion, rhythm, massing, height, materials, roof shape, details and orientation, and color. In addition, analysis of the design of public spaces such as streets, sidewalks, and parking areas, along with existing street furniture, landscape features, auxiliary buildings, fences, walls, and transitions between neighborhoods are important to understanding the traditional urban character Easton wishes to continue in all new development.

Design Principles for New Residential and Commercial Buildings

New development in Easton should be based on the existing architectural and urban character of similar building types. That is, the buildings in a new large single-family residential development should be based on the design principles found in existing large traditional single-family residential neighborhoods. New commercial development should incorporate design principles found in the town's historic commercial district. New mixed-use developments, which are encouraged in Easton's *Comprehensive Plan 2004*, should incorporate design principles from both traditional residential neighborhoods and the central business district.

The following sections begin to define the existing character of traditional residential and commercial buildings and districts in Easton, as well as provide design principles based on that character that should be used in all new construction. However, the definitions of the existing character, and their articulation as design principles is not meant to be exhaustive. Rather it is meant to provide architects, contractors, building owners, developers and others involved in designing and constructing new buildings with insight into the character of new developments that will meet the goals of the *Comprehensive Plan.*

Setback

A building's setback is the distance it is located inside property lines.

Front facades of new commercial buildings should be built to the front setback line

Existing Character Most traditional commercial buildings in Easton are zero lot line buildings; that is they are built on the front and side property lines with only a small open space at the rear. In some areas, where existing commercial buildings have small front yards, they are aligned with their neighbors.

Most traditional residential buildings in Easton are free standing with setbacks on all four sides, the exception being a few early to mid 19th century residences that are built on the front property line.

Design Principles The location of new buildings should respect the established setbacks of traditional buildings in Easton. Typically this means that new commercial buildings should be aligned with neighboring buildings, built to the front setback line established in the Town of Easton's Zoning Ordinance, with parking to the sides and rear.

Front facades of new residential buildings should respect existing setbacks

Residential buildings should typically be free standing, with their front facades facing the street. The distant that new residential buildings are setback from the front and side property lines should be based on similar size residential buildings found in the traditional neighborhood. For example, existing small single family homes are often located within five to ten feet of the front property line with minimum side setbacks, while larger single family homes may be setback 25 or 30 feet from the front property lines centered on relatively large parcels.

As with commercial buildings, new residential development must comply with the town's Zoning Ordinance. They should be built as close to the front setback line as possible.

Orientation

Orientation is the direction a building faces a street.

New buildings should reflect traditional orientations to principal streets

Existing Character Most primary facades of historic commercial and residential buildings in Easton face the principal street, with their main entrance in full view. In a few cases, a residential building is oriented to a side yard or placed at an angle to a street.

Design Principles New buildings should be oriented to the principal street with their main entrance in full view.

Scale

Scale is the relative or apparent size of a building in relation to its neighbors, typically perceived through the size of building elements, such as windows, doors, storefronts, porches, cornices, surface materials, and other exterior features. Most buildings are designed to be human in scale; that is, they appear to be of a size appropriate for human occupancy and use. Other buildings are designed to be of monumental scale, giving them physical and symbolic importance.

Easton's traditional buildings are of human scale

Existing Character With very few exceptions, Easton's traditional commercial and residential buildings are of human scale.

Design Principles The scale of a new residential and commercial buildings should respect the prevailing scale of Easton's traditional residential and commercial buildings; that is, they should be human in scale.

Proportion

Proportion is the relation of components of buildings, such as doors, windows, storefronts, porches, and cornices to each other and to their facades. Often proportions are expressed as mathematical ratios, drawn from the architectural theories of ancient Greece and Renaissance Italy. For example, many historic buildings designed in the Classical Revival style use mathematical proportions to locate and size windows, doors, columns, cornices, and other building elements.

Existing Character The facades of Easton's existing residential and commercial buildings often use classical proportions. They are typically seen in the relationship of the height and width of a building, its windows and doors, slope of the roof and other facade components. In the example on this page, note that the facade symmetrical along a line drawn from the tip of the roof to the ground and the heights of the first, second and attic floors are equal. Also note that the location and proportions of the windows are related to the proportions of the facade.

In commercial buildings, the existing proportional relationships can be seen in the elements that compose storefronts as well as the size and location of upper story windows and cornices.

New building facades should be based on traditional proportions

Design Principles The facade proportions for new commercial buildings should be based on proportions found on the facades of Easton's traditional commercial buildings.

Likewise, the facade proportions for new residential buildings should be based on proportions found on the facades of Easton's traditional residential buildings.

Rhythm

The vertical and horizontal spacing and repetition of facade elements, such as storefronts, windows, doors, belt courses, and the like give a facade its rhythm. The space between free standing residential buildings, or lack of space between party wall commercial buildings, along with the building's height, towers, and other roof projections establishes the rhythm of a street.

Traditional commercial buildings often have regular facade rhythms established by their storefronts and upper floor windows

Existing Character Existing commercial buildings in Easton typically have storefronts with large display windows, transom widows and centrally placed recessed entry doors on the ground floor, and regularly spaced windows on upper floors.

Easton's historic residential buildings have both regularly and irregularly spaced windows and doors. The rhythm of ground floor is also often established by porch elements such as columns, rails and steps.

Commercial buildings are typically party wall structures while residential buildings are typically free standing.

The facade rhythm of Easton's traditional residential buildings may be regular or irregular

Design Principles The facades of new buildings should be based on the facade rhythms of Easton's traditional buildings of similar use.

The spacing between new buildings should reflect the spacing between traditional buildings of similar use.

Typically facade rhythms within a contiguous new commercial block should be similar.

The facade rhythms within a new residential development of similar size houses should be compatible with each.

Massing

A building's massing is derived from the articulation of its facade through the use of dormers, towers, bays, porches, steps and other projections. A building's massing significantly contributes to its character and that of the streetscape, particularly for zero lot line, contiguous commercial blocks.

The massing of Easton's Victorian buildings is typically derived from towers, bays, porches and the like

Existing Character Easton's traditional commercial buildings are typically expressed as a single mass, with large expanses of display windows on the ground floor, and regularly spaced windows on upper floors.

Easton's small early 19th century residential buildings are typically expressed as a single mass, while late 19th and early 20th century residential buildings often have bays, towers, porches and projections giving them complex massing.

Easton's traditional commercial buildings typically have simple massing

Design Principles The massing of the facade of new residential and commercial buildings should be based on the massing found on traditional buildings of similar use in Easton.

Height

The height of facades and their cornices, along with roof ridgelines, and projections such as chimneys, and towers, contributes to the character of buildings and streetscapes.

Existing Character While the heights of Easton's traditional commercial district located in the same block may vary, they are typically within one or two stories of each other.

The heights of Easton's traditional residential buildings located in the same block tend to be similar.

Design Principles Designing primary facades of new party wall or contiguous buildings to be similar in height.

Varying the heights of new commercial buildings by no more than two stories in any one block.

Varying the heights of new free standing buildings by a maximum of ten percent of the height of adjacent new buildings.

Using towers and chimneys on residential buildings in a manner similar to their use on Easton's traditional residential buildings.

Buildings in the same block typically vary in height by only one or two stories

Materials

The type, size, texture, surface finish, and other defining characteristics of exterior materials are important to defining the overall character of a building.

Existing Character Facades of brick, horizontal wood siding, cut stone, and roofs of slate and metal are all common on Easton's traditional commercial and residential buildings.

Easton's traditional commercial buildings also typically have wood storefronts, patterned or colored glass transom windows, and canvas awnings over the storefronts.

Easton's traditional residential buildings often have one story wood porches on the front, one or two story wood porches on sides or rear, and brick chimneys.

Design Principles The materials used for walls, sloped roofs, and other exterior features of new buildings should be based on the materials found on traditional residential and commercial buildings in Easton.

The size, texture, surface finish, and other defining characteristics of new exterior materials should be similar to those found on Easton's traditional residential and commercial buildings.

Non-traditional materials such as stucco, stucco like material (EFIS), vinyl and metal siding, textured plywood, oversized brick, concrete block, texture concrete masonry units (CMU) and the like should not be used for primary facades of new buildings.

New construction should reflect the exterior materials used in Easton's traditional buildings

Roof Shape

The shape and slope of roofs are also important to defining their character.

Existing Character Traditional commercial buildings in Easton typically have flat roofs hidden behind cornices or Mansard roofs. Easton's traditional residential buildings typically have gable or hipped roofs.

Design Principals Roof shapes of new buildings should be based on those found on traditional buildings in Easton.

Roof shapes for new buildings should be compatible with those on adjacent new buildings.

Roofs on new commercial buildings should be flat with pronounced front facade cornices or Mansard.

Roofs on new residential buildings should be primarily gable or hipped.

Roof shapes on new buildings should be based on roofs found on traditional buildings

Details and Ornamentation

Details such as the shape and texture of siding used or types of brick courses used for a wall, and ornamentations such as porch brackets, dentils, scrolls, corbels, and the like, significantly add to the character of a facade.

Existing Character Early 19th century commercial and residential buildings in Easton tend to have plain details and ornamentation.

Mid and late 19th century and early 20th century commercial buildings in Easton tend to have brick details as well as ornamented wood storefronts and window surrounds, or metal cornices.

Mid and late 19th century residential buildings often have elaborate wood details and ornamentation on porches, towers, and window and door surrounds.

Design Principles New buildings should use well scaled and proportioned details and ornamentation on their principal facades.

Details and ornamentation found on existing buildings in Easton may be used as the basis for details and ornamentation on new buildings, but they should not be copied exactly.

Details and ornamentation for new buildings should be based on those found on traditional buildings

Color

A building's color is derived from its exterior materials such as unpainted brick, stone, terra cotta, slate, asphalt shingle, copper, lead, and other naturally colored materials, or from paint, stains or other applied colors.

Existing Character Exterior brick and stone on traditional buildings in Easton are typically left unpainted.

Wood trim, door and window surrounds on commercial buildings are often painted white or other light colors.

Wood residential buildings are typically painted white or a light color.

Usually no more than three painted colors are found on traditional buildings in Easton.

Exterior colors of new buildings should be based on traditional colors

Design Principles The colors of new buildings and structures should be compatible with its overall design and that of neighboring buildings.

Brick and stone should typically be left unpainted.

Traditional color schemes should be used.

No more than three painted colors should be used on new buildings.

Design Principles for Public Space, Street Furniture, and Landscapes

Streets, sidewalks, parking lots, benches, trash receptacles, kiosks, and other elements of public space and street furniture are important to defining the character of residential neighborhoods and commercials districts. So too are trees, shrubs, plantings, walls, fences, and other landscape features. Equally important to defining the character of residential neighborhoods and commercial districts is the transition between districts. Collectively public space, street furniture, and landscapes provide the context for the buildings in new developments.

The design of new public space, street furniture, and landscapes should reflect those found in the traditional residential and commercial districts in Easton. Particular attention should be given to creating safe, pedestrian oriented environments with features designed to reinforce the unique character of Easton as well as fulfill the Design Principles adopted in the *Comprehensive Plan 2004*. At the same time, attention should be paid to using materials that are robust and easily maintained, as well as environmentally sound. The design of public space, streetscapes, and landscapes in new developments should help to create a sense of place within that development as well as link it to the traditional residential neighborhoods and commercial districts of Easton.

Streets and Sidewalks

Streets and sidewalks are the primary connective networks within commercial or residential districts. They allow pedestrians and vehicles to flow through and around the development, providing access to businesses, institutions, and residences.

Existing Character Streets in Easton's traditional commercial and residential districts typically are paved with asphalt, and based on a hierarchical grid pattern. Sidewalks, in residential areas are concrete, separated from the street by a grass medium that often contains trees. Sidewalks in the traditional commercial district are brick or concrete, usually adjacent to the curb, and often contain planters with flowers, shrubs or trees.

Design Principles Basing new street and sidewalk patterns and widths on the hierarchical grid pattern found in Easton's traditional residential neighborhoods and commercial district.

Terminating vistas along streets or sidewalks with important civic, religious or institutional buildings.

Separating sidewalks in residential areas from streets by grass mediums, typically containing trees.

Using surface materials for streets and sidewalks in new developments similar to those found in Easton's traditional residential neighborhoods and commercial districts.

Sidewalks and streets in Easton's traditional districts are organized in an hierarchical grid

Parking Lots

While surface parking lots in commercial areas are necessary, they should not be prominent features in new developments.

Parking lots should be screened from view or located at the rear of new buildings

Existing Character Existing parking lots in the traditional commercial district are located behind buildings or are screened from the public right-of-way by low walls or shrubs.

Design Principles Provide adequate landscaping, walls or fences to screen automobiles from immediate view, but still allow visual access into the lots.

Design parking lots in accordance with the landscape standards contained in the Town of Easton Zoning Ordinance.

Street Furniture

Street furniture is the general term used to describe benches, trash receptacles, parking meters, streetlights, and other elements found in residential and commercial districts.

The design of street furniture should be compatible with the design of the buildings

Existing Character Existing street furniture in Easton's traditional residential and commercial districts is typically functional and compatible with the design of the buildings.

Design Principles Design and locate street furniture in new commercial districts that encourages pedestrians to linger, window shop, as well as provide places to sit, and in residential areas provide street furniture that promotes neighborliness.

Locate street furniture so that it does not impede pedestrian or vehicular traffic.

The design of street furniture in new developments should be compatible with the design of the buildings.

Landscape Design

Landscape design on private property in front of residential buildings, commercial districts, and public spaces is important to defining the character of new developments.

Landscaping in front yards, and in public spaces in residential areas is important to defining their character

Existing Character The front facade of single family homes in Easton's traditional residential districts are typically separated from the public sidewalk or street by lawns, mature trees, and informal planting groups of shrubs and flowers. Foundation plantings are typically found close to the house. Typically the front door or porch is connected to the public sidewalk with a straight concrete or brick walk. Shrubs, trees, flower beds or fences run along side boundary lines separating a property from its neighbors. Driveways are located on the sides of the buildings, sometimes connecting the street to a garage.

In commercial areas, landscapes tend to be street trees, flowers and small shrubs in planters, and lawns fronting and surrounding civic and religious buildings.

Tress, shrubs, and other plantings are typically native, relatively maintenance free, and ecologically sound.

Planters, street trees, and flowerpots are all found in Easton's traditional commercial district.

Design Principles Basing landscapes in new developments on those found in Easton's traditional residential neighborhoods and commercial districts.

Using native and environmentally sound trees and other plant material.

Auxiliary Buildings and Structures

Carriage houses, sheds, and other auxiliary buildings are often important to defining the character of residential buildings.

Auxiliary structures in Easton's traditional residential districts are typically compatible in design with the principal dwelling.

Existing Character Carriage houses, garages, sheds, and other auxiliary buildings in Easton's traditional residential neighborhoods are usually located on alleys or at the rear of properties. Typically they are constructed of the same materials as the principal dwelling, using similar details and sometimes ornamentation.

Modern auxiliary structures such as TV dishes, swimming pools, and decks are typically located at the rear of properties.

Design Principles Base the design of auxiliary buildings on the principal dwelling.

Locating auxiliary buildings and structures so they are not visible from principal streets.

Fence and Walls

Fences and walls are important character defining elements in residential and commercial landscapes.

Fences and walls are important character defining features

Existing Character Wood and metal fences can be found throughout Easton's traditional residential neighborhoods. Low brick walls are found in the commercial district. Typically fences and walls are located on side and rear yards, but are also found along front property lines where houses are close to public sidewalks.

Design Principles Using low wood and metal fences in new residential front and side yards, and low brick walls in commercial areas. Taller privacy fences should be only used at the rear of buildings.

Locating and designing fences so they are compatible with the design of the buildings with which they are associated.

Transitions between Districts

Changes in building appearance and location on a site, as well as changes in streetscape and landscape signal transitions between districts for citizens and visitors alike.

Existing Character The entries to Easton's traditional residential neighborhoods and commercial district are marked by changes in building design, setback, sidewalks, street furniture, and landscaping. Although subtle, transitions between neighborhoods are easily recognized by citizens and visitors alike.

Design Principles Marking transitions between existing and new developments by changes in landscaping, streets, sidewalks, and street furniture, and not through pillars, gates or signs.

Marking transitions between different districts within large new developments by changes in building design and setback, as well as by differences in landscaping, streets, sidewalks, and the like.

Entries to traditional neighborhoods are marked by subtle changes in building setback, landscaping and the like