

**DESIGN GUIDELINES FOR THE
SOMERS POINT HISTORIC PRESERVATION DISTRICT**



SOMERS POINT
NEW JERSEY

**Prepared By
Rutala Associates**

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SOMERS POINT HISTORIC PRESERVATION DISTRICT**

Historic Preservation Commission

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DESIGN GUIDELINES FOR THE SOMERS POINT HISTORIC PRESERVATION DISTRICT

A. BACKGROUND

The Somers Point Historic District consists of three zoning districts:

- Historic Village Commercial;
- Historic Village Residential; and
- Historic Village Waterfront.

About 50 percent of the National Historic District in Somers Point lies within the flood hazard zone as designated by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). This has safety, health and financial implications. FEMA has established Base Flood Elevations (BFEs) for all areas within the flood hazard zone. Base Flood Elevation is the predicted height water will reach in a flood having a 1 percent chance of occurring in any given year. Within the Somers Point Historic District, there are three flood hazard zones. The VE zone, directly on the bay, has a BFE of 12 feet. In addition, within the VE zone, there is the expectation of a 3-foot breaking wave during a 1 percent flood event. Besides the marinas and docks, there are virtually no structures in the VE zone within the Historic District. The remainder of the Somers Point Historic District within the flood hazard zone is classified as AE with either a 9-foot or 10-foot BFE, with most of the affected properties in the AE-9 zone. In addition, FEMA has placed a small number of Historic District properties in the shaded X flood zone. This is a transition point between the more regulated V and A zones and areas outside the flood hazard zone. Presently, FEMA regulations do not require flood insurance for this zone, but some mortgage holders require it.

The New Jersey Flood Hazard Area Control Act requires that new or substantially rebuilt homes be constructed so that the bottom of the lowest horizontal structural member is 1 foot above the property's BFE (non-residential structures are subject to floodproofing measures). This is usually referred to as the "freeboard," or the factor of safety above the expected flood level. The municipality can require a higher freeboard elevation. The Strategic Recovery Planning Report (January 2014) prepared for Somers Point recommends a freeboard elevation of 2 feet above BFE for all properties in the AE and X flood zones and 3 feet above BFE for all properties in the V zone.

Historic properties can obtain a variance from this requirement of the Somers Point Floodplain Management Ordinance if the improvements do not result in loss of historic structure status. Presently, historic structures that are primary residences can retain subsidized insurance with this variance but it cannot be guaranteed that such properties will not be subject to more stringent insurance premiums over time. Federal flood Insurance rates will increasingly be related to how much above the BFE a house is elevated.

B. PURPOSE AND INTENT

The purpose of these Supplemental Guidelines to the City's existing Historic District Guidelines for Design Review is to protect the historic character of Somers Point when houses are elevated within the Historic District.

The individual property owner's decision to elevate a home in the Historic District need not result in the loss of its historic significance within the District. These guidelines are intended to allow for elevation of homes without destroying the streetscape and character of the neighborhoods that make up the Historic District. They should be utilized to guide property owners and give direction in order to alleviate the impact of foundation elevation on the Historic District while providing for the safety and well-being of Somers Point residents. The guidelines are in conformance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation, which should be the controlling regulation for any work on an historic home. Generally, in order to retain its significance, changes brought about during a rehabilitation project should be such that, if undone, the "essential form and integrity of the historic structure would be unimpaired."

C. PRE-ELEVATION PLANNING

Owners considering raising their house should obtain as much preliminary information as possible before making any decisions.

1. Consult with Somers Point officials, including the Flood Plain Management official and the Zoning Officer, to obtain the flood zone and Base Flood Elevation as well as for guidance with regard to the City's Flood Plain Management Ordinance, zoning requirements and building code.
2. Review the City's Historic District to help analyze the property's architectural design elements and consult with the Historic Preservation Commission regarding the property's historic status and significance and possible impacts of changes to the property.
3. FEMA offers several readable Technical Bulletins with which property owners should familiarize themselves when considering an elevation project. Property owners should take care that they are reading the latest version of any bulletin by consulting the FEMA website.
4. Obtain a topographic survey of the property to ascertain at what elevation the structure presently stands. Almost every structure in the Historic District is at or above the 5-foot contour.
5. Find the location of all structures on the property in relation to the property lines and setbacks from property lines.
6. Analyze the property in terms of site circulation and entryways.

7. Consider the property in terms of the immediate neighbors and the entire street.
8. Consider hiring a professional to evaluate the house's structural and foundation design.

Only after attaining as much fundamental background information as possible should property owners proceed to elevation alternatives. The basics of raising any house are how high to go and what type of foundation will work best in terms of safety and economic feasibility.

1. Homeowners must decide how high to raise their homes based on state law, local ordinances, the existing elevation of their foundation and personal preference. As previously stated, new and substantially rebuilt homes must conform to state law (1-foot freeboard) as well as any more stringent local ordinances, such as the 2-foot freeboard suggested by the Strategic Recovery Plan Report for Somers Point. Homeowners may choose to raise their existing non-damaged homes for safety and/or insurance reasons. Primary residence homes within the flood zone are subject to gradual rate increases if their premiums are below full risk.

Generally, if a homeowner chooses to elevate the house, it should be raised to the minimum recommended. Besides elevation, there are additional methods of flood insurance premium reduction, including mitigation measures such as foundation reinforcement and floodproofing.

2. The type of foundation for an elevation project is a function of FEMA requirements and personal taste. Basically, houses can be raised on pilings (required in V flood zone), piers or block. The raised area created may not be utilized for living space but it may be utilized for parking, storage and access to the house.

Most houses in the Somers Point Historic District are wood-framed construction. Generally such houses with a basement or crawlspace can be elevated by separating the house from its foundation, lifting it and then constructing a new foundation below. Houses with a slab-on-grade foundation, which form the floor as well as the foundation, can be lifted with the entire slab and a new foundation constructed below.

D. GUIDELINES

The intention of the guidelines is not to enforce uniformity but to retain the texture and feel of the late 19th and early 20th century Period of Significance. Indeed, the charm of the District lies partly in the variety among the types of houses from the Period of Significance.

The impact of increasing the height of a house can be minimized by maintaining the proportions of the structure as well as the house's relationship to the streetscape. Much of the historic impression lies in the scale of the houses, their roof patterns, the pedestrian-oriented entrances and the landscaping. New foundations and even, new entire stories can mimic original door, window and horizontal elements' alignment, spacing and dimensions,

thus retaining for the structure the basic elements of the Historic District's charm. Elevating houses will, without doubt, alter the Historic District. The goal of these guidelines is to preserve, as much as possible, the District's connection with the past while acknowledging the necessity of mitigation measures in light of climate change.

These guidelines will be based on minimizing the effect of elevation. They are divided into the three major parts of a building most affected by elevating a house:

- **Setting/Streetscape**, which is the house's context in terms of the parcel within which it sits as well as the part it plays in the pattern that makes up the character of its neighborhood.
- The **Foundation** is the supporting base of a structure. Since an elevated house will show more foundation, screening of foundations is an intrinsic component of these guidelines.
- House **Access** is the entry assembly, including steps and porches. This is the house's "face" and the most visible representation of the house to the public.

Retaining the significant external features of these three areas' are key to success in elevating the house while retaining its historic value.

Each component will be considered with regard to its meaning in terms of:

1. Concerns with regard to the Historic District character and existing Historic District Guidelines as well as decisions that property owners must make when elevating their homes.
2. Supplemental Elevation Guidelines upon which the Historic District Commission will base the Certificate of Appropriateness for the elevation project.

E. **SETTING/STREETSCAPE**

1. Concerns and decisions:
 - a. Current elevation and topography:
 - 1) All of the Historic District is at least 5 feet land elevation.
 - 2) Topographic elevation increases inland from the bay.
 - b. Footprint for consideration of access to elevated entrance:
 - 1) Property boundaries (from tax map or, preferably, a boundary survey) should be



Typical Streetscape on Side Street

known.

- 2) Observe where each feature on the property is in terms of boundary and each other.
- 3) Measure the setbacks to all structures.
- 4) Know other development regulations pertinent to the property.

c. Parking and paving:

- 1) Includes circulation around site, driveways, entrance approaches, and areas for off street parking.
- 2) The 1998 Master Plan Re-examination Report and the Strategic Recovery Planning Report (January, 2014) both recommend decreasing impervious coverage in order to increase natural vegetation and stormwater absorption.
- 3) Onsite parking
 - Often, elevating the house will force changes in where cars are parked on the site as existing parking areas may be needed for new access stairs.
 - While the Historic District Commission does not encourage garages under structures, space constraints may call for solutions such as increasing the structure's elevation to allow for parking under structure.
- 4) Walkways
 - Different types of paving materials have varying permeability.
 - Width of walks changes the feel of yard and entryways.

d. Fences/retaining wall:

- 1) Front fences are not common historically in Somers Point.
- 2) Retaining walls are more common due to grade changes on streets moving away from the bay.
- 3) Fences should allow for visual penetration (the ordinance requires at least 50 percent visibility).
- 4) Consider whether fence or landscaping functions better in terms of its relation to the historic streetscape.

e. Mechanical Equipment/Lighting:

- 1) Includes all exterior devices related to heating, electric, plumbing, air conditioning, ventilation and media.
- 2) Houses built during the Period of Significance were often designed to naturally conserve energy using site and building features such as shade trees, projecting porches, operable windows and awnings.
- 3) Changes to existing systems require consideration of their impact on the historic exterior and streetscape, especially lighting changes.

f. Outbuildings:

- 1) Historic garages and other outbuildings used for storage/parking do not require elevation.
- 2) On small lots, non-historic accessory structures may interfere with access to the elevated entrance.

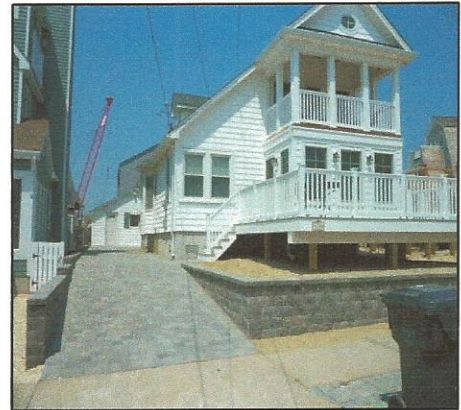
g. Landscaping:

- 1) Traditionally used to beautify, screen and establish public-private boundaries.
- 2) Historically, landscaping plans were minimal and simple to maintain.
- 3) Aspects of landscaping have an important role historically in conserving energy (see Mechanical Equipment/Lighting).
- 4) Use as a visual buffer to screen new foundation/construction.
 - Types of plant materials that suit the characteristic seashore environment
 - Look at which established plantings can be salvaged/reused
- 5) Contouring and fill:
 - In certain circumstances, fill can be utilized to reduce the impact of an elevated house by gradual grade change.
 - Works best on larger properties but can be combined with retaining walls for consideration on smaller sites.

2. Setting/Streetscape Guidelines

a. Topography

- 1) Use topography to minimize elevation.
- 2) Stairs can be cut into fill.
- 3) Fit elevated structure into existing or new topography.
- 4) Be sensitive to height change on neighboring properties and streetscape.



E2.a.1: Fill used to mitigate elevation impact

b. Footprint

- 1) Stay as close to the historic footprint as possible.
- 2) Avoid moving or removing historically significant site features, such as walks, drives, fences, walls and light posts.



E2.a.4: Neighboring property incompatibility

c. Parking/paving

- 1) Minimize paving in the front yard.
- 2) Keep any driveway widths as narrow as possible and no more than 10 feet wide. Consider double track driveways.
- 3) Screen parking spaces from the street wherever possible.
- 4) The slab for a garage below the elevated house should be breakaway or structurally independent and designed to function under flood conditions.

- 5) Avoid a non-historic driveway such as one using pavers, brick and decorative designs. Paving should be consistent with the historic house style in materials and scale.

d. Fencing/Retaining Walls

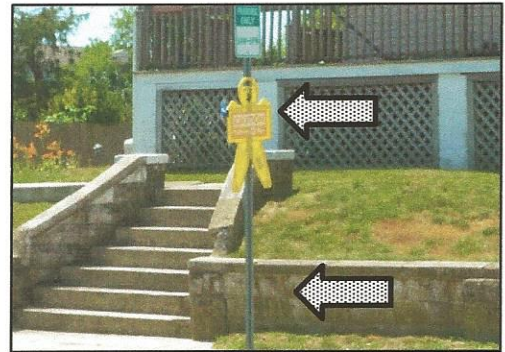
- 1) Fences should serve a purpose such as screening or as a separation device and not be utilized to close off the street view of the house.
- 2) Fence style and materials should mirror the historic house style.
- 3) Fences should not exceed 4 feet.
- 4) Retaining walls should be consistent in design, materials, and scale with the house style.
- 5) Styles and color of retaining walls should reflect the style and materials of the house foundation.



E2.c.1: Inappropriate type and excessive paving

e. Mechanical Equipment

- 1) Install mechanical equipment in the least visible area possible, preferably to the rear.
- 2) Install with the least alteration possible to the building's site and environment, and with the least damage to any historic building material or landscaping.
- 3) Mechanical equipment should be installed low to the ground. This allows for better and easier screening.
- 4) Screening materials may include vegetative material, lattice, fencing or other compatible material (see landscaping).
- 5) Mechanical equipment should blend with the surroundings, either by painting it to match the structure or screening it or both.
- 6) Retain and reuse any historic front lighting fixtures.
- 7) Refrain from floodlighting and security lighting on poles.
- 8) Do not floodlight building front.
- 9) When installing mechanical equipment,



E2.d.4: Large block repeated in wall and foundation



E2.e: A/C in rear but not screened from facing street

avoid damaging the structure. For example, if attaching it to a masonry foundation, it should be affixed to mortar joints, not the stone or block.

f. Outbuildings

- 1) New outbuildings should be sited to the rear or recessed as much as possible from the street view.
- 2) Existing outbuildings of historic significance should be retained if at all possible during the elevation project.



E2.f.2: Contributing garage retained during demolition of 1910 house

g. Landscaping/Buffers

- 1) Retain the historic character of the yard.
- 2) Preserve landscape features that are significant for the structure and the neighborhood character, such as older trees, walkways and fences.
- 3) Modern landscaping schemes with exotic materials alter the character and should not be utilized.
- 4) Utilize native or salt air adaptable plant materials.
- 5) Protect significant existing plantings as much as possible during the project.
- 6) Plan ahead for landscaping screening.



E2.g. Simple, maintainable landscaping plan

F. FOUNDATION

1. Concerns and decisions:

- a. An engineered structural analysis is recommended before proceeding with an elevation project. FEMA recommends a pile or column foundation in the Coastal A Zone (https://s3-us-gov-west-1.amazonaws.com/dam-production/uploads/20130726-1537-20490-8057/fema499_1_6_rev.pdf) "Designing for Flood Levels above the BFE."
- b. Types of house foundation
 - 1) In all special flood hazard areas (SFHAs), the building must be designed, constructed and anchored to prevent flotation, collapse and lateral movement.
 - 2) Space below the Base Flood Elevation can be used only for access, parking and limited storage.
 - 3) The type of foundation for elevation should be decided with advice from a professional.

- Piers/piles are probably necessary if going more than 8 feet in height.
- If the area below the Base Flood Elevation is enclosed by a foundation wall, it must have flood openings that allow the space to flood freely.

c. Materials for new foundation

1) Materials used below the Base Flood Elevation must be flood-resistant. Consider the house's historic foundation when deciding on materials for the new foundation.

2) All building materials (including fasteners) below the BFE should be flood-damage resistant (with some exceptions for life safety and electric code requirements). FEMA Technical Bulletin #2 lists building materials by their flood resistance.

- Structural materials (floor slabs, beams, subfloors, framing and sheathing) should be highly resistant to flood damage, meaning that they can survive wetting and drying and damage caused by moving water.
- Finish materials are acceptable if they are resistant to floodwater damage, meaning they can survive wetting and drying but are not durable when exposed to moving water.

3) Piles are usually made of steel or treated wood.

- Pilings are most often utilized for elevations over 8 feet, which should not be necessary in the Somers Point A flood zone
- Pilings allow for a garage understory.
- Houses raised on pilings are more difficult to integrate into their surroundings

4) Concrete block

- Consider for elevation projects of 3 to 5 feet.
- Large exposed block is a common use in the Historic District.
- Block can be screened or integrated into the house design.



The foundation, especially when exposed as many are in the Historic District, is important to the character and feel of the house.

d. Understory options

- 1) Screening
- 2) Limited storage
- 3) Garage (see parking slab restrictions above)

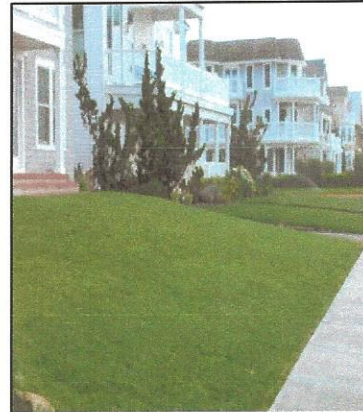
e. Foundation screening treatment options

1) Landscaping fill

- Dependent on the size of house setback
- Can be used to maintain relationship to the street and sidewalk
- Amount of setback will determine whether to use a retaining wall at the sidewalk or a sloping grade to the sidewalk.



Retaining wall for small setback



Gently sloping fill works well with large setback

- FEMA allows only minor quantities of fill for landscaping and drainage as it poses the potential to divert floodwaters to adjacent properties in certain flooding circumstances.

2) Enclosures at the foundation

- Open lattice work
 - Over entire open foundation, especially to cover tall piles.
 - Often seen between vertical supports as part of larger house rhythm.
- Breakaway walls (insurance premiums may increase if the area is not left open to flood waters)



Continuous latticework ignores rhythm of porch columns



PREFERRED: Latticework pattern complements porch columns

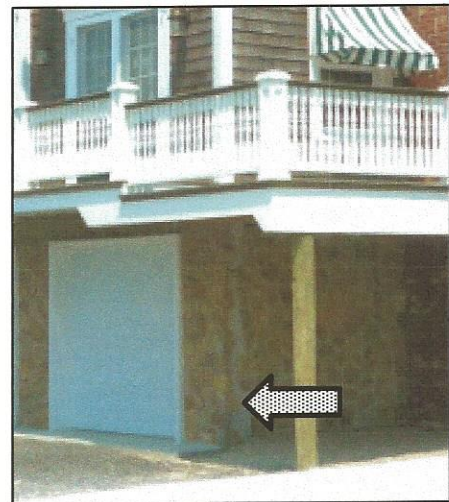
2. Foundation Guidelines

a. The design of the new elevated base, whether it is open or enclosed, exposed or screened through landscape plantings, should reproduce, wherever possible, the historic scale and arrangement of the house's features. For instance, if the house has a flared column base porch, the new foundation could replicate that form at its base.



F2.b: 'False' first story imitates vertical elements of higher levels

b. Existing façade elements, such as columns or large block, should be integrated into the elevation design plan for the new base or sub-story levels by repeating the material, the pattern and/or the shape as much as possible.



F2.c1: New river stone inappropriately introduced for new foundation on shingle-style house

- c. Integrate new foundation into existing house.
- 1) Replicate the texture and color of the existing foundation (if a significant feature) in the new sub-story foundation. Replicate paint colors where there is documentation that they are historic.
 - 2) Whenever possible, do not cover the old foundation with new material.
 - 3) Mimic vertical (and horizontal) lines/proportions of the existing home. If the existing foundation has a rhythm of openings and voids, repeat the rhythm either structurally or in a screening technique.
 - 4) Scale -Substantial, exposed foundations are a feature of the bungalow style common in Somers Point. Elevation on exposed masonry columns, when they reproduce the scale of the original foundation, is encouraged.
 - 5) Character - When the existing foundation is exposed as a feature of the house, retain the exposed foundation theme in the new elevation.
 - 6) Buffering new sub-story foundation - Landscaping that is suitable to the seashore environment or constructed



F2.c6: Latticework screen hiding most of pilings

screening should be utilized to screen the new sub-story elements, such as pilings, that are intrusive to the historic character of the house.

G. ACCESS

1. Concerns and decisions:

- a. Observe the house's façade and entry features.
 - 1) Look for significant features that characterize the house.
 - Masonry
 - Entry
 - Columns or posts on porch
- b. Consider replicating the vertical and horizontal elements that create the house's character when elevated.
 - 1) Materials and colors
 - 2) Treatments of new sub-story at street level



Window pattern and thick flared columns are important features of house front entrance

- c. Decide stair access for the new entrance.
 - 1) A 5-foot elevation will need 8 to 9 feet of stair length (Each foot of elevation requires 18 to 19 inches of horizontal space for stairs)
 - 2) Consider stair-porch-front door harmony.
 - 3) Determine stair placement in terms of setback, side yard and access to the house.
 - 4) Note how current stairs work in relation to the street.
- d. Understory garage considerations
 - 1) Most houses in the Historic District will not need to elevate for an understory garage.
 - 2) The garage front should not dominate the view from the street.
 - Consider the new garage door design as part of the historic house and semi-public space.



Understory garage relates house to street with pedestrian gate entrance

- e. Entryway
 - 1) Note the manner in which the house directs pedestrian traffic from street to private space.
 - Keep pedestrian and street views in mind for entrances.
 - 2) Front Door
 - Assess door's place in historic façade
 - Consider texture, color, material of door

f. Porch

1) Porch is the defining feature of many houses, whether a simple stoop or entire façade width.

- Helps define building's style and presence on the street.
- Acts as a transition area between the exterior and interior of the residence.
- Somers Point porches tend to be small and utilitarian but still essential to the character of a house.
- Consider integration of existing porch into elevated access

g. Gutters and Downspouts

1) Gutters and downspouts are often prominent on facades of Historic District houses.

2) Examine how rainwater is distributed on the current house.

3) Consider methods of rainwater distribution with new elevation.

2. Access Guidelines

a. Protect and retain features that contribute to the overall historic character of a building.

- 1) Retain/replicate entrances and their functional and decorative features whenever possible.
- 2) Maintain character of original entry pattern for movement from public space to interior.
- 3) If the front door requires replacement, match the design and dimensions of the original.



G2.c: False panel duplicates scale and pattern of elevated porch rail

b. Replicate the texture/color of exterior materials of the historic house in the new sub-story area. Do not add a mix of materials such as stone veneer and stucco unless functionally necessary.

c. Duplicate placement (rhythm) of historic features such as columns or horizontal railings in sub-story area.

d. If adding an understory garage, use horizontal and vertical elements on the garage doors to recreate the original façade rhythm and depth. Do not leave a blank garage door façade facing the street.



G2.d: Garage doors relate to house style and dormer features. Design creates a pedestrian scale

e. Repair any damaged historic features using recognized preservation methods for patching, consolidating, splicing and reinforcing.

f. If replicating an entire historic feature, match the original as much as possible in design, dimension and color but do not try to exactly duplicate.

g. Entryway and porch

1) Maintain the importance of the front door.

2) Make the new entry visible.

3) Whenever possible, retain the type of existing porch, steps and entryway and integrate them into the new entrance elevation.

4) The design of a new entrance, porch or stoop should recall what was replaced and retain compatibility with the historic nature of the building and the street.

5) Modern rail designs are not appropriate on new steps unless replacing similar ones.

6) Front steps should have enclosed risers.

7) Wood should be painted. Rough, unfinished wood steps and landings are not appropriate for the Historic District.

8) Do not cut off the house entrance from the street by replacing an open porch on the front of house with a closed structure.



G2.g1: Main entrance has been hidden at side/rear with street entrance becoming 'back door.'

H NEW CONSTRUCTION

All new construction in Somers Point must comply with state law and Somers Point ordinances with regard to elevation. This means that new homes in the Historic District that are within Flood Hazard Zones V, A and, perhaps, shaded X, will need to be elevated to at least 7 feet freeboard if the City passes a 2 feet above BFE freeboard ordinance for the AE and X flood zones as recommended. Most properties in the Historic District's AE-9 zone already have between 5 feet and 10 feet topographic elevation. Most of the X flood zone properties are at 10- to 15-foot topographic grade.



New construction in Normandy Beach is changing neighborhood scale

New construction within the Historic District must meet the general Historic District design guidelines of § 114-102, which require that a new building "...be visually compatible with its neighbors in spacing, setback, massing, materials, roof shape, window divisions and siding emphasis." New construction that must be built to legislated elevations should utilize the Historic Structure elevation design guidelines generally to ensure that it is

integrated into and supports the overall character of the Historic District.

1. Concerns and decisions

- a. Does the design do damage to the surrounding historic neighborhood by overwhelming adjacent buildings?
- b. Does the proposed design change the street with a measurable change in setback or mass?



Typical Normandy Beach houses replaced after Sandy with new construction

- c. Is the street level façade blank or is it in visible and striking contrast to others in the neighborhood?

2. Guidelines for New Elevated Construction in the Historic District

- a. Utilize the Historic Elevation Guidelines to harmonize new construction with historic character.

b. Site

- 1) Respect the arrangement of surrounding structures, open space and landscape elements characteristic of the area.
- 2) Protect from damage any large plantings that distinguish the street.
- 3) Utilize Elevation Design Guidelines for landscaping in accord with the neighborhood.
- 4) Maintain compatibility with the size and scale of neighbors. Use building step-back to maintain pedestrian street scale when constructing a significantly larger structure than is common historically on the street.
- 5) Do not introduce exotic plant materials or create elaborate hardscaping.



H2.b1: New house in Charleston synchronizes in setback, porch detail and landscaping with historic suburban neighborhood

- c. Keep the sidewalk/pedestrian relationship by designing stairs and porch designs that are visible from the street.

d. Façade

- 1) Utilize patterns of windows and doors reminiscent of the types in the same neighborhood and related to the historic Period of Significance for Somers Point.
- 2) Create façade openings/access points that relate to and can be seen at street level.
- 3) Make roof lines clear and visible.

e. Materials and colors

- 1) Smooth, untextured facades are not characteristic of the Historic District and should be avoided.
- 2) Contrasting window trim to the base color is predominant in the Historic District and will serve to blend new construction into the streetscape.



H2.d New Orleans proposal retains street relationship and shotgun style in modern design