

Main Street Historic District

Encompassing portions of the Mixed Use Zone District

Design Objectives and Guidelines

Policy:

Creative solutions that are compatible with the historic mining character of the Main Street Historic District are strongly encouraged, while designs that seek to contrast with the existing context simply for the sake of being different are discouraged. This will help protect the established character of the district, while also allowing new, compatible design.

This chapter presents guidelines for new construction and alterations to existing non-historic structures in the Main Street Historic District. First, the goals for and characteristics of this district are summarized, and then specific guidelines are presented.

Location

This area covers the Main Street Historic District and is defined by the rear alleys to either side of Main Street itself in the western approach to the city center.

Existing Character

Development in what is now called the Main Street Historic District began with housing built during the early mining era in Aspen. Soon a few small, commercial businesses sprang up on corners in the neighborhood, along with civic buildings such as churches. The early streets were lined with trees which was typical of a residential area. Starting in the 1940s, development of lodging occurred, either as stand-alone hotels and motels or as bed and breakfasts. While some of these more recent buildings may also be of significance, they do not establish the historic context for Main Street.



The Main Street Mixed Use Area extends nine blocks along West Main Street.

Street Pattern

The historic area is defined by the portion of the street block immediately flanking the street. The east-west alignment of the street and the regular street grid imparts a quiet background, discipline and formality within the predominantly small scale variety of older and more recent buildings. Original lot and garden areas still frame the majority of the buildings along the street.

Setbacks should reflect a traditional residential character. Setbacks should be in line with historic and residential context to the extent feasible and they should convey a lawn character. The intent is to reflect the traditional residential appearance at the street, while accommodating new uses.

Streetscape features

- Mature cottonwood trees in the right-of-way provide a shaded environment and sense of rhythm along the street.
- Bands of grass lie between the sidewalk and curb.
- The primary walkway is along the north side of Main Street; however, closer to the Commercial Core District, concrete sidewalks exist on both the north and south sides of Main Street.



Traditional tree-lined streets with smaller residential structures remain an important part of this district.

Building Character

Where larger-scale development has taken place, its impact tends to be moderated by the immediate character and scale of the setting. This smaller scale of development, against a dramatic mountain backdrop, creates a memorable streetscape of generally narrow lots and residential building scale. Building height averages two stories with many single story buildings. Roof form and profile, as well as building orientation, are important characteristics. Building setbacks define a detached relationship to the street and a particular rhythm and character.

Wood is the most common building material and, along with the series of cottonwood trees, helps to maintain a sense of tranquil shade, historical continuity and urban maturity. Residential fencing helps to define lot and street lines, and brings an additional level of detail to the street scene. Brickwork was an early material for larger residences and other materials, such as stucco and manufactured logs, have been introduced by later lodge development.



New development should respect the scale and character of historic structures.



Design Objectives

1. Preserve the integrity of the historic district.

The primary period of significance for Main Street is the mining era in Aspen. The primary objective is to preserve this character while accommodating compatible development and change. Individual buildings from later periods may also be of historic significance. They should be preserved and their context should be respected in future development.

2. Maintain traditional building widths.

People constructed many buildings that were similar in width to nearby structures, and generally in proportion to the lot size. This helped to establish a relatively uniform scale for the neighborhood and, when these buildings were evenly spaced along a block, a sense of rhythm resulted. In such a case, the perceived width of a new building should appear similar in size to that of historic buildings in the area in order to help maintain this sense of visual continuity.

3. Maintain the range of traditional building and roof forms.

A similarity of building forms also contributes to a sense of visual continuity along Main Street. In order to maintain this feature, a new building should have basic roof and building forms that are similar to those seen traditionally. Overall facade proportions also should be in harmony with the context.

4. Maintain the character of traditional materials.

The predominant use of wood siding is another important feature in the district. Building materials of new structures and additions to existing structures should contribute to this visual continuity of the neighborhood by reflecting the scale and texture of traditional materials. While new materials may be considered, they should appear similar to those seen traditionally to establish a sense of visual continuity.



Mature cottonwood trees in the right-of-way provide a shaded environment and sense of rhythm along the street.

5. Incorporate architectural details that are in character with the district.

Entries are clearly defined on most structures in the neighborhood. Porches, porticos and stoops are elements that typically define entries. These features add a one-story element to the fronts of buildings, helping to establish a uniform sense of human scale along the block. They are essential elements of the neighborhood that should be maintained. Other architectural details also contribute to the sense of character of the street, adding visual interest for pedestrians. Their continued use is strongly encouraged.

6. Maintain the characteristics of traditional windows and doors.

The similarity of window and door size and location contributes to a sense of visual continuity along the street. In order to maintain this sense of visual continuity, a new building should maintain the basic window and door proportions and placement patterns seen traditionally in the district.



Conceptual Review Design Guidelines

The following design guidelines shall apply at the conceptual review stage.



The network of streets, alleys and existing pedestrian passageways enhances access in the Main Street Historic District.



The character of the alley can be enhanced by building form.



Maintain the traditional character and function of an alley.

Street & Alley Systems

The street pattern is essential "infrastructure" to the creation and maintenance of the character of Aspen. The circulation pattern provided by the network of streets and alleys should be retained for maximum public access. It should not be enclosed by gating and it should not be spanned by development above. Wherever possible, pedestrian access should be enhanced. The creation of additional public walkways to rear alleys and other public spaces enhances the attraction, permeability, intricacy and interest of the city center.

Street Grid

7.1 Preserve the historic district's street plan.

- Three distinct street grids intersect in the neighborhood (Main Street, side streets and alleys). This layout should be retained.

Alleys

7.2 Maintain the traditional character and function of an alley where it exists.

- Locate buildings and fences along the alley's edge to maintain its narrow width.
- Paving alleys is strongly discouraged.
- Closing an alley is inappropriate.



Parking

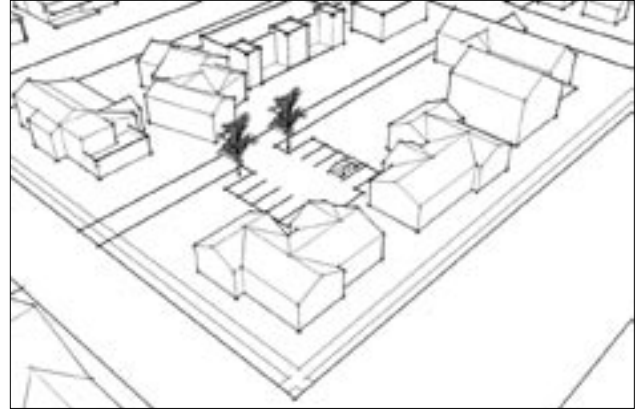
The character of the Main Street District is one which is most appreciated on foot. The human-scale, walkable concentration of streets and spaces lies at the heart of the attraction of the area. The visual impact of parking shall be minimized.

7.3 Parking shall not be positioned between the building and the street. Visual impacts shall be minimized in one or more of the following ways:

- Parking shall be placed underground or in a structure wherever possible.
- Where surface parking must be provided, it shall be located to the rear or the interior of the property, behind the structure.
- Surface parking shall be externally buffered with landscaping, and internally planted and landscaped to soften parking areas.

7.4 Underground parking access shall not have a negative impact on the character of the street. Underground parking access shall be:

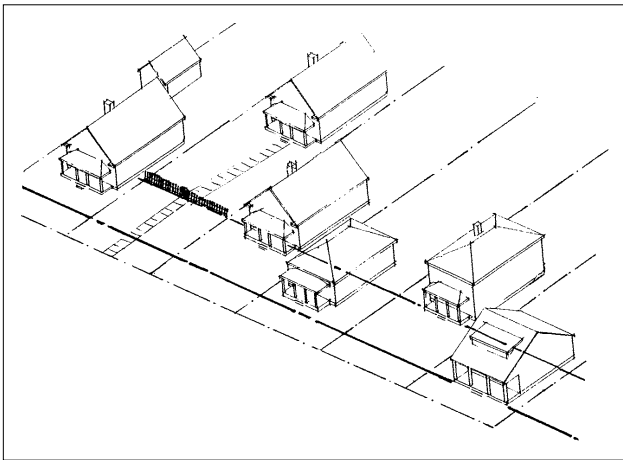
- Located on a secondary street where feasible - except where alley access is feasible.
- Designed with the same attention to detail and materials as the primary building façade.
- Integrated into the building design.



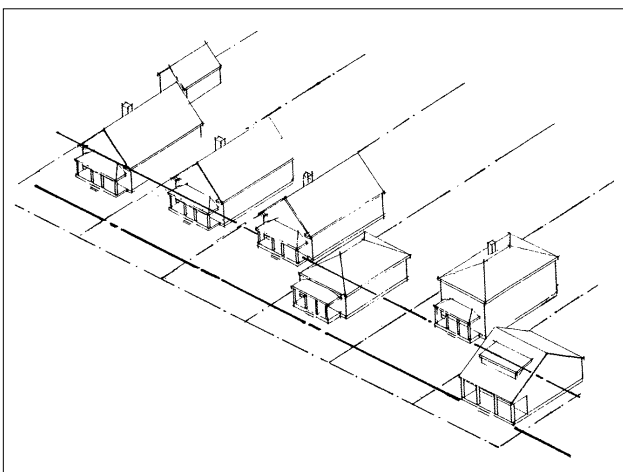
Where surface parking must be provided, it shall be located to the rear of property, behind the structure.



A variety of building setbacks exist along Main Street.



Inappropriate: Although this building has placed a fence in the typical setback range, the building is setback too far from the street.



Appropriate: When constructing a new building, locate it to fit within the range of yard dimensions seen in the block.

Building Placement

Setbacks & Building Alignment

The pattern of principal and side street, as well as the alley, should be retained and enhanced. The predominant pattern and scale of development is varied but well defined. Building alignment varies along the street, but in larger buildings perpendicular ridge lines and street facing gables predominate. The slightly varying setbacks create an orchestrated visual vitality which, along with building scale, should be respected in further development. Mature trees also should be safeguarded.

Corner sites present the scale of the building in a very public three dimensions. Particular attention to design and building configuration to accord with this scale and presence will be required.

Site design features

- Residential buildings have relatively uniform front-setbacks. Although front setbacks are not identical, the minimal variation creates a sense of rhythm along the street.
- Larger homes along Main Street generally have larger front-setbacks, while the smaller miner cottages have smaller front-setbacks.
- Larger residential units are generally located on multiple lots, and centered within the lots.
- Side-setbacks of larger homes are often half- or full lot width.
- Smaller homes have minimal side-setbacks and fill most of the lot width.
- Despite the variety in setback patterns between house sizes, houses generally are oriented towards the street, with their primary entrance facing the street.
- Secondary structures are set towards the rear and sides of the lots along the alleys.
- Commercial units were historically located on corner lots and fronted the sidewalk. More recent commercial buildings are sited similarly to residential patterns.



7.5 Respect historic settlement patterns.

- Site a new building in a way similar to historic buildings in the area. This includes consideration of building setbacks, entry orientation and open space.

7.6 Where a sidewalk exists, maintain its historic material and position.

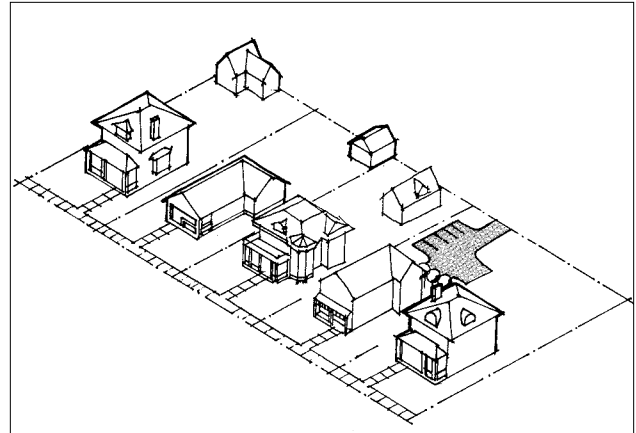
- Historically, sidewalks were detached from the curb, and separated by a planting strip.

7.7 Minimize the use of curb cuts along the street.

- Provide auto access along an alley wherever possible.
- New curb cuts are not permitted.
- Whenever possible, remove an existing curb cut.

Site**7.8 Provide a walk to the primary building entry, perpendicular from the public sidewalk.****Orientation****7.9 Orient a new building in a manner that is similar to the orientation of buildings during the mining era, with the primary entrance facing the street.**

- The building should be oriented parallel to the lot lines, maintaining the traditional grid pattern of the block.
- A structure, or each street-facing unit in the case of a multifamily structure, should have a primary entrance that faces the street. The entrance to the structure should be at an appropriate residential scale and visible from the street.



Provide a walk to the primary building entry, perpendicular from the public sidewalk.



Orient a new building in a manner that is consistent with the orientation of traditional development along Main Street.



Respect historic settlement patterns in a new building.





Victorian residences remain a beloved historical style throughout Aspen.



Similarity of building forms also contribute to the visual continuity along Main Street.



Building and roof form on new structures should be similar in character to their historic neighbors.

Building Alignment

7.10 When constructing a new building, locate it to fit within the range of yard dimensions seen in the block historically during the mining era.

- These include front yard, side yard and rear yard setbacks.
- Setbacks vary in some areas, but generally fall within an established range. A greater variety in setbacks is inappropriate in this context.
- Consider locating within the average range of setbacks along the block.

Secondary Structures

7.11 Locate a new secondary structure in a manner that is similar to those seen historically in the district.

- Secondary structures should be placed along the alley edge.

Building Form

A similarity of building forms also contributes to a sense of visual continuity along Main Street. In order to maintain this feature, a new building should have basic roof and building forms that are similar to those seen traditionally. Overall facade proportions also should be in harmony with the context.

The character of the roof is a major feature of historic buildings in the Main Street District. The similar roof forms contribute to the sense of visual continuity when repeated along the street. In each case, the roof pitch, its materials, size and orientation are all important to the overall character of the building. New construction should not break from this continuity. New structures and their roofs should be similar in character to their historic neighbors.



Building Height, Mass & Scale

The well-defined pattern of building height, mass and scale on Main Street should be preserved. Here the building spacing, scale, height and roof profiles create a design discipline for the form of future development. Larger buildings within the area should step down in scale next to residential units.

7.12 A new structure should step down in scale where it abuts a single story historic structure.

7.13 A new building or addition should reflect the range and variation in building height of the Main Street Historic District.

- Refer to the zone district regulations to determine the maximum height limit on the subject property.
- A minimum second story floor to ceiling height of 9 ft. should be used in a method that is respectful to historic buildings.
- Additional height, as permitted in the zone district, may be added for one or more of the following reasons:
 - The primary function of the building is civic. (i.e. the building is a Museum, Performance Hall, Fire Station, etc.)
 - Some portion of the property is affected by a height restriction due to its proximity to a historic resource, or location within a View Plane, therefore relief in another area may be appropriate.
 - To benefit the livability of Affordable Housing units.
 - To make a demonstrable (to be verified by the Building Department) contribution to the building's overall energy efficiency, for instance by providing improved daylighting.

Building Scale

7.14 Design a new building to appear similar in scale to those in the district during the mining era.

- Generally, a new building should be one to two stories in height.



New infill should maintain the mass and scale of existing development. One story porches and variation in massing reflect the building tradition of the area.



Subdivide the mass of larger structures into smaller "modules" to reflect the traditional scale of development on Main Street.

7.15 On larger structures, subdivide the mass into smaller "modules" that are similar in size to single family residences or Victorian era buildings seen traditionally on Main Street.

- Other subordinate modules may be attached to the primary building form.



Final Review Design Guidelines

The following design guidelines shall apply at the final review stage.



Use building components that are similar in size and shape to those seen traditionally on Main Street.

Building Design & Articulation

Entries are clearly defined on most structures in the neighborhood. Porches, porticos and stoops are elements that typically define entries. These features add a one-story element to the fronts of buildings, helping to establish a uniform sense of human scale along the block. They are essential elements of the neighborhood that should be maintained. Other architectural details also contribute to the character of the street, adding visual interest for pedestrians. Their continued use is strongly encouraged.

Architectural features

- The Main Street District has developed into a mixture of commercial and residential forms.
- The Main Street District is composed of varying architectural styles reflecting the development phases of Aspen.
- The historic mining era is responsible for the majority of small miner's cottages and larger high-style homes, although considerable infill has occurred due to the ski industry.
- Infill buildings include samples of Chalet style and Rustic style buildings.
- Residential buildings are primarily vernacular designs, with highlights of Queen Anne buildings.

7.16 Use building components that are similar in size and shape to those of the Victorian era residences seen traditionally on Main Street.

- These include windows, doors and porches.
- Overall, details should be modest in character.



7.17 The imitation of older historic styles is discouraged.

- This blurs the distinction between old and new buildings.
- Highly complex and ornately detailed revival styles that were not a part of Aspen's history are especially discouraged.

Windows & Doors

The similarity of window and door size and location contributes to a sense of visual continuity along the street. In order to maintain this sense of visual continuity, a new building should maintain the basic window and door proportions and placement patterns seen traditionally in the district.



Maintain the scale and proportion of window and door size and location along Main Street.

7.18 The retail entrance should be at the sidewalk level.

- All entrances shall be ADA compliant.
- On sloping sites the retail frontage should be as close to a level entrance as possible.

7.19 Incorporate an airlock entry into the plan for all new structures.

- An airlock entry that projects forward of the primary façade at the sidewalk edge is inappropriate.
- Adding temporary entries during the winter season detracts from the character of the historic district.
- Using a temporary vinyl or fabric "airlock" to provide protection from winter weather is not permitted.





Wood is one of the most common building materials along Main Street.



Use materials on the exterior façade of buildings that convey a human scale.

Architectural Materials

The existing palette of building materials within the Main Street Historic District is an essential part of the sense of evolution of the area and its current character. Primarily wood and masonry define the majority of the area and express both human scale, structure, detail and a sense of historical continuity. These materials have been used in recent lodge development within the area.

The predominant use of wood siding is another important feature in the district. Building materials of new structures and additions to existing structures should contribute to this visual continuity of the neighborhood by reflecting the scale and texture of traditional materials. While new materials may be considered, they should appear similar to those seen traditionally to establish a sense of visual continuity.

Materials

- Historically, masonry and wood buildings characterized the district.
- Stucco and manufactured logs are seen among the infill buildings from the early ski-era.

7.20 Use building materials that are similar to those used historically.

- When selecting materials, reflect the simple and modest character of historic materials and their placement.

Roofing Materials

7.21 Use roofing materials that are similar in appearance to those seen historically.



Paving & Landscaping

Certain settings and buildings within the city are associated with the quality of design and materials in paving and / or landscaping. It is important that this be recognized and retained where it exists, is of historic relevance, or otherwise successful.

The site and setting of all development shall be enhanced by design of both paving and landscaping within any proposal. Proposed enhancements within the public right of way shall form part of a comprehensive improvement proposal for the street or area, and approval will be required.

Landscape design features

- Some historic houses still retain their front yard original fence patterns that create a distinct residential character. These fences are low and transparent in nature.
- Landscaping is dominated by shade trees along the right-of-way, although lilacs are common plantings adjacent to houses.

7.22 Landscaping and paving should have the following characteristics:

- Enhance the street scene
- Integrate the development with its setting
- Reflect the quality of the architectural materials

7.23 Landscaping should create a buffer between the street and sidewalk.



Landscaping should create a buffer between the street and sidewalk.



