

Historic Preservation Design Guidelines:

The Mill Hill Historic District

The Mill Hill Historic District is one of eight municipally designated Historic Districts in the City of Trenton. It is also listed on the State and National Registers of Historic Places. First settled by European immigrants in 1679, these Quaker religious refugees led by Mahlon Stacy built farmhouses and a grist mill in and around what is now Mill Hill and Mill Hill Park. Once the Delaware and Raritan Canal, and later, the railroads, were built, Mill Hill and the City of Trenton really took off. Trenton became a booming industrial town, and Mill Hill was built with a variety of homes, businesses, churches and even small industries. After a long period of decline and the threat of wholesale demolition, Mill Hill became, and still is, a beacon of restoration and revitalization. Because of this history and the neighborhood's historic designations, exterior renovation work in Mill Hill is regulated by City ordinance and requires review and approval by the City's Landmarks Commission.

These Historic Preservation Design Guidelines were originally compiled by The Old Mill Hill Society's Architectural Committee for use by Mill Hill homeowners, and have now been revised in particular to assist residents and property owners applying for the Old Mill Hill Society's Restoration Grants. The overall purpose of these guidelines is to assist in the restoration and rehabilitation of homes in our neighborhood so that they meet the requirements of the City's Historic Preservation Ordinance as well as the Secretary of the Interior's [Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties](#).

When Mill Hill residents and property owners are planning an exterior renovation project, ranging from repairs of exterior woodwork to major window and door repairs or replacement, an application to the Trenton Landmarks Commission must be completed prior to the start of the project so that the proposed work can be reviewed, revised if necessary and then approved. This includes exterior work, such as painting of woodwork, that would not typically require a building permit. The overall purpose of the neighborhood's historic designation and the implementation of the City's Historic Preservation Ordinance is to acknowledge, preserve and restore Mill Hill's unique history and architectural character. The preservation of Mill Hill is part of what makes our neighborhood such a special place to live, and helps to preserve and enhance our property values and quality of life. These guidelines are intended to assist you with your submissions to the Commission and completing exterior renovation work that preserves and enhances the historic character of your property.

Any questions you have may be directed to members of the committee or to Andres Lomi, the City of Trenton staff person assigned to the Trenton Landmarks Commission, 609-989-3582; alomi@trentonnj.org.

A. Exterior Repairs and Restoration

These guidelines mainly address exterior repair and restoration work on the elevations of houses and buildings in the Mill Hill Historic District that are visible from "public ways", i.e. the neighborhood's streets and alleys. Work on the rear of houses and buildings that are not visible from public ways does not receive the same level of scrutiny by the Landmarks Commission as it doesn't impact the character of the District from the public's point of view. Again, before exterior work begins on a home or property in Mill Hill, the property-owner must complete an application to the Trenton Landmarks Commission, appear at the Commission's next public hearing and receive approval.

The neighborhood is composed in general of two- and three -story rowhouses, some with wood clapboard exteriors, many constructed of brick. Architectural styles include Federal, Greek Revival, Italianate, Carpenter Gothic, Second Empire and Queen Anne. "A Field Guide to American Houses" by Virginia and Lee McAlester is an excellent resource for understanding the character-defining features of each of these house styles.

The primary goal in any exterior building preservation or restoration project should be the repair and preservation of existing historic features and, where possible, restoration to the original 19th or early 20th century design. Property owners are responsible for preserving, repairing or restoring original design details wherever possible. If specific details of the building's original design are unknown, repair or replacement should conform to the period in which the building was built. You may be able to find old photographs of your property at the Trenton Public Library's Trentoniana Collection.

Exterior Siding Materials: Most homes in Mill Hill were originally sided with wood clapboard, brick, brownstone and occasionally stucco. If your home has any of these original materials, they should be repaired and preserved. New exterior materials should be in keeping with the original brick, stone or wood construction. Installation of other materials, such as aluminum, steel or vinyl siding, asphalt and asbestos siding, porcelain enamel, imitation brick or stone, corrugated metal, plastic, and glazed or bright metal on elevations visible from public ways is not permitted.

Brick: Brick is probably the most prevalent and important exterior façade material in Mill Hill. It is important to treat it carefully so that its appearance is preserved and so that it will last long into the future.

Exterior brick should not be painted. If it has already been painted, the condition of the original brick surface should be evaluated to see if the paint can be carefully and safely removed without damaging the surface of the historic brick. Under no circumstances should brick be sandblasted, and all cleaning materials should be the gentlest possible.

In general, exterior brick should not be cleaned, and abrasive methods should never be used. If the existing brick is soiled, cleaning methods should be tested prior to general cleaning to make sure that they are gentle and won't damage the brick.

Over time, the mortar joints between the bricks will need to be repaired. This is called "repointing", and the replacement mortar material must be carefully selected to match the color, texture, width and overall character of the original mortar joints (pointing). In addition, the new mortar must be specified so that when it cures it is not harder than the historic brick as this will cause long-term freeze thaw damage. Many homes in Mill Hill have very narrow mortar joints; this is an important feature that is difficult to replicate. Only qualified historic preservation masons should work on the exterior brickwork on Mill Hill houses.

Brownstone: Many Mill Hill homes have brownstone bases, foundations and/or decorative brownstone features, particularly around windows. These are important character-defining features and should be preserved and repaired. Unfortunately, brownstone is a soft stone that deteriorates over time. If the brownstone on your home needs to be repaired, a qualified historic preservation mason should be used as well as appropriate materials that closely match the appearance, texture and color of the original.

Wood Siding: Many of Mill Hill's oldest homes have exterior wood siding, typically clapboard. This should be preserved and protected. When repainting, loose paint should be carefully removed, bare spots primed, and two coats of appropriate, high quality paint applied. New colors should be carefully selected to match colors that were available at the time the house was constructed and that are consistent with its architectural style.

Other Siding Materials: Prior to Mill Hill's designation as a Historic District, a number of homes were inappropriately re-sided with non-historic materials, including aluminum, asphalt, asbestos and "brick-face" (stucco finished to approximate a brick or stone appearance). While these materials are inappropriate and not historic, property owners cannot be forced to remove them. That being said, restoration to the original historic material is highly encouraged and is an example of the kind of work funded by the Mill Hill Restoration Grant program.

Exterior Decorative Wood Trim: Most homes in Mill Hill have decorative exterior wood trim, including trim and moldings around windows, large cornices with moldings, and decorative brackets. These are important features that should be preserved and repaired. If pieces are damaged beyond repair, they should be replaced "in-kind" to match the original material, configuration and appearance. When repainting, the surfaces should be carefully prepared and the new paint colors should be selected to be consistent with the structure's architectural period and style.

Doors and Windows: Original, historic and historically appropriate wood doors and windows should be preserved and repaired. Historic wood windows can be made more energy efficient with the installation of interior storm windows. New exterior storm windows are not permitted. If existing historic windows are beyond repair, replacements must be wood and match the original opening size and the historic window configuration. Many Mill Hill homes have windows with arched tops; if these are being replaced, the new windows must match the original arched configuration exactly. For all replacements, the window sash should contain the original number of window panes that is appropriate for the house style; depending on the style of the house, these might be six panes over six panes, two panes over two panes, or one over one. Snap-in or other imitation window muntins are not permitted; true divided light or simulated divided light windows should be specified. Metal or vinyl window sashes and frames are also not permitted. Window and door sills and lintels should be made of the original wood, cast iron, stone or brownstone. Sheet metal covering of sills is not permitted.

Original or historically appropriate doors, door frames and transoms should be repaired or restored. Doors that are not original and not historically appropriate should be replaced with material and of a design consistent with the period of the building. Metal, vinyl or fiberglass doors and door frames are not permitted on public facing elevations. Door hardware, including knobs, escutcheons, knockers, letter slots, bells, house numbers and hinges, also should be in keeping with the design period of the building. Metal awnings are not permitted on windows or doors of any building.

Shutters: Original or historically appropriate shutters should be preserved and repaired. When installing new shutters, they should be constructed of painted wood and their style and design should be appropriate to the design and style of the building. Homeowners should consider installing shutters where the windows were originally designed for shutters. Typically, shutters on first floor windows were of raised panel design, with the upper floors having louvers. Shutters should be operable and sized to fit the window openings exactly. If the original windows are arched, the shutters should also be arched

and constructed to fit the window opening exactly. Shutters should include hinges, bolts and tiebacks in keeping with the design period.

Storm/screen windows and doors: Storm and screen windows and doors are not permitted on the facade of any building facing a public way.

Air conditioners and window fans: Window air conditioners and fans are not permitted on the front of any buildings. Air conditioners and fans on the sides or backs of buildings should be placed to minimize visibility from the street or public way.

Chimneys and vents: Existing, historic chimneys that are visible from public ways should be preserved and repaired. This is particularly important for some of the Federal style houses that have double chimneys on the side elevation. New chimneys should be designed and located consistent with the period of the house. Plumbing Vents should be located atop buildings and should be located so that they are least visible from public ways.

Gutters and downspouts: Every structure is required to have gutters or downspouts sufficient to handle the rainfall collecting on the roof and to prevent water spilling onto the exteriors of the building or onto the sidewalks and neighboring properties. Many houses have recessed gutters on the front elevations. These should be preserved and repaired. Where visible, exposed gutters should be half-round, either painted galvanized steel or copper. Downspouts on front or visible elevations should be securely attached to the building. They should be round or corrugated round and made of copper or painted metal to blend with the building. Cast iron downspout boots and fancy roof line scuppers atop a downspout should be retained and repaired.

Stoops and porches: Historic stoops and porches visible from public ways were typically made of wood, often with decorative columns, railings, spindles and brackets, brownstone (or some other stone), decorative cast iron, or in later cases, brick and concrete. Original and historically appropriate stoops and porches should be repaired and preserved. Existing stoops and porches that are not in keeping with historically appropriate design characteristics should be modified or replaced when renovation work is being proposed. When replacing inappropriate porches or stoops, the new design should fit with the style and architectural character of the building. Where stoops or porches were originally wood and are visible from public ways, the new stoops or porches should be of painted wood, including the flooring, which should be tongue and groove, not "deck" flooring. Since stoops and porches are exposed to the elements, weather resistant, paintable wood, such as cedar and sustainably harvested mahogany, should be used.

Porch Railings: Railings should be of original design and made of wood, wrought iron, cast iron or decorative painted steel in keeping with the construction material of the stoop or porch itself and the historic design of the house. Porch railings, porch roof supports and decorative gingerbread should be of appropriate historic design and made of wood. Pipe railings, pressure treated railings and decking, etc., are not permitted on stoops or porches visible from public ways. Porches and doors require lighting fixtures of a design appropriate to the period of the house and in keeping with the design of the area.

Foundations: Where present, the original exposed field stone, brownstone or brick foundation walls on elevations visible from public ways should be preserved and repaired. Where present, the original raised

wide pointing on stone foundations should be retained and restored. Original doors and windows in facade foundations should also be retained and restored.

Cellar windows: Original wood cellar windows visible from the street should be repaired and preserved. When replacement is required, the new windows should be made of painted wood and fit the existing opening exactly. Vinyl or aluminum, etc., replacement cellar windows are not permitted on facades visible from public ways. Original decorative wrought or cast iron window grills should be retained and preserved. When installing new grills, they should be made of decorative painted cast iron or steel of design appropriate to the period of the house.

Fences, walls and gates: Fences and gates visible from public ways should be constructed of wrought or cast iron, decorative steel that simulates cast iron, wooden picket, or Victorian pattern cut boards. The design should be compatible with the period of the building. Fences and gates of cyclone or other wire construction, stockade, basket weave, chain link and similar commercial fencing, and walls of concrete or cinder blocks, etc., are not permitted.

Installing or replacing plaques of any kind (commemorative or informative) on the facade of the building requires approval from the Trenton Landmarks Commission and should be appropriate to the period and design of the house and neighborhood.

Utility Services and antennas: Telephone wires, electric service wires and meters, TV aerials, satellite disks, lead wires, and oil fill pipes are not permitted on the front of buildings or where they are visible from the street. Where there is no choice about location, every effort should be made to hide or obscure these elements.

Lights and signs: Neon, flashing, or blinking signs are not permitted. Design and placement of lights and signs (on commercial properties) must enhance the architectural quality of the area. Early or historically appropriate lighting should be kept; new lighting visible from the public way should be decorative and appropriate to the period and design of the house or building.

Exterior Colors: Exterior painting schemes should be chosen from the range of colors appropriate for the period and style of each home. As a rule, the homes in Mill Hill were constructed during periods when bright white exterior paint was not used.

Other features which might not have been present on the original building but were common to the period are permitted if they don't damage or obscure the historic structure. Examples of these features include ornamental iron porch railings, carriage lamps, iron foot scrapers, and 19th century mail slots.

B. Additions:

Additions to homes and structures in Mill Hill that are visible from public ways are rare and should be carefully considered so that they don't detract from the character and configuration of the original house. The addition should be readily discernible as later construction, but its design, materials and scale should be compatible with the design, materials and scale of the original.

C. New Construction:

Over the years, several infill structures and houses have been added to Mill Hill streetscape with varying degrees of success. In general, new construction should not be slavish copies of historic styles or structures, but should be designed to fit with the general design characteristics, materials, height, scale and features of the Mill Hill Historic District. New architectural neighbors are welcome, as long as they make the attempt to fit into Mill Hill's long and distinguished architectural history!

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