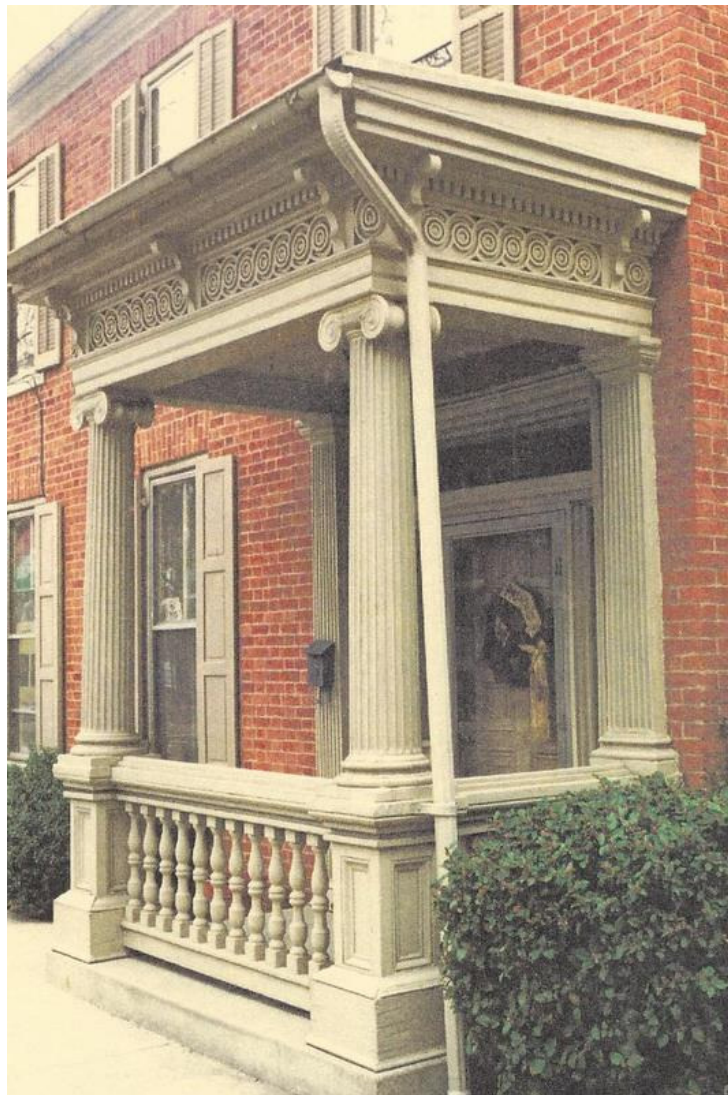


Mercersburg Design Guide

A Guide for Maintaining and Rehabilitation Buildings
in the Mercersburg Historic District

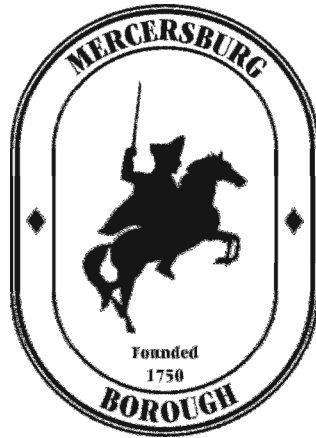


Borough of Mercersburg

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Welcome to the Mercersburg Historic District
Listed on the National Register of Historic Places

Mercersburg Historical Architectural Review Board
Borough of Mercersburg



Certified Local Government Program
Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission

These guidelines have been funded jointly by a grant from the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission and the Borough of Mercersburg.



Pennsylvania
Historical & Museum
Commission

INTRODUCTION

Purpose of this Reference Guide

These guidelines are intended to be an easy reference for property owners within the Mercersburg Historic District. The primary goal is to help those who wish to do repairs or make alterations to buildings in the historic district understand the process for getting approval to begin the work.

It is divided into sections by the type of work being undertaken. You may use the entire guide as a reference or just use the applicable section.

Introduction

Mercersburg is rich in 18th and 19th century residential and small commercial buildings that reflect a variety of architectural styles and the history of the Borough. It is this collection of buildings, sites and features that creates a setting unique to Mercersburg. The preservation of the Borough's historic district benefits all its citizens as well as visitors to the community.

Why is it important to preserve our town?

To many people the desire to preserve comes from a simple need to retain linkages with the past. While libraries and museums hold countless treasures of the past for the curious visitor; buildings, structures and sites are among the most important and readily accessible pieces of our past. The arrangement, size, shape and form of buildings, spaces, and structures give towns like Mercersburg their identity. Once lost, the unique identity of a town and its surrounding area is irretrievable.

Another reason for preservation is the tremendous **value of reusing our existing buildings**. It is simply more cost effective to rehabilitate existing buildings and their architectural components than to remove and dispose of old materials such as doors, windows, shutters and porches. **Properly maintained, these components can have a long, useful life.**



MERCERSBURG: AN ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY

Mercersburg was founded in 1750 by William Smith. The town was situated on an important trade route linking the western frontier with the port city of Baltimore, Maryland. Most of the buildings standing today in Mercersburg date from the last quarter of the 18th century through the first quarter of the 20th century. Mercersburg follows a typical Pennsylvania town plan with main streets intersecting at the town square. Characteristic of many Pennsylvania towns, buildings are sited even with the sidewalk without front yards or setbacks.



Mercersburg has a variety of both residential and commercial buildings constructed of log, stone or brick. Most log buildings have been covered with wood siding. Eighteenth and nineteenth century vernacular forms of Georgian, Federal, Greek Revival and Italianate architectural styles are found in Mercersburg. There are also a few high style examples of Queen Anne, Classical Revival and Colonial Revival dating from the early 20th century.

In addition to its buildings, important character-defining

features of the town are brick sidewalks with limestone curbs, tree-lined streets, stables, carriage houses, smokehouses, outhouses and other outbuildings that grace the back lots and line the alleys. Much of this manmade environment is remarkably intact.



WHAT IS THE MERCERSBURG HISTORIC DISTRICT?

The Mercersburg Historic District is a collection of compatible structures dating from the late 18th through the early 20th centuries. The district encompasses the older central portions of the Borough. The Mercersburg Historic District actually has two distinct designations.

In 1975 the Mercersburg Borough Council established the Mercersburg Historic Architectural Review Board district through the passage of an ordinance authorized under the Pennsylvania General Assembly Historic District Act (1961). This district provides a way for citizens and property owners to recognize and protect the special character of their community. This ordinance is designed to ensure that the essential characteristics of this district are preserved by requiring any exterior changes to buildings within this district to be reviewed by the HARB prior to the work being completed.

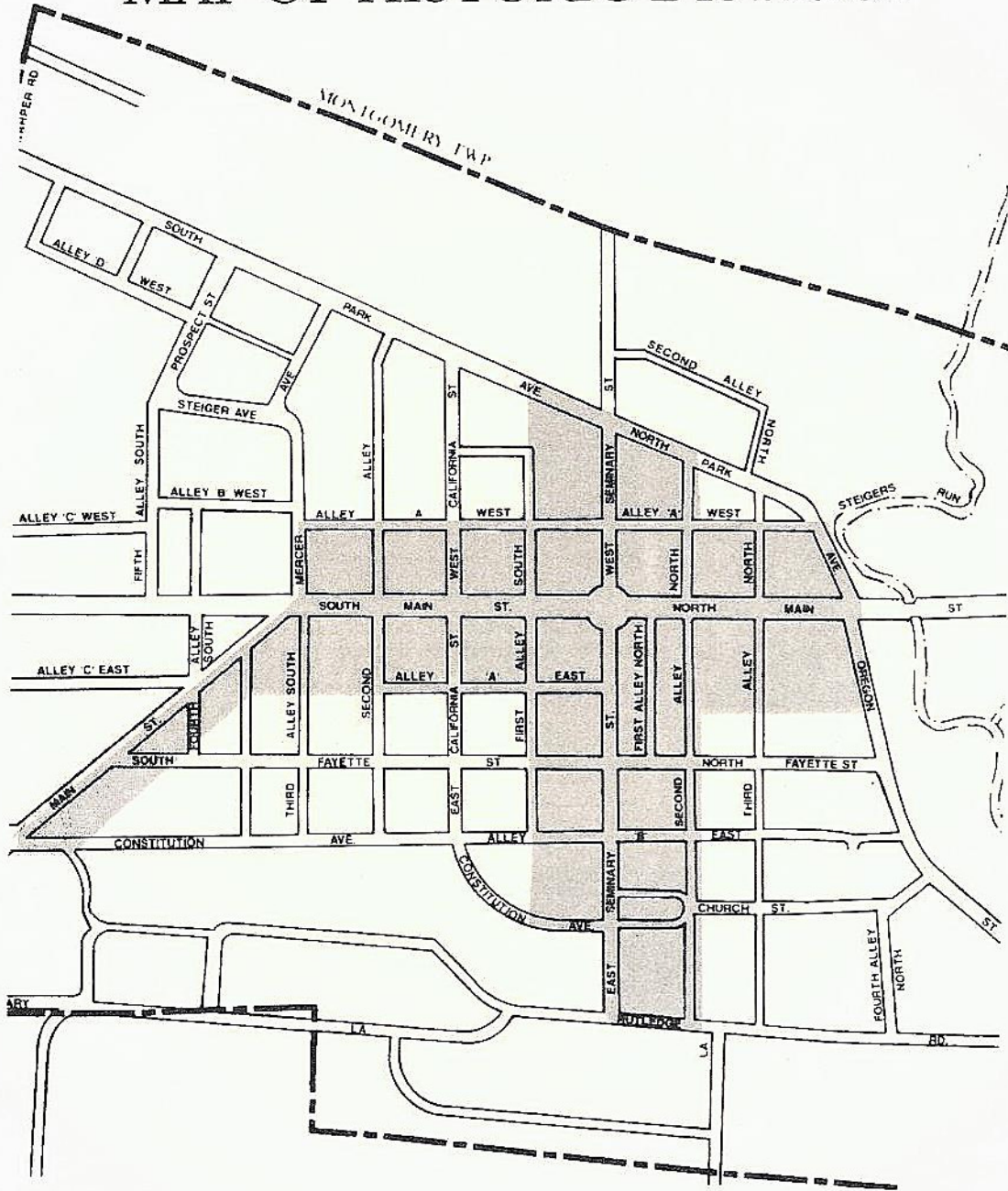
Additionally, the historic district was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1978 and was expanded in 1988. The National Register of Historic Places was established by the United States Congress in 1966 to create a list of properties, including districts that are significant to American history and culture. Listed properties are protected from federal funded or licensed projects that could damage or destroy historic resources. Listing on the National Register of Historic Places may make property owners eligible for federal income tax credits for the rehabilitation of income producing properties.



While the boundaries of both districts (HARB and National Register) are the same, it is the HARB district designation that requires work to be reviewed prior to commencement.

MERCERSBURG HISTORIC DISTRICT

MAP OF HISTORIC DISTRICT



NOTE:

Boundaries of district are not exact on map.

THE HARB PROCESS

So you want to do some work on the exterior of your house, now what?

If your building is located within the Mercersburg Historic District (see map), you will need to submit an application to have the work approved by the Historical and Architectural Review Board (HARB) **BEFORE** you begin the work.

Any activity that alters the appearance of your building and can be seen from the public right of way (streets AND alleys) must be reviewed by Mercersburg's HARB.

What is HARB?

HARB (Historical and Architectural Review Board) is made up of members of the Mercersburg community appointed by the Mercersburg Borough Council. The Board includes a registered architect, a licensed real estate broker, the Borough's codes official, and four volunteers with knowledge of and interest in historic preservation.

What does HARB do?

HARB is an advisory board to Borough Council. It is HARB's responsibility to review all changes to the exteriors of

buildings within the Mercersburg Historic District to determine if the work is appropriate to the character of the district and meets the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation*. Their recommendations are forwarded to the Mercersburg Borough Council, who gives final approval.

The establishment of a HARB district in Mercersburg is official recognition that many of the Borough's buildings are of architectural, cultural, and historic value. Development, growth, changing fashions in building styles and attempts to modernize, weatherize, and remodel put constant pressure on owners to change the appearance of their historic buildings. HARB tries to mitigate the cumulative effects of these changes by reviewing each change as it is proposed, to make sure that every effort is made to preserve the historic integrity of the buildings in the district.

Just as a zoning ordinance protects neighborhoods from uses that would be incompatible and inappropriate, a historic preservation ordinance protects against changes to individual historic buildings that would damage their unique character.

THE HARB PROCESS

How do I know if I have to submit an application to HARB?

If your property is located within the boundaries of the Mercersburg Historic District (see map), you must submit an application for a Certificate of Appropriateness describing your proposed work plans for review by HARB if the work will alter any exterior architectural feature visible from a public street or way. This includes the rear of buildings, garages or outbuildings visible from the alley. It also includes the installation of signage and fencing and the chemical and/or water cleaning of any masonry surface. It does not include painting a previously painted surface. **HARB has no jurisdiction over the choice of paint colors.** Proposals for demolition and new construction must also be submitted for approval by HARB.

How do I submit an application to HARB and when does HARB meet?

HARB meets regularly on the 1st Tuesday of every month at 7:00 p.m. in Borough Council chambers. Applications to appear on the meeting agenda are due the preceding Tuesday by noon. Applications are available at Borough Hall and on the website:

<http://www.mercersburg.org/borough/pdfs/MercersburgHistoricalAndArchitecturalReview-BoardApplication.pdf>

Applicants must give their name, home address, and telephone number on the application, as well as that of their contractor, if one has been selected. A complete description of the work must also be given. Specification information and samples of proposed materials are strongly recommended

What work does HARB review?

- **Exterior Changes** visible from any public right of way on all properties within the historic district, even if the property is vacant or contains buildings that are not historic. This includes replacement of windows and doors!
- **Changes to property features** including signs, awnings, fences, handicap ramps, sheds, decks, pools, sidewalks and all other built features of a property.
- **Demolition** of existing building (whether they are historic or not)
- **New Construction** including additions to existing buildings

THE HARB PROCESS

What work does HARB not review?

- **Repair and Maintenance** projects where the color, size, texture, shape and composition of building materials remains unchanged.
- **Interior Changes**
- **Landscaping** including street trees, shrubs, etc. HARB does review built features such as walls, fences, driveways and decks.

How does HARB make its decisions?

In order to protect the historic character of the district, HARB considers:

- The effect that a proposed change will have upon the general historic and architectural nature of the historic district, not just the building itself;
- The appropriateness of exterior changes to architectural features which can be seen from a public right of way; and
- The general design, arrangement, texture, and material of the proposed work on the building and the relation of these factors to similar features of buildings in the historic district.

To help make its decision, HARB members apply the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation* (See Page 12). These standards are guidelines developed by the United States Department of the Interior. They are accepted as the national standard for rehabilitating historic buildings.

At the HARB meeting, the applicant or his or her representative, presents their proposed plans and the HARB members can ask questions or make suggestions. After HARB has considered all the issues, it votes on the proposal and sends its recommendation to Borough Council.

What happens after my application has been reviewed by HARB?

HARB recommendations for approval or denial of the proposed projects are forwarded to the Mercersburg Borough Council, who decides whether or not the project will receive a Certificate of Appropriateness. Council usually meets the 2nd and 4th Monday of each month, so generally HARB recommendations are reviewed within one week of the HARB meeting. Once Council has approved the application, the Borough staff can issue the Certificate of Appropriateness during their regular business hours. Projects may not begin until a Certificate of Appropriateness is received.

THE HARB PROCESS

What happens if HARB or Council denies my application?

If your proposed work is not approved, you can meet with Borough staff, HARB or the Borough's historic preservation consultant to discuss ways to undertake the work so that it will meet the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards*.

Is this Certificate of Appropriateness the same as a building permit?

No, the building permit process is separate from the HARB process. While some work within the historic district may not need a building permit, it still must receive a Certificate of Appropriateness.

When can I start my work?

Work can begin as soon as a Certificate of Appropriateness is received from the Borough.

What happens if I do work without HARB or Borough Council approval?

If a property owner initiates work without a Certificate of Appropriateness, a stop work order may be issued and the owner may be required to pay a fine. Work may not

resume until HARB and Borough Council approval is obtained.

How long does all this take?

From initial application, review by HARB, approval by Borough Council and issue of Certificate of Appropriateness, the HARB process usually takes 3-4 weeks. It is important that you plan this time into your project schedule.

HARB also encourages informational discussions with property owners at regularly scheduled HARB meetings prior to submission of a formal application. Contact the Borough and asked to be placed on the agenda for an informal discussion.

I'm in a hurry! Isn't there some way around this process?

All projects that result in a visible change to the exterior of your property as seen from a public right of way require HARB review. So if you would rather not go through the HARB process, you can always just maintain the current appearance of the property. If you do not change your property, HARB review is not necessary.

In some rare cases, where emergency work is needed, an expedited review can take place to allow the repairs to be made

THE HARB PROCESS

quickly. HOWEVER, the work will still receive a full review by HARB and Borough Council after the fact. It is important that the emergency work is undertaken carefully and according to the requirements set forth by the Borough staff when the emergency approval is given. Otherwise, work may need to be redone.

Where Do I Go for Technical Assistance?

Property owners can obtain FREE advice from the Borough's Historic Preservation Consultant on appropriate changes, materials and cost effective maintenance techniques. Contact the Borough office to obtain this free service.



Please refer to the last section of these guidelines (*Where Can I Find More Information?*) for additional free resources.

How do I use these Guidelines?

HARB is required to evaluate all proposed work and determine if it will meet the *Secretary of the Interior's Standard for Rehabilitation* (see Standards on the next page). However, these *Standards* do not provide detail on how to address specific rehabilitation issues. This Design Guide has been developed to provide some guidance on appropriate treatment of historic buildings and changes to the building's individual components.

This design guide is a tool for property owners, design professionals, contractors, HARB and Borough Council. These guidelines are not meant to be rigid restrictions. They are meant to be used as guiding principles that, when followed, will result in the sound preservation of Mercersburg's historic buildings.

As a property owner, you are encouraged to review these guidelines when planning changes to your property. Early consultation with HARB will provide for the most flexibility in planning your project.

SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR'S STANDARDS

SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR'S STANDARDS FOR REHABILITATION*

1. A property will be used as it was historically or be given a new use that requires minimal change to its distinctive materials, features, spaces, and spatial relationships.
2. The historic character of a property will be retained and preserved. The removal of distinctive materials or alteration of features, spaces, and spatial relationships that characterize a property will be avoided.
3. Each property will be recognized as a physical record of its time, place, and use. Changes that create a false sense of historical development, such as adding conjectural features or elements from other historic properties, will not be undertaken.
4. Changes to a property that have acquired historic significance in their own rights will be retained and preserved.
5. Distinctive materials, features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a property will be preserved.
6. Deteriorated historic features will be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of the deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature will match the old in design, color, texture, and, where possible, materials. Replacement of missing features will be substantiated by documentary and physical evidence.
7. Chemical or physical treatments, if appropriate, will be undertaken using the gentlest means possible. Treatments that cause damage to historic materials will not be used.
8. Archeological resources will be protected and preserved in place. If such resources must be disturbed, mitigation measures will be undertaken.
9. New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction will not destroy historic materials, features, and spatial relationships that characterize a property. The new work shall be differentiated from the old and will be compatible with the historic materials, features, size, scale and proportions, and massing to protect the integrity of the property and its environment.
10. New additions or adjacent or related new construction will be undertaken in such a manner that, if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment would be unimpaired.

* U.S. Department of the Interior, *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties*, 1995.

APPLYING THE STANDARDS

Identify, Retain and Preserve

Rehabilitation begins with identifying the form and detailing of those architectural materials and features that are important in defining the building's historic character. First priority should always be to retain and preserve those features.

Protect and Maintain

Protection of important architectural features involves the least amount of intervention necessary including maintenance. This can involve cleaning, caulking, painting, rust removal and general care of all features.

Repair

When the physical condition of character-defining features requires additional work, repairing is recommended. Once again, this should be done with the least amount of intervention possible to accomplish the work. Patching, splicing, consolidating and reinforcing are recognized preservation methods. Repair can also include limited replacement-in-kind of deteriorated or missing features. Although using the same material is preferred, substitute materials may be acceptable if the essential form and design will remain the same visually.

Replace

If the level of deterioration or damage of a feature is not repairable, then replacement is appropriate. If the essential form and detailing of the deteriorated element is still evident, it should be used as a model to create the new feature. First priority should be to replace the entire element in-kind with the same material. If that is not possible, a substitute material should be carefully chosen that matches as closely as possible.

APPLYING THE STANDARDS

Design for Missing Features

When an entire feature is missing, it no longer plays a role in defining the historic character of the building. However, if it can be accurately reproduced using historical, pictorial and physical evidence, it should be reinstalled. However, a second acceptable option for the replacement feature is a new design that is compatible with the remaining character-defining features of the historic building. The new design should always take into account the size, scale, and material of the historic building itself and, most importantly, should be clearly differentiated so that a false historical appearance is not created.

Alterations/Additions to Historic Buildings

The construction of an exterior addition to a historic building should be avoided, if possible. If a new addition is the only option, it should be designed and constructed to be clearly differentiated from the historic building and so that the character-defining features are not radically changed, obscured, damaged, or destroyed. It should also be located on the least prominent elevation of the building and should not overpower the existing building in size or siting.

Energy Efficiency/Accessibility Considerations/Health and Safety Considerations

It is important to understand that work will be needed on historic buildings to meet accessibility requirements and health and safety code requirements; or retrofitting measures to conserve energy. Although this work is quite often an important aspect of rehabilitation projects, it is usually not a part of the overall process of protecting or repairing character-defining features. Instead, this work is assessed for its potential negative impact on the building's historic character. For this reason, particular care must be taken not to radically change, obscure, damage, or destroy character-defining materials or features in the process of rehabilitation work to meet code and energy requirements.