

# GUIDELINES FOR NEW CONSTRUCTION: HISTORIC CONTEXT

The City of Ravenna has grown and evolved over the 200 plus years since its founding in 1799. Ravenna's link to the Pennsylvania-Ohio Canal in the 1840s, and early railway connections in the 1850s helped it to become a leading commercial and industrial center for the region. It also flexed to become a bustling community aiding the war efforts during the middle of the 20th century with the Ravenna Arsenal employing thousands of workers. As the City grew and prospered over these time periods, new buildings were constructed in the downtown area that reflected popular architectural styles and available building materials. The resulting collection of buildings represents several different periods in the City's history and tells the story of Ravenna's history visually, through its architecture. This architectural diversity is unified, however, by several common elements:

1. Commercial façades align and form an even plane along West Main Street.
2. There is consistency in overall building height, with two- and three-story buildings the most dominant. Occasional multi-story buildings (Riddle Blocks and Phoenix Blocks on East Main) reflect a vibrant Ravenna in the early- to mid-20th century.
3. Buildings contain three parts (storefront, upper facade and cornice), unifying the streetscape.

Historically, builders in downtown Ravenna keyed their designs to what had come before, building upon existing traditions. New buildings were

designed to fit into, and enhance, the existing architectural framework. Building design today shall be guided in the same way, taking cues from the visual patterns and physical character of surrounding buildings.

New construction may take the form of:

1. **An infill building** closes a gap in a row of commercial facades, constructed on a site with one or more of its walls adjoining buildings on adjacent sites. The infill site is vacant because it was either never developed or a building was removed from the site.
2. **A new free-standing structure** is on an open site some distance away from neighboring buildings. It may be acceptable to construct a freestanding building on the site of an underutilized parking lot.
3. **An addition to an existing building** connects to that building on one or more elevations and levels.

In downtown Ravenna, opportunities exist for all three types of construction, although demolition of an existing historic structure to accommodate new construction shall be a last resort. The goal of new construction shall be visual compatibility with the existing architectural and historic character of the area.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NEW CONSTRUCTION

Recommendations for New Construction The construction of new buildings in Ravenna to fill existing gaps in the streetscape shall be encouraged when the construction supports economic development or when vacant, existing buildings cannot be adapted for new use.

As already noted, the design of a new building shall be guided by its surroundings. By taking its cues from its neighbors, the new building can be made to fit into the broad visual patterns of the area. This does not mean that the styles of existing buildings shall be copied, but rather that a new and contemporary building design can be compatible with the historic architecture that exists.

New construction – whether infill or freestanding – shall be clearly new, using contemporary materials, finishes and techniques. Each building site and environment is unique, so there can be no hard and fast rules for new design. However, there are several important factors which shall be considered when planning a new building in Ravenna:

- ▶ **Relationship to the Street:** A new building shall reflect adjacent structures in its orientation and placement in relation to the street. For example, most commercial facades are located at the edge of the sidewalk creating a single plane, and an infill building shall reflect this even setback of the existing streetscape.
- ▶ **Building Spacing:** New construction shall observe the rhythm of surrounding building spacing. Creating a continuous facade on downtown streets is appropriate for infill construction. Free-standing construction on corner lots may provide more flexibility in allowing for open space.
- ▶ **Scale:** Scale refers to the perceived size of a structure in relationship to the typical size of a person and the surrounding structures. Pedestrian scale is created when buildings and their details are easily visible from the sidewalk and do not overwhelm the passerby. Monumental scale is just the opposite, where buildings and details are larger than human needs would dictate. Monumental scale is sometimes used to create an impression of grandeur. New construction shall observe the scale of surrounding structures. In downtown, pedestrian scale is most appropriate.
- ▶ **Form:** This is defined as the external shape and configuration (building footprint, width, height) of the structure.
- ▶ **Mass:** This is the combination of forms and is associated with a perceived weight of the building.
- ▶ **Height:** New construction shall be of similar height to that of adjacent and nearby buildings.
- ▶ **Proportion:** This is the relationship between the width and height of a building: tall and narrow, low and squat, square. New construction shall employ proportions similar to those of adjacent buildings.
- ▶ **Relationship of Roof Shapes:** New construction shall reflect the predominant roof shapes in the area. Flat roofs are most appropriate for downtown infill construction. Roof pitches shall be similar to that which currently exists.
- ▶ **Existing Addition:** Retain an addition if it contributes to the character and historic integrity of the structure.

- ▶ **Rhythm of Solids and Voids:** In a building façade, the wall areas (solids) alternate with the window and door openings (voids) to create a pattern. New construction shall reflect the rhythms of adjacent and nearby structures. For example, an all-glass facade would be inappropriate when placed between two typical late-19th century commercial buildings.
- ▶ **Proportion of Openings:** The size and proportion of window and door openings in new construction shall be similar to those on surrounding facades.
- ▶ **Style and Character:** New construction shall be expressed in terms of contemporary design. The new building shall not try to duplicate historic styles, and pseudo-historic elements shall not be applied to contemporary structures to make them look older.
- ▶ **Quality** design, materials, and craftsmanship shall be incorporated in additions and new construction.
- ▶ **Materials, Textures and Colors:** New construction in Ravenna shall reflect the historic materials, textures and colors which exist, including natural brick, natural stone, cast iron, painted wood, pressed metal, and architectural glass panels.



Example of a poorly designed roof addition to an existing structure

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NEW CONSTRUCTION

Additions to buildings are not particularly common in Ravenna today, primarily because of the amount of unused space which already exists in upper stories of existing buildings. In fact, people seeking to expand are encouraged first to look at existing space before considering an addition.

However in some cases, additions to existing and historic structures are necessary to adapt to a changing economy and new or increased demands for products and services. Additions must be considered on an individual basis because each building is unique. In the same manner, new construction shall be designed specifically for the site it will occupy and relate to surrounding structures. Reference Preservation Brief 14 (New Exterior Additions to Historic Buildings).

Where additions are proposed, the following guidance is offered:

**When designing the addition, preserve the historic character.** The historic character of a building is revealed through its setting, shape/form, window arrangements, materials, craftsmanship, color, and interior. An addition shall respect and relate to these characteristics, paying particular attention to proportion and mass to avoid overpowering the structure to which it is being added.

- ▶ Additions shall have rooflines lower than the main building.
- ▶ Window arrangements shall complement the historic arrangements.
- ▶ Select materials and colors that are compatible with the historic building, including brick, stone or wood. Avoid rough-sawn siding, artificial stone, or other materials which never would have been used in downtown, for example.



This historic bank has a rear addition for extra office space. The addition respects the historic building in scale and it's proportion of openings, and the style and character of a more modern design.

**When connecting the addition, preserve significant historic materials and features.** Connecting an addition to the historic property involves the loss of some material from the original structure. Additions shall be designed to preserve significant historic materials and features with minimal damage or loss of significant materials and craftsmanship such as, but not limited to, roof shapes, window patterns, entrances, cornices, decorative molding, or glazing.

- ▶ Alterations to primary elevations shall be avoided.
- ▶ Where space permits, locate an addition to the rear of the building, possibly creating a new rear or secondary building entrance.
- ▶ Avoid roof-top additions, penthouses or the creation of roof decks on downtown buildings. Such additions are incompatible with the scale and character of the downtown.
- ▶ Skylights may be added to flat-roofed buildings, but their placement and design shall guard against leakage.

**When detailing the addition, protect the historical significance by making a visual distinction between old and new.** The initial thought for a design that will preserve the historic character of the structure may be to detail it using the same features as the existing structure. This design concept shall be abandoned as it will make the addition indistinguishable from the historic structure, negatively impacting the historical significance of the structure. Plan the addition so it provides some differentiation in architectural characteristics.

- ▶ The new addition shall complement the existing structure through simplified detailing so that it does not overpower the original structure.
- ▶ The use of pseudo-historic details and elements shall be avoided.

