



HRICKO 93

# ARCHITECTURAL & PLANNING GUIDELINES CLIFTON, VIRGINIA

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The "Architectural & Planning Guidelines, Clifton, Virginia" was approved by the Architectural Review Board (ARB) on April 24, 1997. Subsequent to a joint public hearing of the Town Council and ARB on July 2, 1997, the Town Council approved this document on that date.

Section 9-19c.3. of the Clifton Zoning Ordinance was amended on February 3, 1998 by the Clifton Town Council and as a result, page 15, "Building Height" was modified as reflected in this document.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The Town of Clifton Zoning ordinance empowers the Architectural Review Board (ARB) to adopt and maintain a set of standards that will assist the ARB and the applicant in meeting the design criteria mandated by the Historic Overlay District of the Zoning ordinance. To that end, guidelines have been developed to:

- Provide guidance to property owners contemplating changes to an existing building or new construction on a lot or parcel of land intended for subdivision or site improvement
- Help produce appropriate changes or improvements that reinforce the existing character of the Town
- Help improve the design quality of future development within the Town
- Protect property values in the Town by discouraging poorly designed and inappropriate projects
- Increase overall public awareness of the unique character of Clifton.

## **BACKGROUND**

## HISTORY OF CLIFTON'S ARCHITECTURAL DEVELOPMENT

What appears to be a homogeneous mix of buildings, built during the same period of time, is actually a collection of structures built over a fifty year period from approximately 1870 to 1920. There have been numerous additions to the original buildings during this early period, and additions continue today.

Almost every street had at least one structure built in the early period (1870 to 1900; see map in back of book), with the majority clustered on Main Street in the central area of town and along the railroad tracks on Ford Lane. Properties that developed between 1900-1920 were also clustered in the town's center, filling in lots between the earlier buildings as well as reaching outward toward the town line. Following World War II, three houses were constructed; from 1979 to 1997 another eight houses were built.

Clifton acquired a Post Office in 1869 and experienced a spurt of economic growth. One of the first structures built was the Clifton Hotel in 1870. There were accounts of U.S. Grant and John Mosbey visiting the hotel. During these years Clifton developed into a small town. The 1879 Hopkins Atlas Map shows Clifton with twenty residences, the Presbyterian church, Baptist church, schoolhouse and sawmill. (See map in back of book for other buildings of this period). Most of these structures were built by the first merchants in the town, since by 1890 Clifton was a thriving business center and retreat.

These early buildings set the tone and style of architecture for the town and in them can be seen the architectural elements that served as a reference for future builders. The architecture that evolved was remarkable for its consistency of detail as well as its simplicity. From house to house, from the earliest buildings to the last, identical architectural elements can be seen. These created a strong harmony among buildings despite the fact that many are quite different in terms of overall form and design. Buildings after 1900 respected the early structures and are virtually indistinguishable from their predecessors.

Prior to 1920, all new structures and additions conformed in basic style to the earlier buildings. Not until late 1920 to 1940 were three "cottage style" homes built, which were probably Sears "Honor-Built" homes purchased in kit form for \$1,500.00. Even these buildings, however, generally respected the scale, setbacks and materials of their predecessors.

Not until the 1950's and early 1960 was there a definite break with the traditional building techniques, with the construction of three brick ramblers.

By 1968, Clifton began to experience an influx of new families who wanted to preserve and restore the older buildings. An attempt was made, when adding to a building, to using a design that was compatible with the existing structure; and even today, designs that are self-effacing and blend unobtrusively with the existing structures are more desirable than aggressive design, no matter how good.

## GENERAL

Generally, the Town of Clifton can be characterized in two ways based on terrain oriented development patterns:

**Lower lying “Downtown” Clifton**, near the creek, where the topography is relatively flat, allowing the narrow streets to occur in a traditional grid-like pattern with grass streetside drainage swales, sidewalks on the main street and houses and commercial buildings tucked tightly against the roadway with the facades of the buildings fronting streets predominately parallel to the street and a loose configuration of street trees coupled with low front yard fencing and mature landscaping.

**Upper “Outlying” Clifton** where the steeper topography fractured the grid pattern with streets that remained narrow but move up and about existing terrain features reflecting, at least to some degree, the technological ability of the time. Sidewalks become less prevalent or disappear altogether. Homes remain closer to the street than in suburban settings but loosen up in both orientation and dimension again reflecting terrain constraints.

Both areas are particularly defined by one characteristic, that of feeling **immanently habitable**, that is, the streets fulfill certain basic requirements allowing pedestrian life to occur, the most important of which are safe streets and effective public spaces shaped by the buildings and landscape surrounding them.

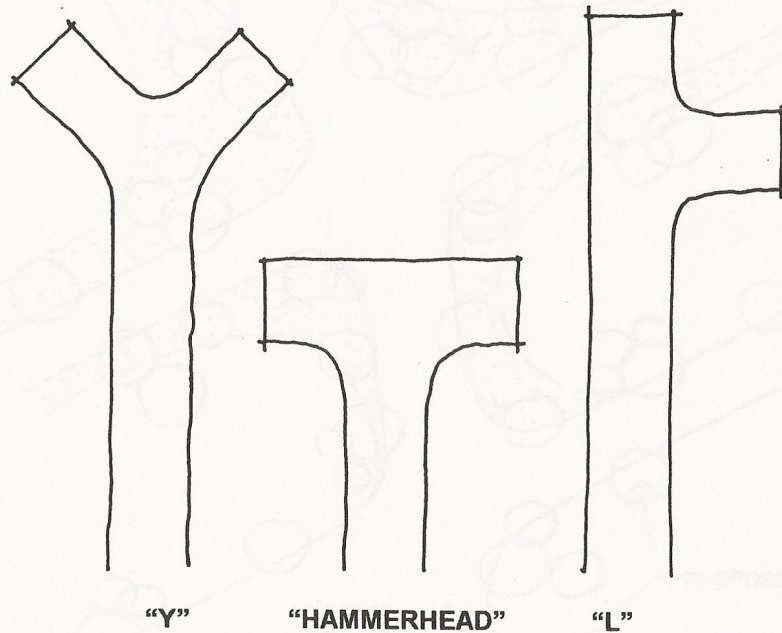
In order to promote site planning that is in keeping with patterns of development that exist in the Town as well as to generate habitable street-space in keeping with the specific character of the Town, the following guidelines must be utilized when planning development.

## SITE PLANNING, STREETScape AND LANDSCAPE

1. Layout of streets must be accomplished with concern for the street pattern to which proposed streets connect or are exposed to. Grid patterns are highly encouraged where topography allows. Where terrain is too extreme or for other reasons streets cannot be grid-like, other patterns such as those in upper outlying Clifton must be utilized.
2. Keep houses as close to the street as possible, with front facades parallel to the street when nearby homes take that pattern. Otherwise, locate buildings on the site in keeping with terrain features, so that homes that are distinctly in keeping with Town architecture can be built.
3. Keep vehicular parking out of front yards, with favor given to detached or side loaded garages.
4. Do not place new outbuildings in front of homes but to the rear or side and out of view of streets unless architecturally in complement with the primary residence.
5. Minimize mass grading on sites in general, working to fit the roadways, driveways, buildings and other structures as closely as possible to existing grade.
6. Carefully define clearing associated with all improvements, saving as much existing vegetation as possible, especially existing trees of 6" caliper or greater measured at breast height.
7. Maintain proposed slopes at 3:1. If conditions warrant a steeper slope (such as saving vegetation or other natural features), the ARB and Planning Commission may approve up to a maximum of 2:1. When steeper slopes are used under these circumstances, bank cover must be provided that will stabilize slopes in accordance with Virginia code, and minimize maintenance requirements such as a permanent ground cover other than grass.

## **SITING OF BUILDINGS & STREETS (GENERAL)**





"Y"

"HAMMERHEAD"

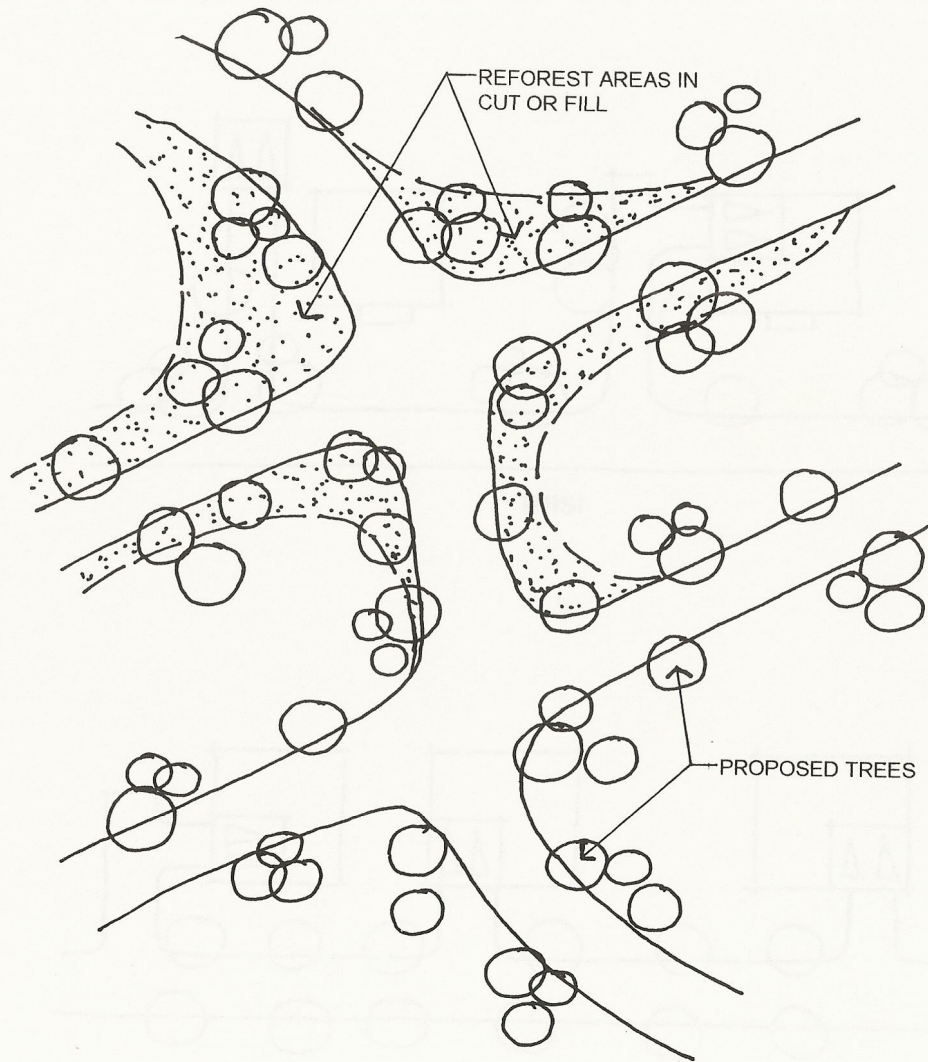
"L"

### TURN-AROUNDS

Street space in the Town is defined public/semi-public space, the character of which is generated by the elements that enclose it. Those elements include homes and public or commercial buildings, sidewalks, fences and walls, guardrails, detached garages, street trees and other landscaping, existing tree stands or volunteered secondary growth covering roadway or other cuts. In order to preserve or promote development of new street space that reflects existing street space, these guidelines must be followed:

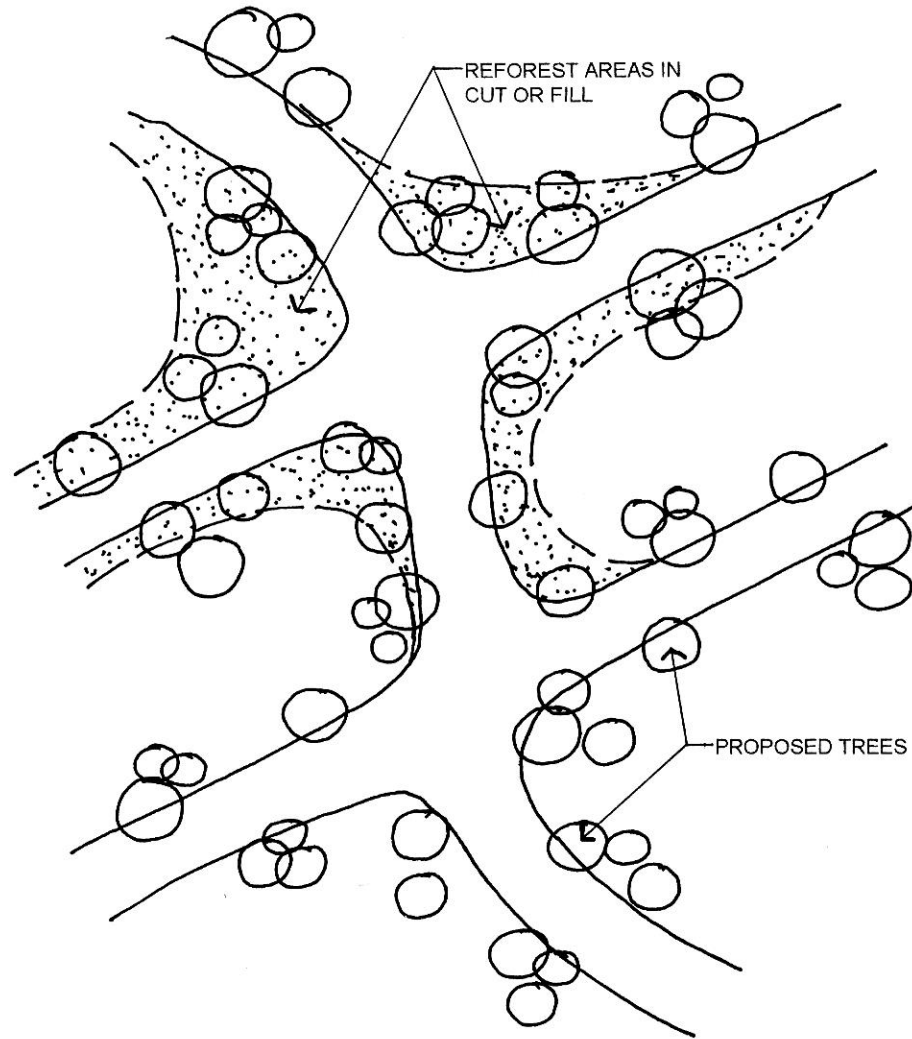
1. Maintain the most narrow street paving section allowed by VDOT.
2. Utilize grassed shoulders and drainage swales if prudent and allowed by VDOT, or other techniques that would result in streets that closely resemble those in the Town.
3. Eliminate the use of cul-de-sac bulbs in favor of less land destructive configurations for turnarounds such as hammer-heads or driveways as allowed by VDOT. (see diagram)

## DELINEATION OF STREET SPACE



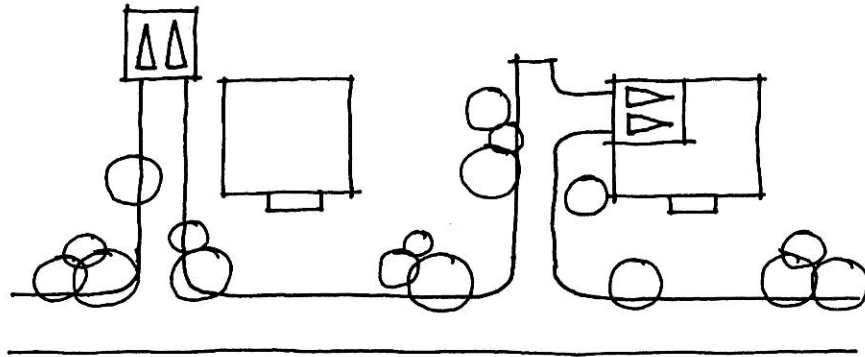
**STREETSCAPE/LANDSCAPE**

4. Provide a landscape planting plan demonstrating plantings that are in keeping with existing Town landscape, for example:
  - Reforestation of cut/fill banks with native plant material.
  - Use of traditional "old garden" plant material and approach to design.
  - Take particular care to preserve and protect existing tree stands and individual trees and other planting of note, especially near the street.
  
5. Provide an existing tree/vegetation preservation plan demonstrating the actual location of tree stands, specific trees and other vegetation to be preserved, and the methods proposed to save and protect them including but not limited to fencing, berming, retaining walls, pruning and fertilization, permanent conservation easements, etc.

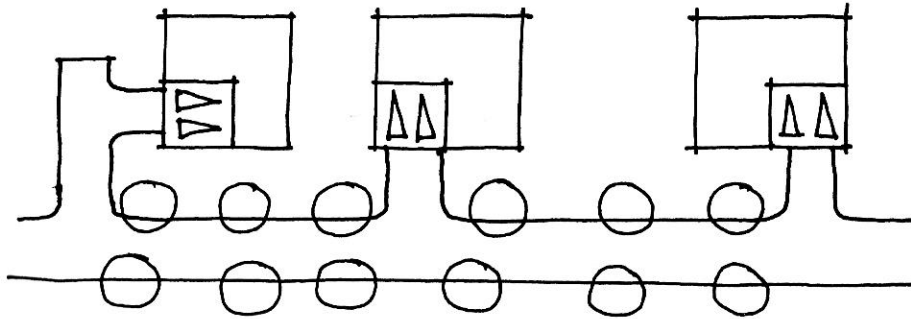


**STREETSCAPE/LANDSCAPE**

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THIS!



NOT THIS!

GARAGE LOCATION/STREETSCAPE

6. Reduce the visibility of the automobile and the effect of the garage door on the street space by utilizing the following:

- Detach garages and move them back away from the street so that the front facade of the garage is approximately aligned with the rear facade of the house.
- Push detached garages downhill from street elevation where possible.
- Side load and move garage to back of unit.
- Keep width of driveways from the street to one car width as long as practical.
- Provide landscape screening that "fits" within the local environment to foil the view of garage doors as one proceeds up or down the street. (see diagram)

### **Fencing and Walls**

Utilize fencing and wall designs, heights and locations that are compatible with historic fencing existing within the Town. Do not use chain link fencing, concrete block walls, split rail, board on board or stockade fencing. Brick walls, whether retaining or not, are generally discouraged. Some leeway may be considered by the ARB on an individual basis for those proposed fences or walls that are not visible from the street and other public areas.

### **Vehicular Guardrails**

If vehicular guard rails are necessary, utilize a heavy timber rail or bollards or a non-galvanized rusting type rail that VDOT will approve.

### **Retaining Walls**

All retaining walls must be constructed with materials that are compatible with either proposed or existing nearby architecture. No retaining wall shall exceed five feet in height. When site conditions warrant more vertical change, combinations of more than one retaining wall may be used together so long as no one wall is higher than four feet and a well landscaped space of no less than four horizontal feet is placed between them. Other wall heights may be considered on an individual basis when issues such as tree/vegetation or other natural feature preservation are concerned. Indigenous stone or stone veneer is encouraged.

## **SITE IMPROVEMENTS**

### **Site Lighting**

Pole type street lights including those for individual homes shall be consistent with those existing in the Town at a minimum. However, if desired, other "traditional" light poles and fixtures may be utilized but must be approved by the Architectural Review Board on a case-by-case basis including type, color, height and style. Bollard lights are discouraged. Other up/down lighting or feature lighting must be concealed from view. Also:

- Do not use lights that are too bright, such as "crime" lights or bright floodlights, when surrounding lighting is subdued.
- Utilize incandescent, metal halide or mercury vapor light sources only. High or low pressure sodium must not be used.
- Floodlighting of house facades will not be allowed.

### **Walkways**

Concrete walkways with a width and scoring/jointing pattern consistent with those existing in the Town may be utilized when required or desired. No other material may be used for walkways except pavers of a type and shape consistent with those existing in the Town, indigenous stone or boardwalks under special circumstances.

### **Driveways**

As mentioned before, driveways must be of a single car width from the street toward the house for as long as practical and may be constructed of asphalt or gravel as allowed by Town Ordinance or Fairfax County PFM. Shared driveways may also be utilized as allowed by ordinance, but must be of the minimum width toward the house for as long as practical and must be constructed of the materials mentioned above. If combinations of gravel and asphalt are proposed, the gravel portion must be kept toward the front or street portion of the drive and the asphalt to the rear or house portion of the drive, mostly concentrated in actual parking areas.

### **Landscaping**

Landscaping must be used to complement buildings within the Town and to enhance the street space as addressed above while being compatible with other landscaping existing in the Town. Also, the following must be considered when landscaping any area within the Town:

- Use trees and other plant material indigenous to the region and the Town, and that are primarily "old garden" species.
- Protect and preserve existing tree stands and individual trees to the greatest extent possible.
- Replace diseased or dead trees and other plants with like species.
- Utilize only shredded hardwood mulch, pine bark mulch, pine needles or cypress mulch in planting areas. Do not utilize plastic edging, lava, crushed

rock, gravel, landscape or other timbers or any other non-traditional mulching or edging materials.

- Maintain all planted areas in a relatively weed-free condition.
- Do not clear naturally occurring under-story growth in tree-save areas or other areas of vegetation preservation, but remove dead, dying or diseased plant material and other trash or debris.
- Landscaped seating areas, parks, and areas of amenities such as fountains, benches and other features, are encouraged within new developments on private sites within the framework of the above guidelines.

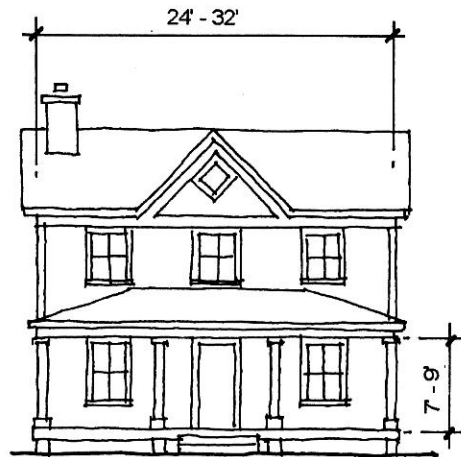
### **Street Furniture**

Trash receptacles, mail boxes, benches, newspaper boxes, bicycle racks, planters, bollards, etc. must be compatible with those existing in the Town and when utilized collectively must be compatible in design, color and material. Avoid placing too many elements on a narrow sidewalk or pedestrian access way.

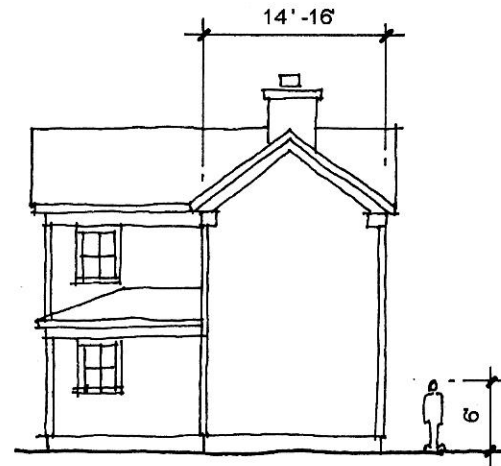
### **Utilities and Equipment**

Place all utilities underground. Surface equipment such as transformers and junction boxes must be screened with fences, walls and/or evergreen plant material and placed so that they are as unobtrusive as possible.

The following sections contain a series of sketches and photographs to illustrate how the balance of forms, spaces, details, and materials go into defining the site or building character of Clifton. Guidelines are also provided to help those considering new building, site construction, or modifications to existing buildings that will enable the Town to retain its essential character.



MAIN FACADE



SIDE



MAIN FACADE

## SCALE

Scale is the apparent size of a building, door, window or other element as perceived in relation to the size of a human being.

## PROPORTION

The form of a building is established by the ratio of its width to its height, or its front area to side.

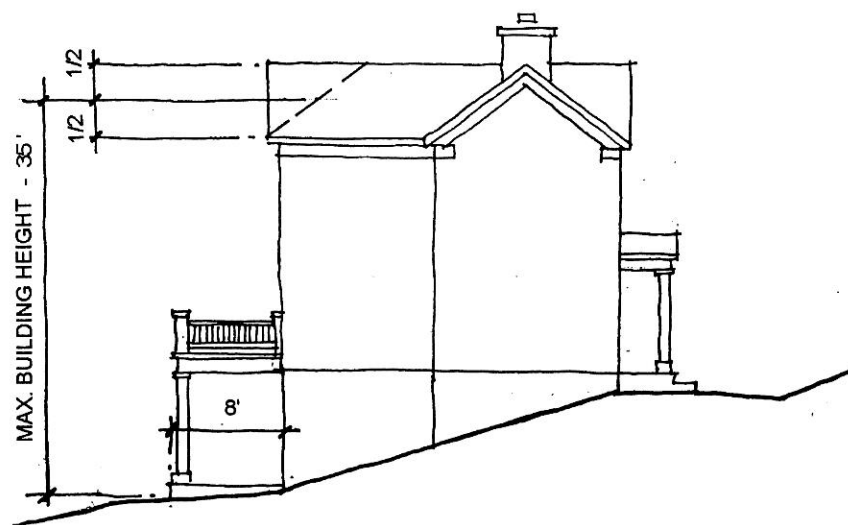
The dimensions of Clifton's structures are modest in terms of many new houses being built today. It is this sense of scale and proportion that helps define the architecture of the town.

## GUIDELINES

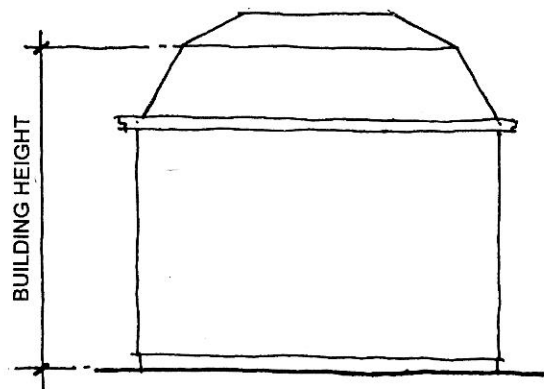
- New buildings and additions shall respect the scale and proportion of existing structures in the town.

## SCALE & PROPORTION





GABLE OR HIP ROOF



MANSARD ROOF

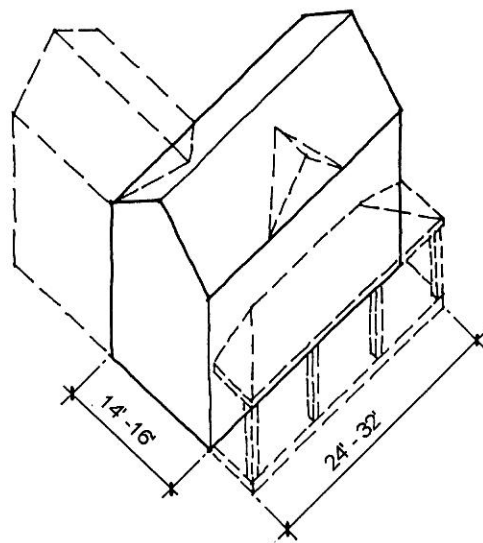
## BUILDING HEIGHT

The "height" of a building is defined in the zoning ordinance as: "the vertical distance to the highest point of the roof for flat roofs, to the deck line on mansard roofs and the average height between eaves and ridge for gable, hip and gambrel roofs measured from grade."

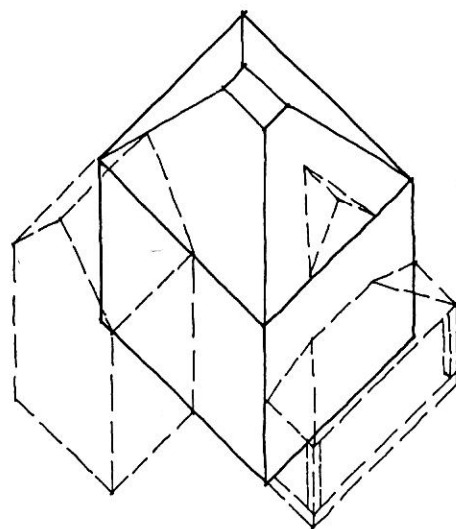
## GUIDELINES

- For the purposes of calculating maximum building height, grade is defined in the zoning ordinance as "the lowest ground elevation at eight feet (8') from the building wall."
- Retaining walls, patio walls, etc. that attach to the building foundation shall be of the same material, finish and color as the foundation.

## BUILDING HEIGHT



GABLE ROOF WITH 'L'



HIP ROOF WITH PROJECTION

## MASSING

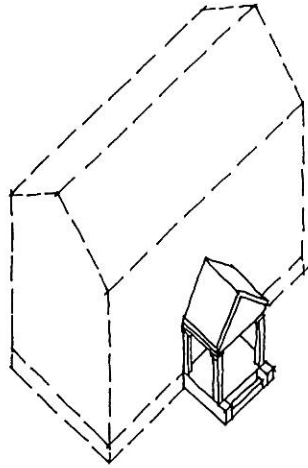
## MASSING

Massing is the composition of the 3-dimensional forms of a building. In Clifton the massing is very simple, with a main building mass (the form that faces the street) and a secondary form or forms to the side or rear. A third type of form is the porch.

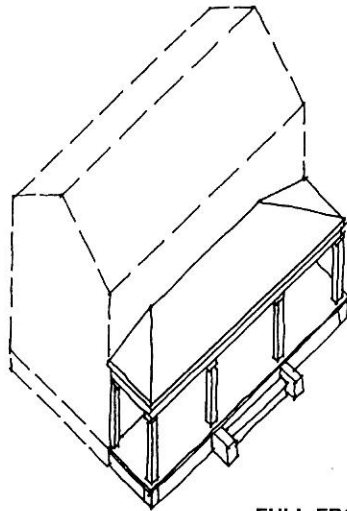
## GUIDELINES

- Keep the massing of new construction and additions simple to be compatible with the massing of existing "contributing" buildings. \*
- Preserve the original roof shape and material whenever possible.

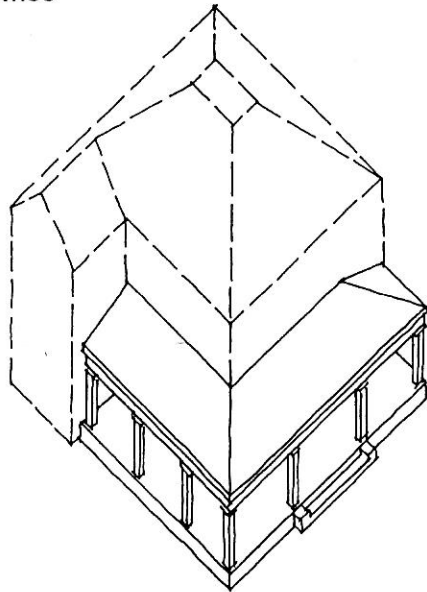
\* "contributing" buildings are those within the Federal Historic District Boundary (See page 26)



PORTICO



FULL-FRONT HIP



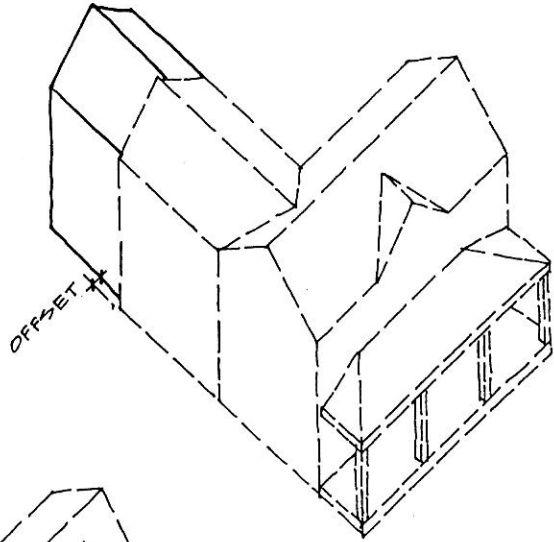
WRAP-AROUND

## PORCHES

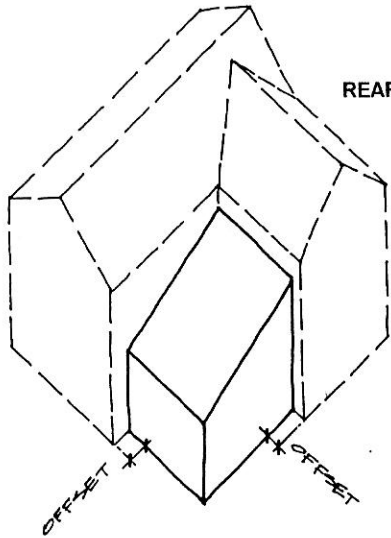
There are three types of porches in Clifton: the portico, full-front hip and wrap-around. The porches help to define the character of the building and are seen on most buildings in town. The buildings without porches have most likely had them removed at some time.

## GUIDELINES

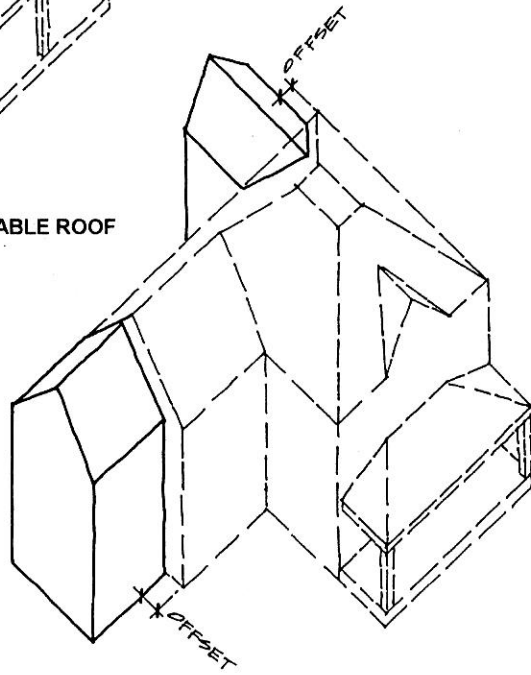
- Existing porches shall be maintained as originally designed (i.e., closing-in or modifying porches is inappropriate).
- New houses shall incorporate a porch to provide a sense of continuity with existing buildings.



REAR ADDITION WITH GABLE ROOF



REAR ADDITION WITH SHED ROOF



REAR OR SIDE ADDITION

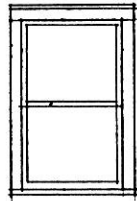
## ADDITIONS

Many existing buildings have had additions added over time that have become architecturally significant in themselves.

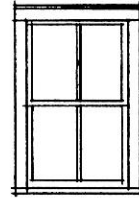
## GUIDELINES

- New additions shall respect the scale, proportion and massing of the existing building.
- Additions shall not be in the same plane as the existing structure, so as to make a distinction between old and new.
- Additions shall be avoided on the primary facade.

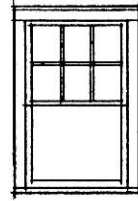
## ADDITIONS



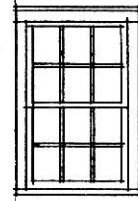
1 OVER 1



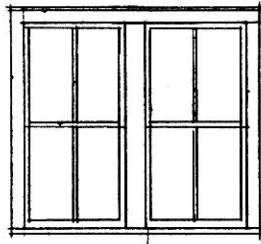
2 OVER 2



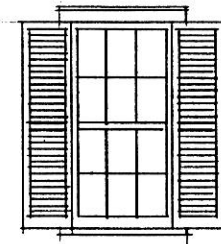
6 OVER 1



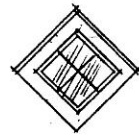
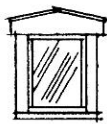
6 OVER 6



TWIN WINDOW



WINDOW WITH SHUTTERS



GABLE-END WINDOWS

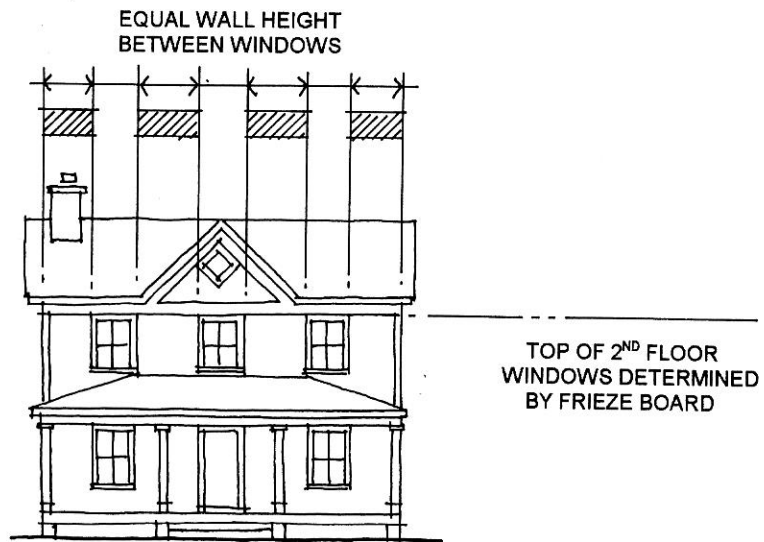
## WINDOWS

There are four basic types of windows contained in Clifton buildings, as shown in the drawings. Prior to 1900 the buildings contained mostly 2 over 2 or 6 over 6 windows. After 1900 some buildings had 1 over 1 but were mostly 2 over 2. The cottage-style houses had 6 over 1 windows. Some early houses had twin windows with a wide mullion between. Some houses have decorative attic-level gable-end windows.

## GUIDELINES

- In additions use a wood window style consistent with the existing building.
- Existing windows in restorable condition shall be retained along with all architectural detail.
- Use unobtrusive storm windows where needed that can be removed in the future.
- In new construction use a wood window style most compatible with the house style and consistent with those found in existing "contributing" buildings.
- If shutters are used they shall give the appearance of being operable (i.e., not wider or narrower than the actual window width, etc).

## WINDOWS

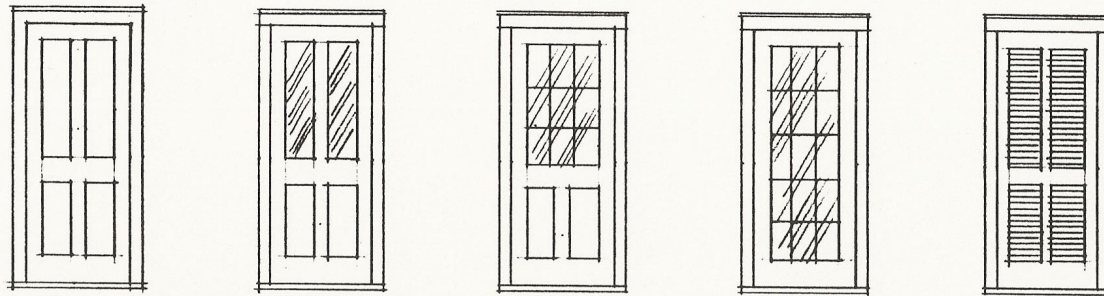


Most existing buildings have three windows across the front elevation with a roughly equal length of wall between. A few buildings have two windows across and some have four or more. The tops generally are determined by the frieze board, porch beam, or door transom height.

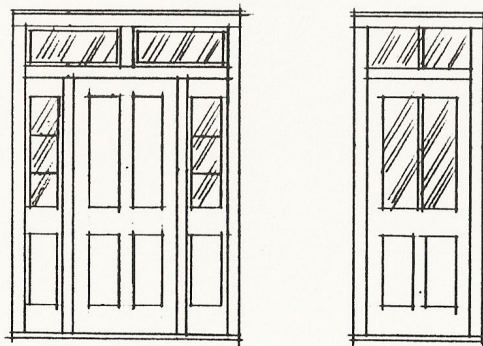
## GUIDELINES

- Windows shall not be removed or added in the existing building unless required by an addition.
- New buildings shall respect the predominant window spacing and height of existing “contributing” buildings.

## WINDOW SPACING & HEIGHT



TYPICAL EXTERIOR DOORS



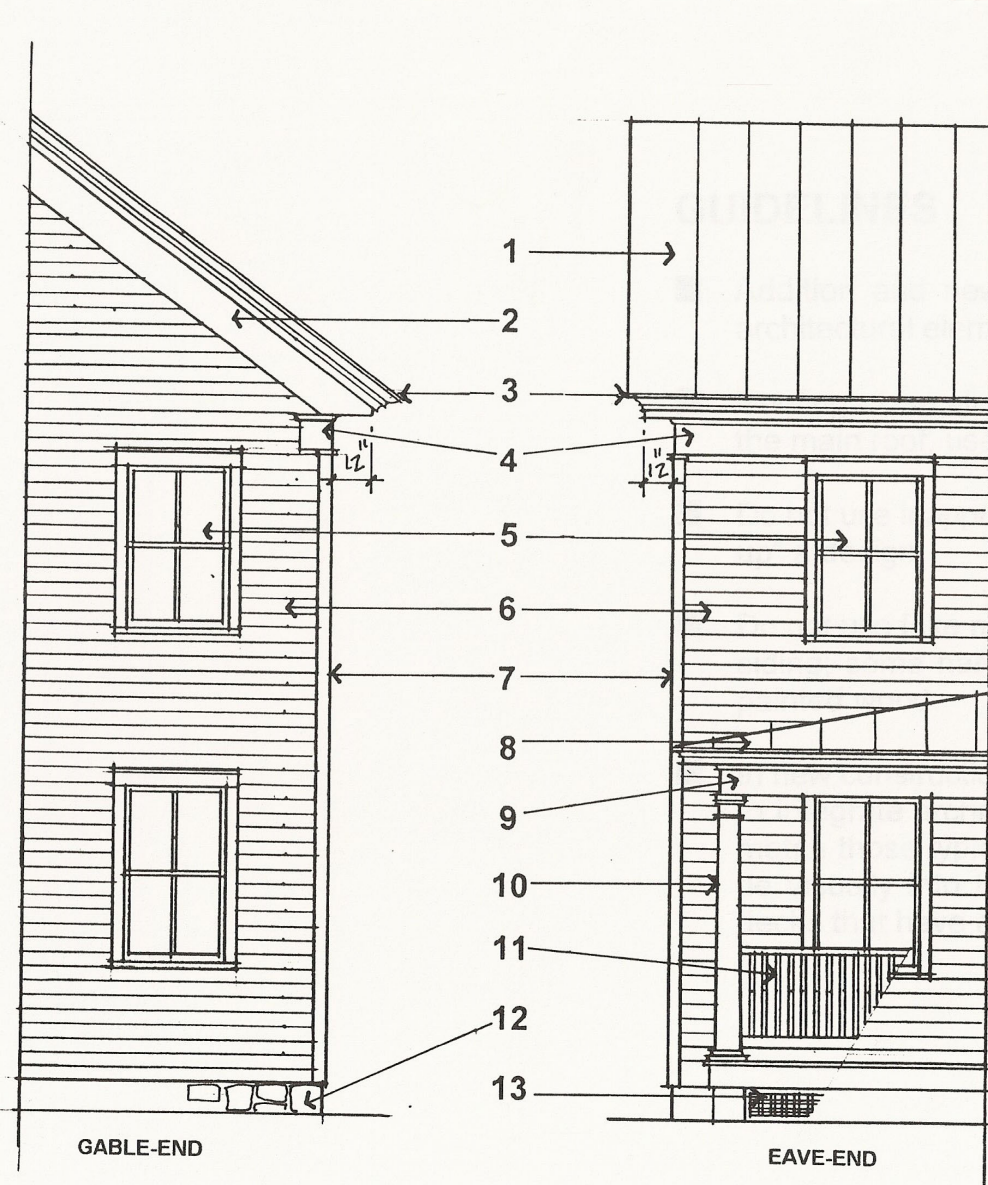
DOORS WITH SIDELIGHTS AND TRANSOMS

## DOORS

There are many styles of exterior doors in Clifton. The predominant type is the 4-panel wood entry door. Some doors have glass panels or are louvered. Buildings with adequate interior ceiling height sometimes have a transom over the door.

## GUIDELINES

- Doors to be located in additions shall be compatible with existing doors and shall be wood.
- Doors shall not be of an earlier (colonial) or later (contemporary) period.
- Storm doors shall be the full-light type in order to display the entry door.
- In new construction use a wood door style most compatible with the house style and consistent with those found in existing "contributing" buildings.



- 1 Standing-seam metal roofing, painted.
- 2 1-1/4" thick rake board usually 10" - 12" wide.
- 3 Fascia with or without crown molding.
- 4 1-1/4" thick frieze board usually 10" - 12" wide. Returns around corner with or without cap molding.
- 5 Double-hung wood window with true divided lites and exterior storm window or storm panel.
- 6 Wood clapboard siding with 4" - 5" exposure, painted.
- 7 Wood corner boards, 3-1/2" wide each face.
- 8 Porch roofing. Standing-seam metal, painted.
- 9 Porch beam with molding at soffit.
- 10 Porch column. Round or square.
- 11 Porch rail. Wood top & bottom rail with balusters at 4" on center maximum.
- 12 Stone foundation. Smooth-surface painted concrete on some houses.
- 13 Lattice. Vertical/Horizontal type.

## TYPICAL ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENTS



## GUIDELINES

- Addition and new construction design shall be consistent with the typical architectural elements found in existing “contributing” buildings.
- Roofing - Use all one roofing material (i.e., if standing-seam metal is used on the main roof, use it on the porch roof, etc.).
- Do not use inappropriate “period” elements such as dentil molding or “earlying-up” a design.
- Do not use fake materials such as imitation stone, shingles, aluminum or vinyl siding; some hardboard sidings are acceptable if the appearance is that of painted wood.
- In new construction, covered or uncovered porches (decks) shall be designed to integrate architecturally with the main building. Columns and railings shall match those typically found in “contributing” buildings and shall be painted to tie visually into the house. Cantilevered and/or pressure-treated unpainted decks that have an “add-on” appearance are inappropriate.

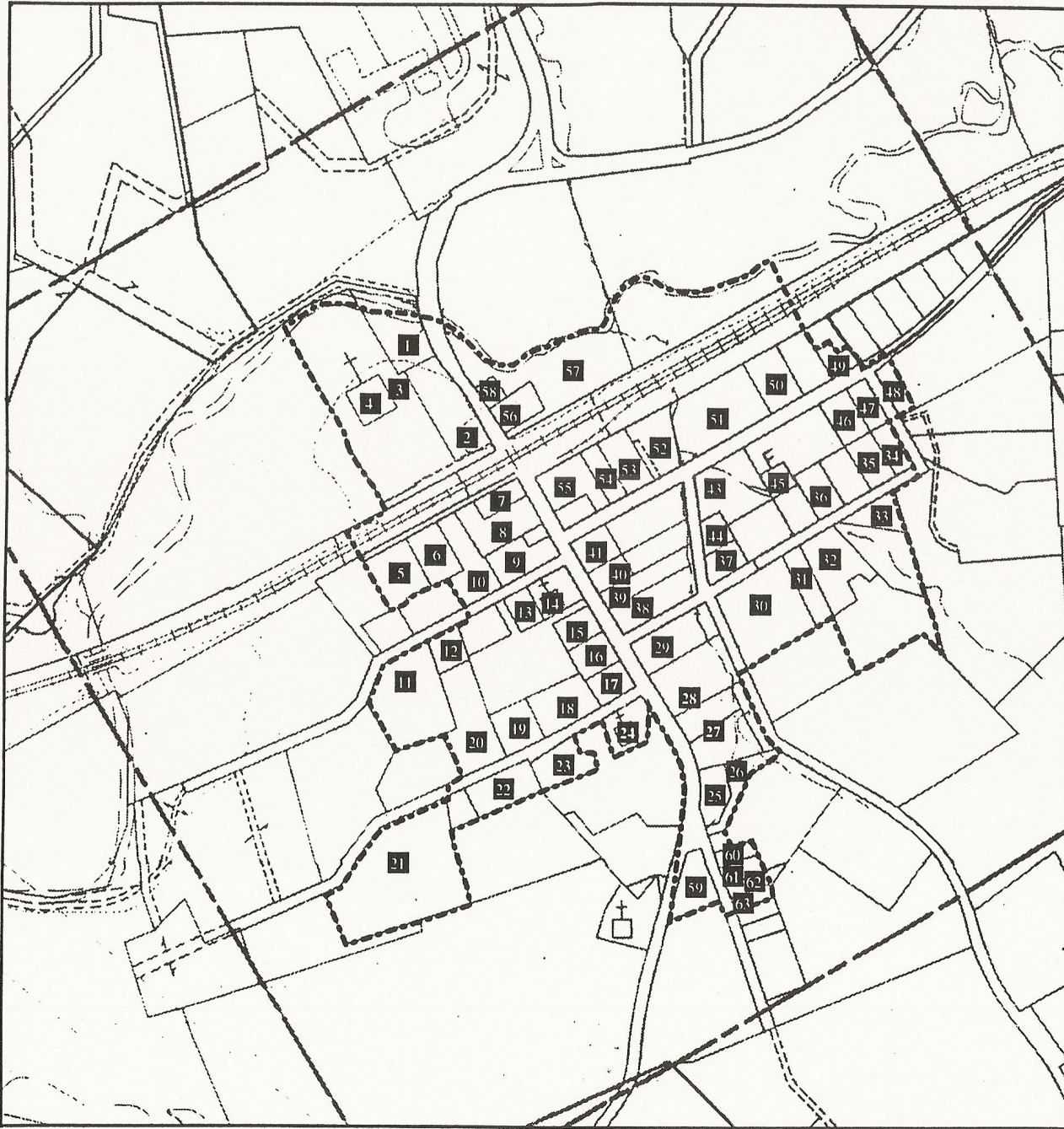
## TYPICAL ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENTS (CONTINUED)

- 1 A property shall be used for its historic purpose or be placed in a new use that requires minimal change to the defining characteristics of the building and its site and environment.
- 2 The historic character of a property shall be retained and preserved. The removal of historic materials or alteration of features and spaces that characterize a property shall be avoided.
- 3 Each property shall 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 architectural features or architectural elements from other buildings, shall not be undertaken.
- 4 Most properties change over time; those changes that have acquired historic significance in their own right shall be retained and preserved.
- 5 Distinctive features, finishes and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a historic property shall be preserved.
- 6 Deteriorated historic features shall be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature shall match the old in design, color, texture and other visual qualities and, where possible, materials. Replacement of missing features shall be substantiated by documentary, physical or pictorial evidence.
- 7 Chemical or physical treatments, such as sandblasting, that cause damage to historic materials shall not be used. The surface cleaning of structures, if appropriate, shall be undertaken using the gentlest means possible.
- 8 Significant archeological resources affected by a project shall be protected and preserved. If such resources must be disturbed, mitigation measures shall be undertaken.
- 9 New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction shall not destroy historic materials that characterize the property. The new work shall be differentiated from the old and shall be compatible with the massing, size, scale and architectural features to protect the historic integrity of the property and its environment.
- 10 New additions and adjacent or related new construction shall 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.
- 11 Site design, including the placement of structures, shaping of landform, and use of plant materials shall be undertaken in such a manner that the visual character and physical integrity of a historic property and its environment is preserved and enhanced.

## STANDARDS FOR REHABILITATION

- 1 Design new buildings to respect the existing architectural design vocabulary and in character with Town environs.
- 2 New construction should not try to create an inappropriate historical basis.
- 3 The style of new buildings shall blend unobtrusively with the existing building styles in the Town without blatant imitation.
- 4 Undertake all new building construction and new street or private driveway construction with efforts to protect and preserve significant archaeological, geological and topographic resources.
- 5 The style of new streets, sidewalks, street furniture and driveways shall blend with the existing character and style of Clifton roadways including necessary changes in landform and new landscape treatment.

## **SUMMARY GUIDELINES FOR NEW CONSTRUCTION**



National Register of Historic Places

■ ■ ■ Federal Historic District Boundary

■ 22 Structure within Federal Historic Boundary\*

Note: The entire Town is within a locally designated historic district as defined by the Town Zoning Code.

\*See Appendix A in the Town of Clifton Plan for a description of properties within the Historic District.

CLIFTON HISTORIC DISTRICT

Clifton Historic District

DHR 194-003 (1985) (2006) NREHP / VA Landmarks

DHR 194-5001 (2010 - 2015)