FENCES, GATES + WALLS

Review Levels

Please note that during the administrative review process, Staff may determine that a project must be reviewed by the Board.

NO REVIEW	ADMINISTRATIVE (STAFF) REVIEW	BOARD REVIEW
Walls less than 2 feet in height	Construction or demolition of fences, gates, garden walls, and retaining walls	Any project referred to the Board by Staff

Introduction

Fences, gates, garden walls, and retaining walls on private property are important visual features of the historic districts that provide distinctive streetscapes while also providing a sense of privacy and enclosure for property owners. Fences are often partially transparent and, in the historic districts, are made of a number of materials including wood, metal, and masonry. Garden walls are constructed of masonry and provide a visual barrier. Many historic structures have fences that were added later which may, over time, have acquired independent historic significance.

Guidelines

- The design of fences, gates, garden walls, and retaining walls should be architecturally appropriate to the style of the structure they surround.
- Fences and walls should be made of wood, metal, and/or unit masonry. The Board discourages using synthetic materials such as fiberglass, poured-in-place concrete, or vinyl.
- Wood fences should have vertical pickets.
- Ornamental iron or metal fences are appropriate for late 19th and early 20th century Victorian structures.

Additional Information

- A survey plat may be required to ensure the fence or wall is located on your property.
- Fences located in front yards must be 50 percent open and cannot exceed 4 feet in height. Fences located in rear and side yards may be open or closed and cannot exceed 6 feet in height. Refer to § 7-202 of the Zoning Ordinance.

FENCES, GATES + WALLS

- Fences cannot be located in a vision clearance area. Refer to § 7-800 of the Zoning Ordinance.
- The Board may waive height, opacity, and vision clearance requirements specified in the Zoning Ordinance when the proposed fence is architecturally appropriate and consistent with the character of the district.
- Retaining walls less than two feet in height, and fences at the height and location otherwise permitted in a front yard, may be constructed in the public right-of-way as permitted by § 5-2-29 of the City Code.

A brick and wrought iron fence at the Georgian style Christ Church.

A wrought iron fence on a Victorian style residence.

A brick and wood picket fence at the Georgian style Lloyd House.

CHIMNEYS + FLUES

Review Levels

Please note that during the administrative review process, Staff may determine that a project must be reviewed by the Board.

NO REVIEW	ADMINISTRATIVE (STAFF) REVIEW	BOARD REVIEW
Construction or modification of chimneys and flues on all non-street facing sides	Construction or modification of chimneys and flues on all street-facing sides	Demolition of chimneys and flues (greater than or equal to 25 square feet)
Demolition of chimneys and flues (less than 25 square feet)		

Introduction

Chimneys were historically constructed with masonry to vent smoke from wood burning or coal burning fireplaces, and were often a prominent architectural feature. Flues generally describe utilitarian vents for oil or gas fired furnaces or water heaters, and were located toward the rear of the structure. They could be made of masonry or metal. Chimneys and flues can have an important impact on the overall visual composition of a building and, if not appropriately located or the wrong style of material, may disrupt the historic architectural character. The vast majority of structures in the historic disricts have interior chimneys and flues, where the only expression of the chimney is through the roof of a structure. Exterior chimneys are found primarily on buildings dating from the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

Guidelines

- New chimneys should be appropriate to the period and style of the adjacent or attached structure.
- Brick and brick-clad chimneys are appropriate for buildings constructed in the late 18th and 19th centuries.
- The Board discourages exterior metal flue chimneys. Metal chimneys on Later (post-1931) commercial and industrial style structures may be appropriate in certain instances.
- Chimneys should not be clad in siding.
- Unpainted masonry chimneys on unpainted masonry houses should not be painted.

CHIMNEYS + FLUES

The corbelled brick chimney is a character defining feature of this Queen Anne style residence.

Example of an inappropriate exterior metal flue chimney on a historic building.

Example of brick chimneys commonly found on historic Old Town residences.

SKYLIGHTS

Review Levels

Please note that during the administrative review process, Staff may determine that a project must be reviewed by the Board.

NO REVIEW	ADMINISTRATIVE (STAFF) REVIEW	BOARD REVIEW
In-kind replacement of existing flat profile skylights	New skylights on all non-street facing sides	New skylights on all street-facing sides

Introduction

Skylights are used to bring more light into the interior of a structure. Skylights can become prominent elements on a building and may interrupt the historic profile of a roofline. The Board discourages the visual disruption of a historic roof profile.

Guidelines

- Skylights should be minimally visible from the public right-of-way.
- Flashing around skylights should match the color of the roofing material in order to reduce the visual intrusion.
- The Board prefers low or flat profile glass skylights, rather than round or domed skylights.
- The material of skylights should be non-reflective, but may be tinted bronze or gray depending on roofing materials.
- Flat profile skylights on flat and low-sloped roofs are considered to be not visible by the Board.

Additional Information

- The Board encourages minimizing the removal of historic fabric when installing skylights.
- Interior shading devices can be used to mitigate light pollution and heat buildup in the house.
- This chapter applies to solar tubes as well as skylights.

SKYLIGHTS

Example of a skylight installed on a minimally visible part of a roof.

SOLAR ENERGY SYSTEMS
(BUILDING MOUNTED)

Review Levels

Please note that during the administrative review process, Staff may determine that a project must be reviewed by the Board.

NO REVIEW	ADMINISTRATIVE (STAFF) REVIEW	BOARD REVIEW
New solar energy systems on all non-street facing sides	New solar energy systems on all street-facing sides	Any project referred to the Board by staff

Introduction

Since the mid-1970s, the use of solar energy systems as a source of energy has increased throughout the country. On historic structures, inappropriately mounted solar energy systems may detract from the historic architectural character. The Board supports sustainable design and solar energy in the historic district, but these features should be balanced with the historic architectural character of the individual structure and the district as a whole.

Guidelines

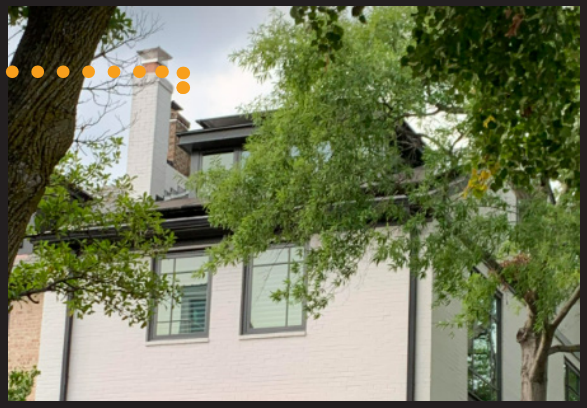
- Solar energy systems should not damage historic building materials.
- Solar energy systems should be minimally visible from the public right-of-way.
- Roof-mounted solar energy systems should be mounted at an angle which is as close to the adjacent roof slope as possible.
- The framework of roof-mounted solar energy systems should match the predominant color of the roof material.
- Solar energy systems on flat and low-sloped roofs are considered to be not visible by the Board.

SOLAR ENERGY SYSTEMS
(BUILDING MOUNTED)

Additional Information

- Solar energy systems must meet all the building height, front, rear, and sideyard setback requirements of the Zoning Ordinance.
- An electrical permit is required for all solar energy system installations.
- The Board encourages exploring using solar energy systems on non-primary structures where feasible. Refer to chapter on accessory structures.

Example of a roof mounted solar panel



STOOPS, STEPS + RAILINGS

Review Levels

There are different levels of review for buildings constructed before 1932 (Early buildings) and after 1931 (Later buildings). Please note that during the administrative review process, Staff may determine that a project must be reviewed by the Board.

Early Buildings (pre-1932)

NO REVIEW	ADMINISTRATIVE (STAFF) REVIEW	BOARD REVIEW
Construction or modification of stoops, steps, and railings on all non-street facing sides	Construction or modification of stoops, steps, and railings on all street-facing sides	Removal of historic stoops, steps, and railings on all street-facing sides

Later Buildings (post-1931)

NO REVIEW	ADMINISTRATIVE (STAFF) REVIEW	BOARD REVIEW
Construction or modification of stoops, steps, and railings on all sides	Not required	Not required

Introduction

Stoops, steps, and railings provide the transition area between the public street and the private interior of a home and are an integral part of the overall composition of a building. Most Early (pre-1932) buildings in Alexandria did not originally have railings. A variety of materials have been used for the construction of stoops and steps in the historic districts including brick, wood, stone, and metal. Many historic structures have stoops, steps, and railings that were added later which may, over time, have acquired independent historic significance.

STOOPS, STEPS + RAILINGS

Guidelines

- Historic stoops, steps, and railings should be retained on all street-facing sides of Early (pre-1932) buildings.
- New stoops, steps, and railings should have a design that is appropriate to the style of the structure and be made of materials such as wood, cast iron, precast concrete, or stone. The Board discourages the use of synthetic materials.
- Handrails should be minimal in appearance and mounted so as not to damage existing historic material.
- Railings with vertical or horizontal pickets should not be installed unless required by the Virginia Uniform Statewide Building Code (USBC).
- Decorative cast iron steps and railings are appropriate for Victorian buildings.
- Concrete steps are not appropriate on 18th and 19th century buildings, but may be appropriate for 20th century buildings.
- Unpainted pressure treated wood is not an appropriate material for stoops, steps, and railings in the historic districts.

Additional Information

- For guidelines on ramps, refer to chapter on accessibility features.
- A survey plat may be required to ensure the stoop or railing is located on your property and not encroaching onto a neighboring property or into the public right of way, except as permitted by § 5-2-29 of the City Code.
- Elevated walking surfaces may require guardrails. Refer to the Virginia Uniform Statewide Building Code (USBC).

STOOPS, STEPS + RAILINGS

Example of historically appropriate cast iron steps and handrail on an Italianate style residence.

Example of historically appropriate stone steps, iron handrail and guardrail on a Georgian style residence.

Example of inappropriate modern brick stoop and iron handrail on an Italianate style residence.