STOOPS, STEPS + RAILINGS

Required Approvals

There are different approvals required for buildings constructed before 1932 (Early Buildings) and after 1931 (Later Buildings).

Early Buildings

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

Later Buildings

BOARD REVIEW	STAFF REVIEW	NO REVIEW
Not required	Not required	All sides

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 Buildings in Alexandria did not originally have handrails. Many historic structures have stoops, steps, and handrails that were added later which may, over time, have acquired independent historic significance.

Guidelines

- Historic stoops, steps, and railings should be retained on all street-facing sides of Early 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).

STOOPS, STEPS + RAILINGS

- Decorative cast iron steps and railings are generally 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).

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.

FENCES, GATES + WALLS

Required Approvals

BOARD REVIEW	STAFF REVIEW	NO REVIEW
Not required	Construction or demolition of fences, gates, garden walls, and retaining walls	Walls less than 2 feet in height

Introduction

Fences, gates, garden walls, and retaining walls are important visual features of the historic districts that provide distinctive streetscapes while also providing a sense of privacy and enclosure for property owners. 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, or masonry. The Board discourages using synthetic materials such as fiberglass, concrete, or vinyl.
- Wood fences should generally 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 cannot be located in a vision clearance area. Refer to § 7-800 of the Zoning Ordinance.

FENCES, GATES + WALLS

- 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.

SOLAR ENERGY SYSTEMS
(BUILDING MOUNTED)

Required Approvals

BOARD REVIEW	STAFF REVIEW	NO REVIEW
Not required	New solar energy systems on the front (all street-facing sides)	New solar energy systems on the side and rear (all non-street facing sides)

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

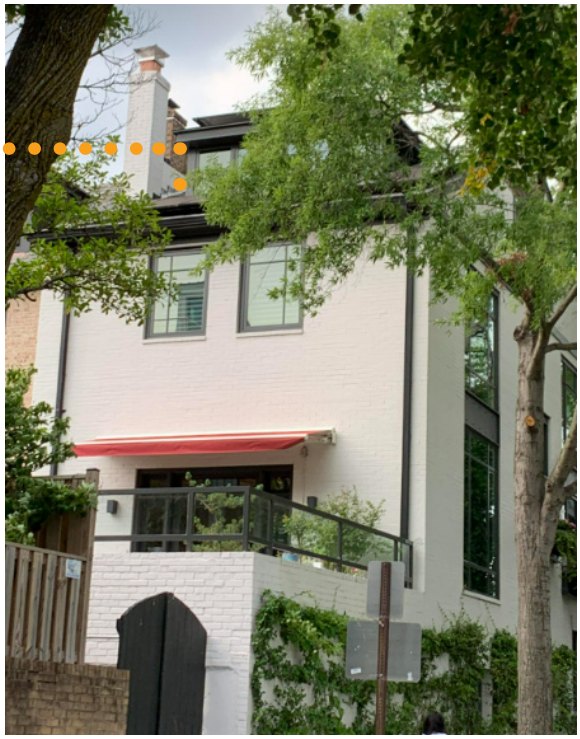
- Solar energy systems should not damage historic building materials.
- Solar energy systems should be minimally visible from the public right-of-way.
- Roof-mounted solar energy systems should be mounted at an angle which is as close to the adjacent roof slope as possible.
- The framework of roof-mounted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

SOLAR ENERGY SYSTEMS
(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 installed on the least visible area of a roof from the public right-of-way.



Required Approvals

BOARD REVIEW	STAFF REVIEW	NO REVIEW
Not required	Repair or replacement of roofing materials	Roof drainage elements such as snow guards, leaf guards, gutters and downspouts

Introduction

Roofs of historic buildings are one of the dominant visual features in the historic district. The choice of roofing materials is an important consideration in the design of any rehabilitation work on a historic structure as well as for new construction. Replacement or new roofing material visible from a public right-of-way requires Staff review.

Guidelines

- On buildings constructed before 1932 (Early Buildings), original or existing roofing which has acquired historic importance over time must be preserved and repaired whenever possible. When this is not feasible, Staff can approve replacement materials that match the original roofing material. If the original roofing material is missing and cannot be determined, roofing appropriate to the age and style of the structure must be used.
- On buildings constructed after 1931 (Later Buildings), modern materials such as composite (synthetic) roofing and composition shingles may be used if appropriate to the style of the building. The Board recommends using architectural grade composition shingles in weathered wood or slate blend colors.
- The Board discourages replacing original and appropriate roofing material with modern alterations.

Additional Information

- A building permit is required from Code Administration for the replacement of over 100 square feet of roofing material in the historic districts, pursuant to § 15.2-2306 of the Code of Virginia.
- The Board recommends using light colors on flat roofs to reduce air conditioning loads on the building and minimize the urban heat island effect.
- The Board encourages environmentally sustainable materials and practices, including living roofs in minimally visible locations.

Historic Roofing Materials

18th Century Buildings
Wood shingle was the predominant roofing material in Alexandria until the early 19th century. Wood shingle roofs were often painted to simulate tile or slate roofs.

19th Century Buildings
Standing seam metal roofs were in wide use throughout the historic districts by the end of the 19th century. Metal roofs are more fire resistant than wood roofs and have a life span of 50 to 100 years with proper maintenance. Other roofing materials such as slate shingles and clay tile were not widely used in Alexandria until the late 19th century. Patterned slate shingles are a central architectural feature of roofs of Gothic Revival and mansard roofs on Second Empire style buildings. Clay tile roofs are a standard feature of Romanesque style buildings.

20th Century Buildings
Composition shingles made of asphalt were not widely used in the historic districts until the middle of the 20th century.

ROOFING MATERIALS FOUND THROUGHOUT THE DISTRICTS

^ FISHSCALE WOOD SHINGLE
18TH - 19TH CENTURY

^ POLYCHROME SLATE
MID 19TH - EARLY 20THCENTURY

^ STANDING SEAM METAL
MID 19TH - 21ST CENTURY

^ FANCY CUT SLATE
19TH - EARLY 20TH CENTURY

^ STAMPED METAL SHINGLE
19TH - 21ST CENTURY

^ SLATE SHINGLE
19TH - 21ST CENTURY

^ SINGLE PLY MEMBRANE
20TH - 21ST CENTURY

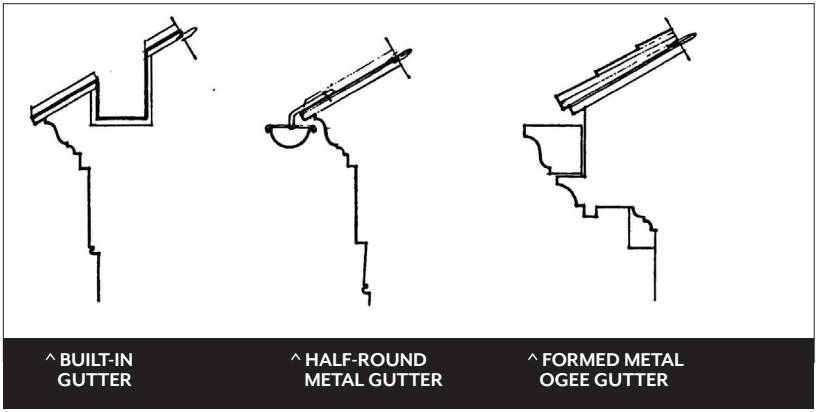
^ ARCHITECTURAL GRADE ASPHALT
20TH - 21ST CENTURY

^ 3-TAB COMPOSITION
20TH - 21ST CENTURY

Gutters and Downspouts

While gutters and downspouts do not require BAR approval, the following are recommended as best practices:

- K-style or ogee gutters should be used when there is a pre-existing fascia board to which the flat side of an ogee gutter can be easily mounted
- Half-round gutters hang from the roof bracket and should be used when no fascia board exists.
- Gutters and downspouts should be metal or wood and painted or factory finished in a color to match the wall or trim.



Types of gutters.

CHIMNEYS + FLUES

Required Approvals

BOARD REVIEW

Demolition of chimneys and flues on front (all street-facing sides)

STAFF REVIEW

Construction or modification of chimneys and flues on front (all street-facing sides)

NO REVIEW

Construction or modification of chimneys and flues on side and rear (all non-street facing sides)

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.

Guidelines

- New chimneys should be appropriate to the period and style of the adjacent or attached structure.
- Brick and brick-clad chimneys are generally appropriate for buildings constructed in the late 18th and 19th centuries.
- The Board discourages exterior metal flue chimneys. Chimneys on 20th century commercial and industrial type structures may be made of metal 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.