

# Neighborhood Design Standards

## Chapter 3.75

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*The Planning Department is assigned responsibility for administration of these design standards.*

### 1 Introduction

**Clarification Box:**

In order to provide clarity and further examples, photographs and additional information have been added in “boxes” throughout the Neighborhood Design Standards.

The information and photographs do not add any new regulations or standards and are not part of the official approved standards. They are provided in order to aid understanding and provide interpretation to some areas that applicants have asked questions about in the past.

Certain areas of Lincoln within the well-established neighborhoods have evolved into relatively dense residential sections which retain much of the traditional physical character of their original lower density development. These are areas of the City that were within the city limits to December 31, 1949, and are potentially eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. The purpose of the Neighborhood Design Standards is to encourage rehabilitation of existing housing in such areas, while allowing necessary new construction that is compatible with the surrounding development.

The standards focus on a limited number of basic design elements which have significant effect on compatibility, such as orientation of windows and entrances toward the street, height and massing, and location of parking. The written standards are accompanied by a sketchbook which both illustrates the basic requirements and makes suggestions of additional means and ideas to achieve greater compatibility. Together, the design standards and the sketchbook are intended to encourage neighborhood associations, developers, and builders to look closely at the existing features of older areas and to think about the effect new building design has in those neighborhoods. These standards and suggestions cannot guarantee good design—only the talents and efforts of owners, designers, and builders do that—but they hopefully will eliminate certain design features that most negatively impact the character of older neighborhoods. (Amended Resolution No. A-83068, 11-1-04; Res. No. A-82591, 3-1-2004).

## 2 Work Requiring Review

The design standards apply to **new construction** of principal buildings on land located within the R-1, R-2, R-3, R-4, R-5, R-6, R-7 and R-8 districts, and subsequent modifications to those buildings, provided such land was within the corporate limits of the City on December 31, 1949.

The following categories of work do not require review under the Neighborhood Design Standards (although other building and zoning codes may apply):

1. Alterations to buildings existing at the date of enactment of these standards (date);
2. Landscape changes to existing developed sites;
3. Construction of accessory buildings on existing developed lots;
4. Any interior aspects of new or existing construction.

(Amended Resolution No. A-83068, 11-1-04; Res. A-82591, 3-1-2004).

### ***What is New Construction of a Principal Building***

(1) Any new building on a vacant lot.

(2) Additions made to an existing dwelling unit to add one or more dwelling units, regardless of the size of the new unit(s). For example changing a single family into a duplex or five-plex into a six-plex.

(3) Additions made to an existing dwelling unit, even though a new unit is not added, that the new construction increases the floor area by 100%. The addition is defined as new construction because it serves as the principal portion of the building. The principal residential use can be defined by items such as new kitchen, master bedroom, living room and garage, even though the original construction may still contain some of these rooms.

## 3 Application & Review Process

The review process for the Neighborhood Design Standards is designed to parallel the current building permit review process. That is, review for compliance with the Neighborhood Design Standards will take place at the same time that other components of the building permit are examined. In doing so, all attempts are made to avoid increased time for review and approval. To facilitate this administrative review process, the applicant will be requested to submit certain additional items with the normal building permit application. Those items are as follows:

1. At least one black or blue line print showing the principal street facade, the side facades, and the site plan of the proposed building.

# 4 General Requirements

## 4.1 Building Elements

### Window

The size of a window was not defined, however, the intent was a window with transparent glass of a common size, such as about 24 to 34 inches in width and 36 to 56 inches in height. On a case by case basis staff will determine when a proposed smaller window is acceptable because it is an appropriate size for the room and still meets the intent to provide multiple openings.

### Openings

The number of openings can include only one door and does not include the garage door.

### Story

“Two openings per story” does not mean two per “floor.” This has been interpreted to mean that if a building has two floors but due to a steeply pitched roof has only 1 and ½ stories, then only one opening on the second floor is necessary.



*New house with low-pitched roof compatible with its setting -- meets standards.*



*Incompatible design that lacks windows toward street -- does not meet standards.*

1. New buildings shall utilize a roof type and pitch commonly found within the same and facing block front. Hipped or gable roofs with pitch of at least 22.5 degrees (6/12 pitch) are acceptable for any project regulated by the Neighborhood Design Standards. Roofs of lower pitch and other types may be compatible in specific districts, and can be proposed and approved on an individual basis. In such cases, the applicant should cite specific examples within a block of the project location comparable to the proposed building in height and to the proposed roof in type and pitch.

2. Existing residential structures within established neighborhoods typically share similar design features, such as a common orientation to the street, seen in the location of entrances, windows, and porches. New buildings shall provide at least two **openings** (combination of **windows** or door) per **story** oriented to the street including at least one window and an entrance to a dwelling unit or to a hallway leading to a dwelling unit.

On corner properties with two required front yards, the principal facade for purposes of orientation (requiring door and windows) shall match the pattern of half or more of the houses on the same and facing block fronts, if such a pattern exists. The other required front yard shall not be required to have an entrance to a dwelling unit but shall meet other

## ***Garage Doors on Corner Lots***

The “other required front yard” in terms of meeting the “garage doors” requirement of the principal faces means that you must also follow Step 7 on the “other block” front” to determine garage door orientation.

It is possible that the other block front will have a different result than the principal facade in terms of the position of the garage door.

## ***What is a Porch***

For the purposes of this standard, a porch must be covered and provide space for outdoor seating without obstructing the door.

## ***Half or More***

Means fifty percent or more, not including the lot(s) in the application.

## ***Same & Facing Block Faces***

Means the entire block fronts of the lot, the “adjoining” block face(s) across the street and adjoining block faces. See two examples on next page.



***Wide porch is similar to surrounding houses -- meets standards.***



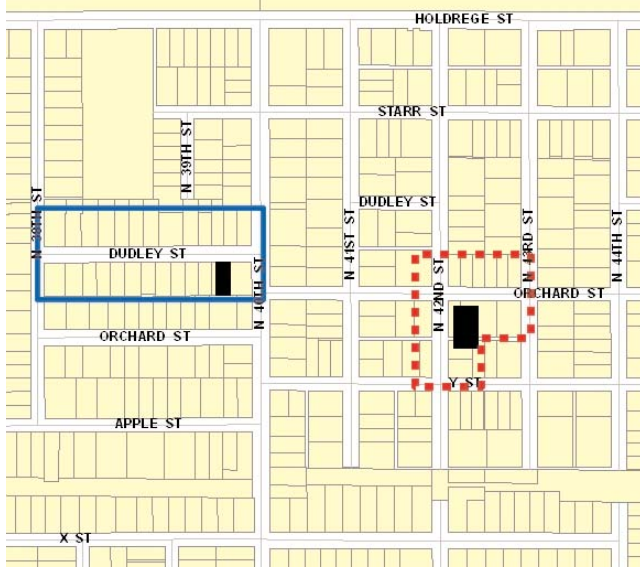
***Porch not typical of surroundings -- does not meet standards.***

requirements for a principal facade (regarding windows, limitations on **garage doors**, and building length).

3. Front porches are required, when **half or more** of the houses on the **same and facing block fronts** or on adjacent blocks have front porches. Front porches shall be equal in width to at least 50% of the length of the front facade and equal in depth to half the depth of the front yard, or ten feet, whichever is less. Smaller porches may be approved based on evidence that half or more of the houses on the same and facing block fronts or on the adjacent block faces have smaller porches.
4. Exterior stairs serving second floor units are not allowed on street facades.
5. The elevation of the first floor level of new dwellings shall generally match the pattern of half or more of the houses on the same and facing block fronts. In other words, if the first floor of most houses in an area are positioned three or four steps above the prevailing grade, new dwellings should have a similar height of first floor, and if most surrounding houses are one or no steps above grade, new construction should match this characteristic.

The Planning Director may approve designs that do not meet this requirement upon receiving information that there are no other practical and reasonable means of providing accessibility to a new dwelling for persons with mobility impairments, and provided the design offers other features to enhance the compatibility of the new building with neighboring dwellings.

(These Design Standards do not supercede



*Same and Adjoining Block Faces (All Lots in Box are Counted)*



*Corner building dominated by garage doors on one street front -- would not meet standards.*

## Measuring Garage Doors 40%

Measurement of the garage doors is from edge of door to edge of door and does not include the framing around the door. The house is measured from wall edge to wall edge, not including eaves or porches.



*Incompatible design due to exterior stairs that dominate a prominent side of the building.*

floodplain or accessibility standards but neither are these Standards waived for those other public purposes. Good design and planning can meet multiple objectives.)

6. In areas subject to these Standards that do not have prevailing patterns (such as new streets developed as Community Unit Plans [CUPs]), the general intent is to produce dwellings which are oriented to principal access ways and have the “neighborly” design characteristics called for in these standards, while respecting the creative design elements fostered by CUPs.
7. Garages, if constructed, shall follow the pattern of half or more of the residential properties on the same and facing block front, such as:
  - a. if the pattern in an area is that garages are located behind the house, a pattern of rear garages shall be followed;
  - b. if the pattern in an area is that garages are attached or that garages are part of the main building with doors facing the street, doors for not more than two stalls are permitted on a portion of the main building facing a front lot line, provided such **doors shall not occupy more than 40% of the length** of the principal street facade. Garage doors are permitted in the main plane of the facade or forward of the main plane only when documentation is provided that such a feature is the pattern of half or more of the houses in an area (such as post-World War II “ranch” houses)



*House with rear-yard garage.*



*Ranch house with garage on facade.*

## **Main Plane of the Principal Facade**

In general, for the purposes of positioning a garage, the front wall with the longest portion will be the main plane. In houses with substantial or deep porches, determining the main plane may count the porch face, measured at the front of the columns, as the main plane.

## **Height**

Means the Zoning Ordinance definition (Lincoln Municipal Code 27.03.130 “Building, Height of”) which in general measures the height of the roof half way up a pitched roof.

## **Measuring Height of Other Buildings**

When there is a question as to the height of the shortest or tallest structure, the applicant shall provide an estimate of the width and height of the walls of the building in question in order to estimate roof height. Typically the building width can be found on the County Assessor’s website.

c. if there is no garage pattern shared by at least half of the residential properties on the same and facing block front, garages may be attached and face the street provided the garage portion of the building is set back from the **main plane of the principal facade** at least five feet.

8. **Height** of new buildings should be similar to that of existing residences on the same and facing block fronts. New buildings shall be acceptable that are not taller than the tallest residential structure, nor shorter than the shortest residential structure, built prior to December 31, 1949 on the contiguous block face, provided that:

- a. the maximum allowable height shall not be reduced to less than twenty-eight (28) feet, and
- b. if the height permitted under this section would exceed that permitted in the underlying district, the new building shall be no taller than an existing, adjacent building. Taller structures may be approved on a case-by-case basis, when a steeper roof would increase compatibility between the new building and adjacent older residences.

9. In order to encourage variation of the front elevation, up to twenty-five percent (25%) of the length of the principal street facade may be constructed up to two feet (2') into the required front yard. Use of this provision, however, cannot increase the extension of porches into a required front yard beyond that otherwise allowed in Sections 27.71.100 and 27.71.110 of the Zoning Ordinance.



*Example of “garage forward” design suitable for an area in which that pattern is predominant.*



*New apartments with “rowhouse” character, reducing overall scale.*

10. The rhythm of similar width houses on similar width lots does much to establish the character of Lincoln’s established residential areas. Large new buildings disrupt this character, unless design measures are employed to reduce their apparent scale. New buildings over fifty feet (50') in length on the principal street facade should be designed to maintain the rhythm of the existing adjacent buildings. Designs will be bound to meet this standard which offset the principal street facade and roof at intervals of fifty feet (50') or less. These offsets shall be at least six feet (6') in depth, and the portions of the facade offset shall equal at least 10% of the length of the facade. Alternate designs that maintain the rhythm of the blockface by such means as shifts in materials within the facade, use of multiple porches and/or dormers, and grouping of windows and entrances, may also be approved on a case-by-case basis.

(Amended Resolution No. A-83068, 11-1-04).

### **4.2 Yards and Open Space**

1. Elevated walkways, or balconies serving more than one unit shall not be located on a portion of the building facing a front or side yard, nor shall open space credit be given for any walkways or balconies.
2. Entrances to the building shall not be located on a portion of the building facing a side lot line unless the entire building is at least ten feet (10') from that side lot line.
3. No more than one mechanical unit,



*Garage-dominated design with wide front paving -- would not meet standards.*



*Apartment with front yard parking -- would not meet standards.*

such as air conditioning units, shall be located within each required front yard and not more than three in any required side yard, provided that multiple units are spaced at least twenty feet apart. Such accessory structures will be screened from adjacent properties if located within a required front yard or within ten feet (10') of a side lot line.

4. Care should be taken to preserve existing street trees. Any trees removed shall be replaced in accord with the city's Master Street Tree Plan, and additional trees shall be planted as necessary to reach a standard of one street tree per fifty feet (50') of street frontage.

(Amended Resolution No. A-83068, 11-1-04).

### **4.3 Parking**

1. No required parking space shall be allowed between the building and the front property line. Driveways and parking aprons in the front yard may not measure more than 20 feet wide.
2. Trees in addition to any others required elsewhere shall be planted within five (5) feet of a parking area at the rate of one tree for every six (6) parking spaces.
3. Parking areas of four or more stalls shall be screened from adjacent properties. Fences may be used for screening in rear yards.

(Amended Resolution No. A-83068, 11-1-04).

***INTERNAL PROCESS AFTER  
DIRECTOR APPROVES WAIVER***

In any case where a waiver is approved by the Planning Director, the waiver is not effective until 14 days after to allow notified property owners or local association(s) to appeal the approval. Thus, construction can not begin until the appeal period is over.

## **5** **Waivers & Appeal**

If the proposed building plan is found to be not in compliance with Neighborhood Design Standards, the applicant may appeal that finding to the Director of Planning, who may waive strict conformance with the Standards upon written finding that the design enhances its setting and meets the intent of the Neighborhood Design Standards. Owners of adjacent property within 200 feet shall be notified by first class mail of such waivers, along with the neighborhood or homeowners association, if any, for the area of the property.

Decisions of the Planning Director may be appealed to the Urban Design Committee within fourteen (14) days of the date of the notification mailing. The party appealing should provide the Committee with any information that demonstrates whether or not the proposed design is compatible with the affected underlying zoning district and whether it meets the intent of the Neighborhood Design Standards.

The Urban Design Committee shall review the proposed design and any additional information, and shall make a written finding upholding or reversing the administrative decision. The Committee may find a design compatible that varies from specific design standards, but meets the overall intent of the Neighborhood Design Standards. If the Committee upholds an administrative finding that a design is not compatible, the Committee may recommend changes to the proposed building permit application in order to meet the intent and purpose of the Neighborhood Design Standards.

Findings and actions of the Urban Design Committee may be appealed within 14 (fourteen) days to the City Council by a letter filed with the City Clerk. The City Council shall review the Committee's recommendations in considering the request to modify or waive any of the Neighborhood Design Standards. If the Council approves a waiv-

er(s) to these standards, the applicant may resubmit the building plans for building permit review. Should Council affirm the recommended changes by staff or Urban Design Committee, the applicant shall make such changes prior to resubmitting the building permit application.

(Amended Resolution No. A-83068, 11-1-04)