

**Town of Belmont**  
**Planning Board**

**Design Guidelines for the General Residence Zoning Districts**  
**For Properties Subject to Design and Site Plan Review and Special Permit**

(Adopted November 15, 2016)

1. Style

One of the Board's top priorities, on behalf of the Town, is to maintain and enhance the proportions, rhythm, character, and materials of the neighboring houses that define the streetscape.

The design of alterations and additions shall, where reasonable and appropriate, strive to improve the quality, appearance and usability of existing buildings, structures, and sites. The architecture of an addition shall be harmonious with the existing structure such that the addition appears as part of the existing structure.

Every reasonable effort shall be made to preserve the original qualities and architectural features of the building.

A new home shall be designed with forms, shapes, textures, and functions compatible with the general character and design styles of the existing neighborhood.

2. Mass and Building Height

On lots less than 5,000 square feet and/or with less than 50' frontage, a new building should not be larger than the size (total living area) of the previously existing building; however, the Board may also consider the Gross Floor Area of the building that previously existed on the lot and the consistency of its size with the neighborhood.

An acceptable size for a new single-family dwelling is 2,200 – 2,600 square feet and for a two-family will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

The grade of the lot may be lowered in order to reduce the sense of mass and building height. All applications should include wall height benchmarked against the crest of the abutting street. Corner lots will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis.

All efforts should be used to reduce the sense of building mass through the use of architectural elements indicated in Sections 4 through 9.

The new building should be similar in height to the other buildings within the neighborhood.

- The height of a dwelling shall not be more than the average of abutting dwellings plus 15 feet. In no case, shall the height exceed the allowable height in the underlying zoning district.
- In no case should it be taller than the tallest building or shorter than the shortest.

Additionally, the horizontal or vertical emphasis of the building and the main elements should complement the neighboring homes.

### 3. Number of Dwelling Units and Configuration

The GR Zoning Districts Zoning By-Laws allow no more than 2 dwelling units per lot. As a result, basements and attics shall not be designed for conversion to an additional unit(s). For example, providing a second stair in a single-family home at the rear of the dwelling or kitchen facilities in the basement shall be avoided.

The conversion of a single-family home on a lot between 5,000 and 6,000 square feet to a two-family home is strongly discouraged.

The traditional horizontal configuration of the dwelling units (one on top of the other) is preferred. The side by side configuration (townhouse style) should only be utilized in the design of a two-family home where the subject lot size and frontage exceeds the minimum requirements as set forth in Section 4.2 of the Town's Zoning By-Law.

### 4. Roof and Dormers

A roof is a significant architectural defining feature of a dwelling and should reflect the roof styles located throughout the neighborhood.

- a. A sloped roof is preferred and may be gable, gambrel, or hip.
- b. The pitch of the roof should be similar to those in the neighborhood.
- c. A cornice line should be of a wide proportion and built out to give dimension to the transition from the roof to the facade.
- d. Roof shingles should be dimensional, architectural grade fiberglass shingles, wood shingles, wood shakes, or slate.

The size of dormers shall be proportional to the house. Dormers are design elements; they should not increase the sense of height or mass of the building.

## 5. Front Porches and Decks

A front porch or covered landing is preferred on all new homes. These elements are a significant part of the architectural identity and the street definition of the Town. Depending on the surrounding neighborhood, the front porch may extend the entire width of the house, or it may be an extension of the front door to differentiate the entrance.

The size of decks shall be proportional to the house. Every effort shall be made for the deck to meet the setback requirements. A 2 ‘-0” jog from the side façade is preferred. Third floor decks are strongly discouraged.

The design details of support columns are very important to the overall appearance of the front porch.

- a. The columns should be at least eight (8) inches in circumference or eight (8) inches square.
- b. The columns should have a distinct capital and base.

### Railings and Decking:

- a. Cedar, fir, mahogany, or ipe shall be used for all finish elements, such as posts, railings, fascia and trim, stair risers and treads, and any other visible features.
- b. Pressure-treated wood may be used only for structural members and/or framing and shall be encapsulated with PVC or similar material.
- c. All railings shall have a substantial profile.
- d. The newel posts should be at least six (6) inch square.
- e. All posts shall be finished with a cap detail.
- f. Cedar, fir, mahogany, or composite material is preferred for the decking.

## 6. Windows

- a. All elevations of the house shall be fenestrated and the window placement evenly balanced.
- b. Basement windows shall not be on the front façade of the dwelling.
- c. Additions shall use the same style window as the rest of the house.
- d. Simulated grid applied divided light windows (SDL) are preferred.
- e. All window casings should be 5/4.
- f. Historic window sills should be utilized.

If shutters are used, they shall be made of wood and utilize authentic hardware and may be installed only on the front elevation. Shutter sizes shall be proportionally correct. They should each be half the width of the window opening such that the entire window is covered when they are closed.

## 7. Architectural Details

The architectural details proposed for the addition shall be consistent with the existing dwelling.

The architectural details should be consistent with the architectural details present on other neighborhood homes to add interest to the design and coherence with the streetscape. Details should be used as appropriate to the neighborhood style and to the building construction type and should be appropriately labeled on the plans.

These preferred details include, but are not limited to:

- a. Eight (8) inch rake boards,
- b. Ten (10) inch fascia,
- c. Twelve (12) to twenty four (24) inch soffits, and
- d. Six (6) to ten (10) inch corner boards.

## 8. Exterior Finishes

The materials, products, and finishes should be chosen for contextual suitability, and for quality and durability with the intent to minimize the maintenance required to remain in good condition.

Brick, wood siding, fiber cement siding, wood shingle, stucco, stone, or other natural materials are acceptable on the front, rear, and side elevations. Vinyl and aluminum siding are discouraged .

Additions should be finished in the same material as the existing house.

Chimneys for fireplaces should be consistent with the style and materials of the design of the house. Chimneys associated with gas fireplaces that vent through the side of the house should be clad with masonry veneer and should run up the side of the dwelling in order to resemble a chimney similar to that of a conventional wood burning fireplace.

## 9. Landscaping

Well-designed landscaping is an asset in the neighborhood and helps soften a building and reduce the sense of mass. As a result, landscaping should be planted to buffer views of the foundation on all sides, along property lines and to separate driveways from abutting property. Planting materials should be high-quality and drought-resistant.

Shrubbery:

- a. Foundation plantings surrounding the home shall be at a minimum thirty six (36) in height.
- b. The Zoning By-Laws require screening of outdoor mechanical equipment. If shrubs are used for screening, they shall be evergreens, such as Boxwood or Hatfield or Hicks Yews, at a minimum of thirty six (36) inches in height.

Trees:

- a. Existing mature trees that are in good health shall be preserved.
- b. A shade or an ornamental tree may be recommended to be planted in the front yard.
- c. Trees shall be at a minimum three and one half (3-1/2) to four (4) inch caliper at the time of installation.
- d. Street trees shall be planted every twenty (20) feet to twenty-five (25) feet and shall be three and one half (3-1/2) to four (4) inch caliper at the time of installation.

Fencing:

Picket and stockade fences, wood and solid PVC are preferred over vinyl and chain link fences. Stone walls are preferred over concrete walls.