

City of Milwaukee – Department of City Development
Single-Family Traditional Design Guidelines
(also Multi-Family with some modifications)

Quality design is important and benefits the entire neighborhood with quality housing that maintains and increases value. These guidelines apply to most City neighborhoods where houses are typically tall and narrow. Different criteria may apply depending on the neighborhood context such as areas with bungalows or cottages. Look at the City lot and the adjacent properties to determine neighborhood compatibility.

Innovative design is also encouraged, but must fit the neighborhood context in scale. These designs must be approved on a case-by-case basis.

House designs and placement on the lot must also conform to the City Zoning Code. Pay special attention to standards for minimum house width relative to lot width and requirements for minimum house height.

House & Garage Placement/Site Issues

1. House width must conform to the City Zoning code requirements for minimum/maximum width based on lot size and existing zoning.
2. Houses must face the street generally toward narrow end of the lot. Houses on corner lots should be oriented the same direction as the adjacent houses, which is usually the street with the least frontage. Orientation should be confirmed before preliminary designs are prepared.
3. House setbacks must conform to the City Zoning Code. Typically the front setback is the average setback for adjoining properties. The Plat of Survey that is required for a building permit will determine the exact setback.
4. Garages shall be detached structures, be placed at the rear of the lot and have a minimum size of 20 feet by 20 feet. If the lot has alley access, the garage set back shall be no more than five feet from the alley. Side driveways are required for lots without an adjoining alley.
5. Attached garages may be allowed in limited circumstances as determined by neighborhood context. These garages must be placed at least five feet behind the front façade so that the house is the dominant feature, not the garage.
6. Decorative metal fencing is the only fencing permitted in front yards. Chain-link or solid wood fencing is permitted in back yards except on corner lots where chain link fencing is discouraged on sides that face streets.

Height

1. Houses shall be two stories plus attic or one and one-half story bungalows and should be similar in design, size and scale with the adjacent houses as well as other houses on the block.
2. Overall height must conform to the City Zoning Code for minimum height.
3. Raised foundations are recommended – 24 to 36 inches above grade – as determined by neighborhood context.
4. Special accommodation will be made for houses with handicapped accessibility.

Windows & Doors

1. Window and door openings shall be proportional to the overall mass of the house façade -- avoiding blank walls with minimal windows. The minimum amount of openings should be approximately 25% of each façade and shall be distributed between both floors.
2. Double-hung windows with a vertical in orientation --tall and narrow in proportion to width – are required on elevations facing the street.

Exterior Materials & Details

1. Exterior siding/cladding shall be brick, natural stone, wood clapboards, wood shingles or hardiplank or cementitious clapboards that do not show lap marks. A heavy shadow line should be evident on all clapboards.
2. Vinyl siding is discouraged and may be prohibited in certain neighborhoods such as those that have mostly brick homes.
3. EFIS and concrete block are prohibited materials.
4. Foundations must be brick, cut limestone, stone veneer, rusticated block, patterned concrete or approved decorative block.
5. Traditional architectural details such as cornices, frieze boards, corner boards, window enframements, water tables and raking boards at gables shall be included on elevations visible from the street.
6. Garage materials should be similar to the house.

Porches

1. A covered porch or stoop is required to cover the front door.
2. The porch deck and roof must extend at least 6 feet from the front of the house.
3. Porches and stoops must be proportion to the overall house size.
4. A traditional design must used and include details such as top and bottom rails with balusters no wider than 2-1/2 inches, mounted in the center of the top and bottom rails. Railings must be no higher than 36 inches.
5. Front porch floors shall be elevated to no greater than 7 inches below the first floor finish floor and shall be concrete or constructed of tongue and groove 5/4 lumber appropriate for exterior use.
6. The area below the deck shall be appropriately skirted with a board frame and covered foundation posts.
7. A side porch facing a street is permitted if the design is similar to the front porch.

Roofs

1. Roofs shall be steeply pitched with a minimum of 8/12 pitch.
2. Roofing material shall be dimensional asphalt, flat tile or slate.
3. Skylights should not be visible from the street.
4. Chimneys shall be of appropriate scale to the house. Pre-manufactured flues shall be covered in a material similar to the rest of the house.
5. Satellite dishes shall not be mounted within 20 feet of the front façade of the house (and side façade if a corner unit).
6. Garage pitches should be similar to the house.