



# Arlington Residential Design Guidelines Study

ARB Presentation - October 5, 2020

Town of Arlington, Department of Planning and Community Development



# Project Background

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- **2018 Residential Study Group and the DPCD Report on Demolitions and Replacement Homes.**
- **2019 RFP for Residential Design Guidelines. Design Review Working Group Established. Harriman selected as consultant. Project kickoff.**
- **2020 Development of Residential Design Guidelines.**

# Project Goals

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**The Town of Arlington would like to work with the community to create Residential Guidelines for one-family and two-family residential projects in R0, R1, and R2 districts that:**

- Address three sets of interests: the preferences of neighborhood residents; the desires of property owners to add onto or replace existing housing; and the general public interests of the Arlington community.
- Codify the balances between different needs in a clear and understandable way - community and individual, aesthetics and market needs, control and flexibility.
- Recommend an approval process that ensures the balance is embodied in the built environment as new structures are built.

# Process





## **Existing Conditions Analysis and Community Feedback**



# Existing Conditions Analysis - Overview

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Through the analysis, the team worked to understand:

- Key design issues and patterns that impact the identity of a neighborhood.
- Design factors that differentiate Arlington's single-family and two-family neighborhoods.
- Current permitting process.

# Existing Conditions - Key Design Issues

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Additions that do not fit the design context of the existing house and neighborhood.



New Construction that is not in scale with the neighborhood.



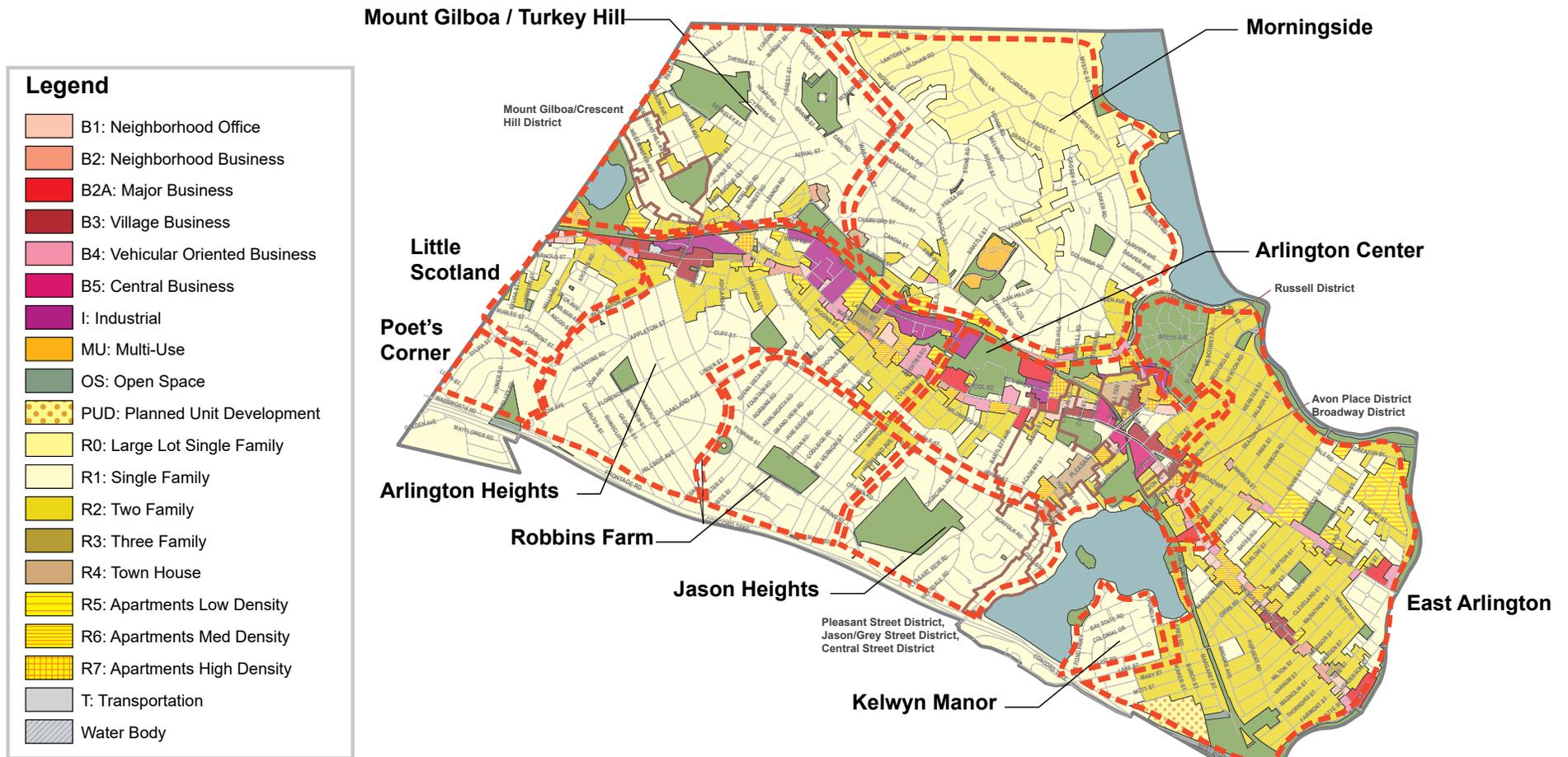
Parking that dominates the principal façade.

# Existing Conditions - Neighborhood Identity

- A ‘sense of place’ is the relationship between people and place and includes the physical characteristics of a neighborhood.
- Elements that help to distinguish different neighborhoods include:
  - History of development - Streetcar suburb vs. post-war suburb. Arlington’s population nearly doubled in the 1920s and saw other waves of development after WWII in the 1950s.
  - Landmarks and open spaces.
  - Street layout and lot size.
  - Age, style, historic districts.
  - Massing, density, height.

# Existing Conditions - Neighborhood Identity

This 'fuzzy boundary' map was drafted by synthesizing information from unofficial mental maps, zoning, key open spaces, and maps of Assessor's Data such as lot size, age, FAR, and style.



*Draft boundaries are for discussion purposes only.*

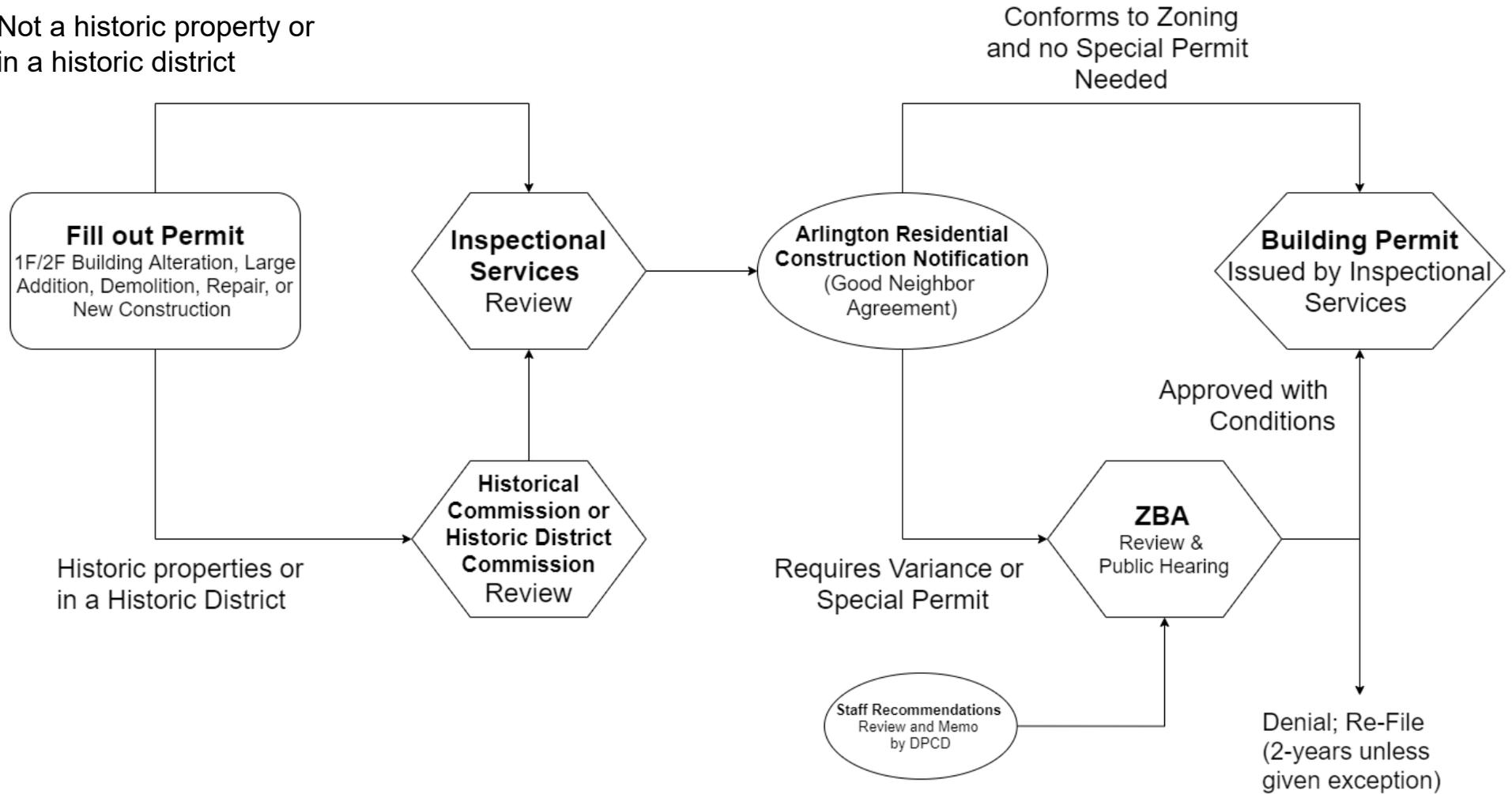
# Community Engagement - Key Takeaways

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- Participants **love Arlington** because of its balance between urban convenience and the community feel of a quieter, smaller town.
- **Off-street parking and the perceived size of new houses were the top concerns.** Parking strategies that de-emphasized the garage and car were well-received. Garages that dominated the façade were not well-received. Participants noted how some new homes were boxy and felt too large, relative to the lot and neighborhood.
- Participants wanted **guidelines that were more visual and less prescriptive.** They hope that it will promote quality designs that fit well in the neighborhood and provide enough flexibility to not overly restrict development.

# Existing Approval Process

Not a historic property or in a historic district





# **Draft Residential Design Guidelines Overview**

# Purpose of Design Guidelines

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- **For Homeowners**

Provide a “pattern book” of design best practices, given the neighborhood context.

- **For Builders, Architects, and other Professionals**

Provide guidance on how new houses and renovations can fit a neighborhood context better.

- **For Town Staff and ZBA**

Provide clear standards to evaluate new construction. For houses that are not zoning compliant, meeting the guidelines will help the variance process move more smoothly.

# Organization of Design Guidelines

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## Three Sections

## Design Principles

## Recommendations

### Streetscape Design

A-1

*Encourage/Discourage*

A-2

*Encourage/Discourage*

A-3

*Encourage/Discourage*

A-4

*Encourage/Discourage*

### Building Design

B-1

*Encourage/Discourage*

B-2

*Encourage/Discourage*

### Building Elements

C-1

*Encourage/Discourage*

# Design Guideline Principles

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- **Streetscape Design**

- A-1: Arlington's residential neighborhoods are distinct and organized into Neighborhood Block Categories to reflect differing lot sizes.
- A-2: New houses and significant additions should be oriented and located in a way that is consistent with their Neighborhood Block Category.
- A-3: Streetscapes should feel welcoming to people walking down the street and should minimize disruptions from driveways.
- A-4: Creative solutions and exceptions are encouraged to help new houses and renovations with special circumstances and non-conforming lots in a way that is consistent with the Neighborhood Block Category.

# Design Guideline Principles

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- **Building Design**

- B-1: Arlington's residential neighborhoods are made up of diverse architectural styles; new houses and renovations are encouraged to borrow elements from existing block styles and avoid being too plain or too complex.
- B-2: Creative solutions are encouraged to ensure new houses are designed to be consistent with the streetscape's rhythm.
- B-3: New additions are encouraged to match or complement the style of the original structure and match the rhythm of other houses on the street.

- **Building Elements**

- C-1: Building elements such as entrances, roofs, dormers, and windows should be used in a way to help the house to feel welcoming and active.

# Four Neighborhood Block Categories

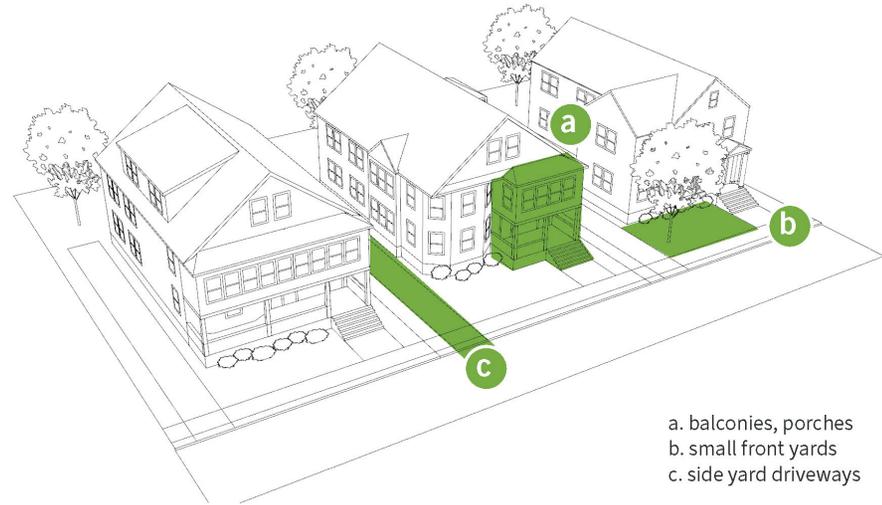
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## 1. Two-Family, Town core

Found in East Arlington and other Two-Family areas along Massachusetts Avenue.

### Primary Characteristics

- Mostly 2-family houses. Typically 2 ½ Stories.
- Typical Lot Size: Smaller than 5,000 sf. Small front yards.
- Balconies and Porches.

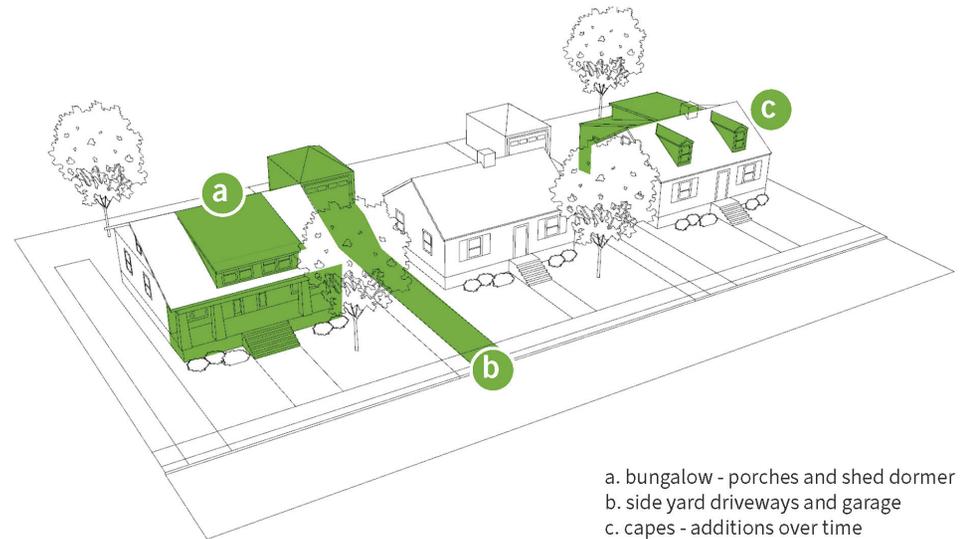


## 2. Single-Family, Small Lots

Found in parts of Arlington Heights, Poets Corner, Robbins Farm, Mount Gilboa/Turkey Hill.

### Primary Characteristics

- Capes, Bungalows, and smaller Colonial styles.
- Typically 1 ½ story with some 2 ½ story.
- Typical Lot Size: Smaller than 5,000 sf or 5,000 sf –6,000 sf. Front Yards between 10 ft to 20 ft.



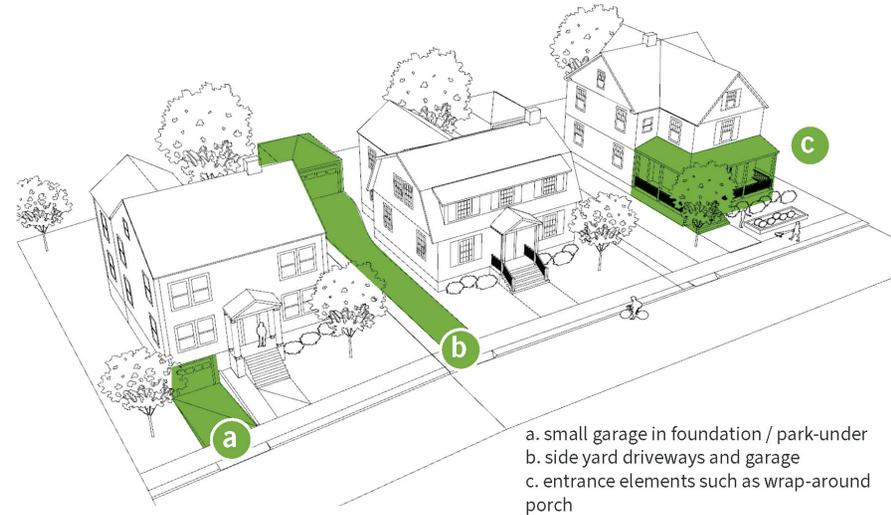
# Four Neighborhood Block Categories

## 3. Single-Family, Medium Lots

Found across Arlington in Kelwyn Manor, Arlington Center, Jason Heights, Poets Corner, Arlington Heights, Mount Gilboa/Turkey Hill, Morningside.

### Primary Characteristics

- Diverse styles.
- Typically 2 story or 2 ½ story.
- Typical Lot Size: 5,000 sf – 6,000 sf or 6,000 sf – 9,000. Front Yards between 20 ft to 30 ft.

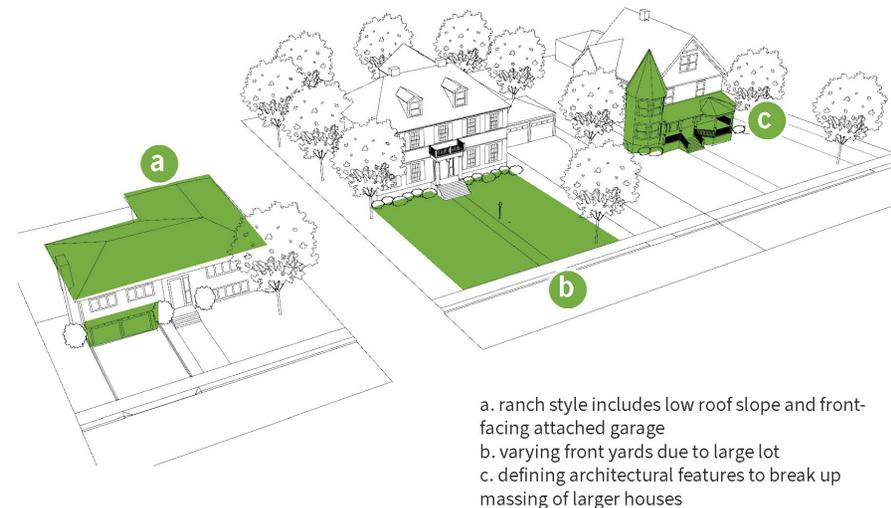


## 4. Single-Family, Large Lots

Found in Jason Heights, Arlington Center, Morningside, Arlington Heights.

### Primary Characteristics

- Colonial/Ranch Style (Morningside) and Victorians, Large Colonials (Jason Heights, Arlington Center, Arlington Heights).
- Typical Lot Size: Larger than 9,000 sf. Front yards larger than 25 ft.



# Sample Layout

Design Principle

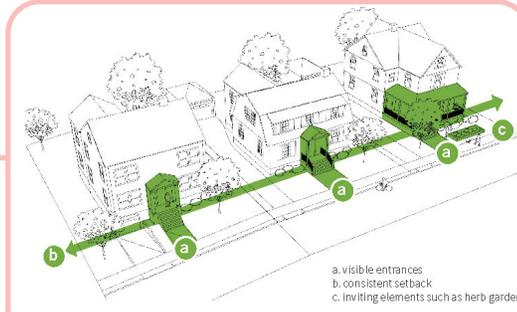
**Principle A-2:** New houses and significant additions should be oriented and located in a way that is consistent with their Neighborhood Block Category.

Page Heading

Front yard areas should add life to the streetscape and feel inviting.

*Zoning Note: See 5.4.2 Table A for full table of dimensions. See 5.3.9 for projections (e.g., bay windows, decks) into yards.*

Annotated Diagram



Definition

**Definition**

Front yard setback is the distance between the house's front façade and the front lot line, or lot line along the street.

**Encourage**

- Consistent setbacks with neighbors: If the setbacks do not align, align it somewhere in the middle or with one of the neighboring residential buildings.

- Greenery: Think beyond the grass lawn, such as vegetable gardens and low-maintenance native plantings.
- Entrance: The primary entrance should face the street and have a separate walkway from the driveway.
- Public-facing projections: Porches, stoops, and bay windows help break apart the massing to create a human-scaled house.

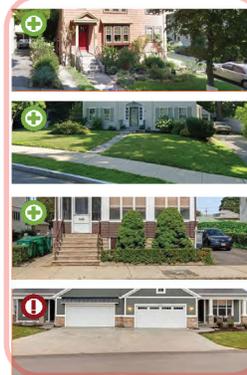
**Discourage**

- Off-street parking: driveways should not be directly in front of the house.
- Mechanicals: air conditioner units and similar equipment should not be in front of the house.
- Paved front yards.

**Block-Specific Recommendations**

- Two-Family Lot Category: Plantings and landscaping can help make smaller yards (less than 10 feet) feel inviting.

Sample Images



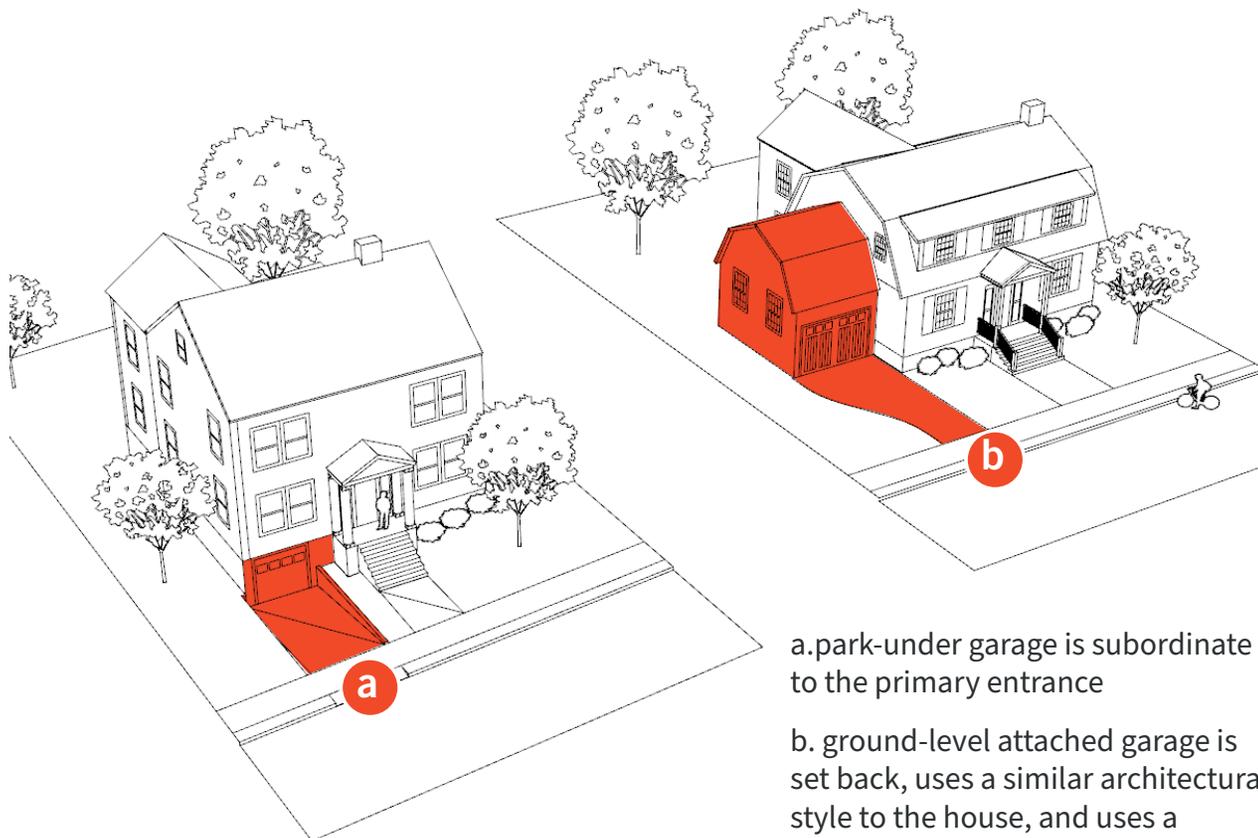
Recommendations (Encourage/Discourage)

Block-Category Recommendations

# Streetscape Design Guidelines - Sample Graphic

**Principle A-3:** Streetscapes should feel welcoming to people walking down the street and should minimize disruptions from driveways.

Attached, street-facing garages tend to dominate the front of the house. Consider other off-street parking solutions first.



- a. park-under garage is subordinate to the primary entrance
- b. ground-level attached garage is set back, uses a similar architectural style to the house, and uses a distinctive door



# Streetscape Design Guidelines - Sample Text

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## Encourage

- **Minimized presence:** Set the attached garage back from the front face of the house. Consider differentiating the garage in a smaller side wing to the main house. Size the garage to be one-car wide.
- **Bay windows and porches:** these elements draw the eye away from the garage.
- **Small park-under garages:** For park-under garages or garages within the house foundation, avoid adding another story to the house.

Match the foundation height of the house to other houses on the street, based on the existing topography.

- **Front walkway:** Create a dedicated entrance walkway for people separate from the driveway.

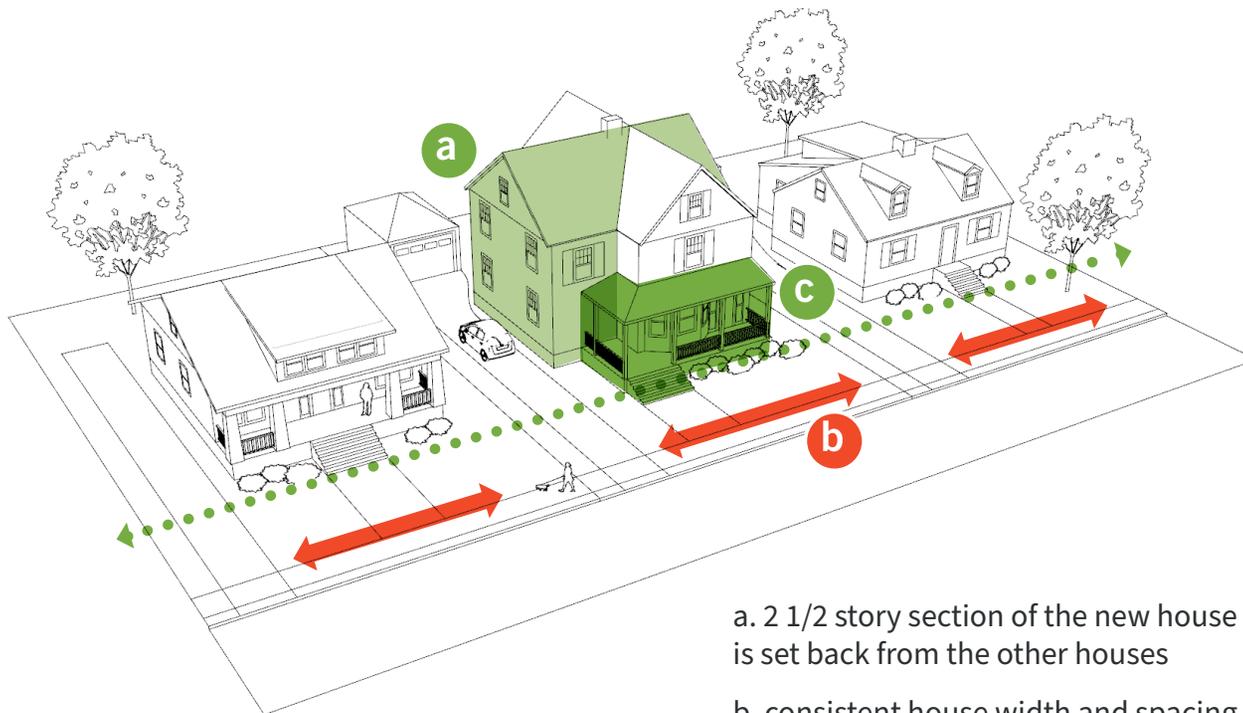
## Discourage

- **Prominent garage doors:** Do not put garage door in front or flush with the primary face of the house. Avoid placing the garage door in the center of the house.
- **Wide garage doors:** Two-car garages should be split into two bays and two garage doors.

# Building Design Guidelines - Sample Graphic

**Principle B-2:** Creative solutions are encouraged to ensure new houses are designed to be consistent with the rhythm and size of other houses on the street.

## Additional Guidelines for New Construction in Single-family, Small Lot Blocks



a. 2 1/2 story section of the new house is set back from the other houses

b. consistent house width and spacing

c. front porch helps to reduce appearance of the new house's height



This new house, though it is taller, matches the spacing of the existing pattern of Cape houses.



Consider side and rear additions that preserve the form of the existing Cape instead of replacement.

# Building Design Guidelines - Sample Text

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## Encourage

### ■ Entrance elements:

Elements such as covered, usable front porches and stoops can help to reduce the appearance of height. Usable front porches refers to a porch with sufficient depth and length to place furniture such as a bench or chairs.

### ■ Half-stories:

Consider using a ½ story such as dormers and the roof space to add additional space instead of a full story.

## Discourage

### ■ Prominent garage doors:

Do not put garage door in front or flush with the primary face of the house. Avoid placing the garage door in the center of the house.

### ■ Wide garage doors:

Two-car garages should be split into two bays and two garage doors.

# Building Element - Sample Graphic

**Principle C-1:** Building elements such as entrances, roofs, dormers, and windows should be designed to be welcoming.

## Main Entrance, Porches, Stoops, and Porticos



Pediment over pilaster.



Double porch.



Entrance is set behind garage.



Contemporary entryway.



New Traditional Colonial Portico.



Two-story entryways generally call too much attention to the house and make it seem larger.

# Building Element - Sample Text

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## Definition

- A **stoop** is a small staircase ending in a platform and leading to the entrance.
- A **pediment over pilasters** is an ornamental archway with columns that projects from the wall and highlights the front entrance.
- A **portico** is a small, covered structure that leads to the entrance, typically supported by columns.
- A **porch** is a covered outdoor area attached to the front of the house or wraps around the house.

## Encourage

- **Obvious entrance:**  
In most cases, entrances should face the street. A pedestrian pathway should link the entrance and sidewalk, instead of a driveway.
- **Entrance elements:**  
Stoops, pediments, and porticos can help highlight the front entrance and add interest to the front façade. Porches should be deep enough to be usable as a furnished space.
- **Detailing:**  
Use appropriately sized columns, railings, and trimmings around doors, windows, and roofs.

## Discourage

- **Obscured or under-sized entrances.**
- **Oversized, two-story entrances.**
- **Inconsistent entrances:**  
Entrance elements help to establish a pattern of front doors on the streetscape. Disrupting the pattern can call unwanted attention to the new house. For example, if there is a defined pattern of porches or stoops, the new house should match the positioning and style of the entrance and avoid introducing something completely new.

# Next Steps and Discussion

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1. **Design Residential Guideline Comment Period and Workshop:  
October - December 2020**
2. **Final Residential Design Guidelines: December 2020**