

Executive Summary

Recommendations from the Architectural Subcommittee

The 2005 Essex Plan of conservation and Development requires:

- An evaluation of architectural resources to further conserve and enhance our architectural heritage.
- A review of Historic Districts/village districts for the three villages.
- An evaluation of the establishment of an Architectural design Review Board for the entire town.

Based on the studies and focus groups, the Subcommittee does not believe that the public is ready to accept Historic Districts or a comprehensive Design Review for both residential and commercial. Instead, the Subcommittee has selected six broad areas to address as beginning measures of planning protection.

There are six recommendations for the Planning Commission to consider. These do not address all comments of residents' concerns. They do capture broad areas that are important for preserving the Town's architectural heritage and are, therefore, consistent with our mission. The recommendations are based on feedback from four resident focus groups, a commercial property owners focus group, and follow up conversations with professionals to clarify comments from the focus groups.

1. Implement a Commercial Design Review Process for new buildings and substantial renovation.
2. Apply for a National Register of Historic Places listing for a section of Ivoryton as an honorary designation. This initiative was recommended by the consultant who identified 100 key structures that represent our architectural heritage. This application would require the support of Planning, Zoning, and the Selectmen for a grant to prepare the application and a town-wide vote for approval for the application to be submitted.
3. Change the current height cap of 30' to 35' above the mean grade level for a commercial structures to encourage more attractive facades and streetscapes in keeping with its neighborhood. Maintain 30' for residential with the opportunity for variance for a greater building height when the design is appropriate for its surroundings and neighborhood and serves to enhance our architectural heritage.
4. Revise coverage ratios for residential and commercial or replace with volume caps for parcel size and district. Current coverage ratios do not achieve what they intended—to limit the size of a structure on a parcel. If control of the absolute size of structures is the objective, total volume is more accurate. If certain types of buildings are not desired, regulations can prohibit them.
5. Reconsider the Gateway Conservation District and Heritage Gateway District as to how they might fit into our Zoning regulations and, as part of the process, designate areas for the new Gateway District guidelines.
6. The Delay of Demolition Ordinance, as written, is not an effective tool to prevent loss of important architectural structures. To preserve our architectural heritage there should be an explanation for the requested demolition, a proposal for the replacement structure before a permit is granted, and a stiffer fine for violations.