

# SEWICKLEY VILLAGE OVERLAY DESIGN MANUAL

SEWICKLEY PLANNING COMMISSION  
SEWICKLEY, PENNSYLVANIA  
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Architecture  
Workplace Design  
Urban Design  
Preservation

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DESIGN GUIDELINES FOR THE VILLAGE OVERLAY DISTRICT

## INTRODUCTION

### PURPOSE

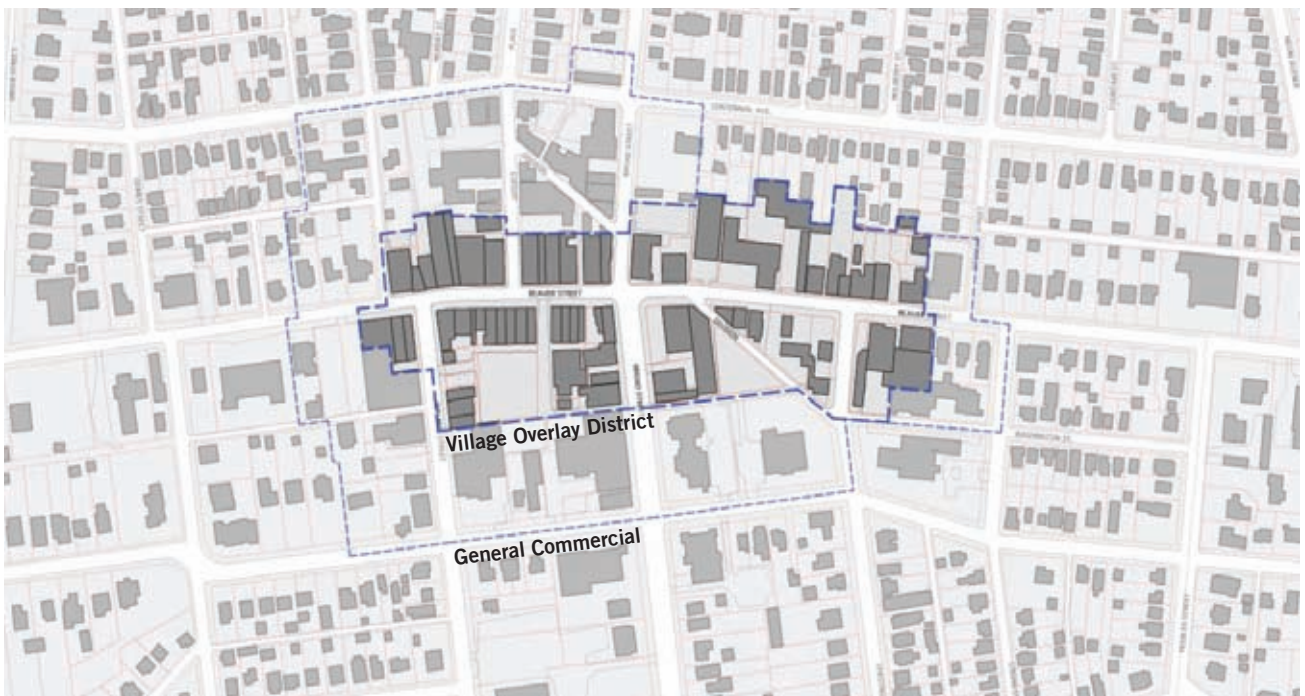
This manual provides direction to property owners, developers and design professionals who undertake new construction or renovate an existing building in the Village Overlay District. Basic design principles are introduced in the text of the manual, and are supported by illustrated examples and guidelines for proper interpretation.

### USING THE MANUAL

Property owners, realtors, developers, tenants and architects should use the guidelines when first considering a project. This will help establish appropriate design directions, while minimizing planning delays and the need to redesign projects later.



The Borough will use the manual as part of its formal review of proposed projects. This manual summarizes two components of the design process. Design requirements are mandatory and are contained in the Zoning Ordinance. These requirements are triggered for any new construction or renovation of an existing building where 25 percent or more of the facade is altered (see the Subdivision Ordinance, Chapter 22 of the Borough Code, for full details, especially the cumulative effect of incremental alterations). Design guidelines, outlined in this document, are discretionary, but are strongly encouraged for all new construction and renovation in the Village Overlay District.



*Boundaries of the Village Overlay District*

## RATIONALE



Buildings play a critical role in defining and activating streets. Their location, size, materials and relationship to one another help determine if a street environment is going to be socially and visually stimulating. An active street life—both day and night—is a defining element of the Village Overlay District. Fostering this energy is important for business vitality, safety and character.

Renovations and new construction should support active, pedestrian-oriented uses along the street and should reflect the architectural features that define the Village core. Retail uses should have a high degree of transparency along the street, and these uses should be clearly visible to pedestrians. Street amenities should enhance this setting by providing comfort, active uses, human scale and visual interest.

### BENEFITS

- Active and attractive streetscapes.
- Economic diversity and vitality.
- Appropriate Village-scale projects based on traditional lot sizes and building patterns.
- Visual cohesion that allows design expression based on common architectural patterns.



## PRESERVING VILLAGE CHARACTER

### HISTORY



Sewickley has had a well-established commercial Village core for over a century, having emerged in the mid-19th century as a mixed residential and retail community with rail connections to Pittsburgh. Strong streetscapes and urban proportions of the past have been maintained and give the current Village a strong sense of identity and uniqueness:

- Buildings in this zone historically fronted the sidewalk and were built on narrow deep lots.
- They were typically 20-25 feet wide, two-stories high, with commercial storefronts on the ground level. Although the upper floors were often residential in the past, most of these upper levels have now been converted to office use.
- Retail displays were typical on lower levels; upper levels typically used vertical double-hung punched windows.
- Brick and wood construction and detailing predominated.

### CURRENT ASSETS

Today, the Village retains many distinctive and historic buildings, many of which have been well maintained.

- The Village has some creative infill development, such as the courtyard nestled in between two older structures.
- It is pedestrian in scale, and its density and high activity levels make it a pleasant (if sometimes congested) environment.
- Where alleys exist, they provide good access to the backs of lots for parking and service.
- The proximity of residential and institutional areas supports pedestrian activity and boutique retail opportunities.



Examples of buildings with desirable architectural characteristics.

## BUILDING MASSING

### OBJECTIVES

*MASSING—The apparent bulk of a building. Massing is affected by factors such as proportion and scale.*

Vertically proportioned buildings are preferred. This means buildings that are taller than they are wide, or which have a façade design that emphasizes vertical proportions (such as bays, emphasizing height on a horizontal facade).

Building massing should be broken up whenever possible into human-scaled elements.

Additionally, the zoning code requires that any new construction or addition visible from a public right-of-way must contain a minimum of two stories (with each story being capable of occupancy by a use permitted in the Village Overlay District).



*These two local buildings use similar material and color choices, but different massing and detailing strategies. The structure to the right demonstrates the preferred approach towards massing—using vertically-oriented bays, glazing, materials and colors to break up the horizontal facade*



*Four buildings on Beaver Street with similar massing.*

### CONTEXT

The guiding principle of this manual is that renovations and new construction in the Village Overlay District should be similar to that of nearby buildings and reflect the historic characteristics that help define the District.

## SETBACKS & BUILD-TO LINES

### OBJECTIVE

The location of facades in relation to the street is an important element in defining the character of a community. Setbacks and build-to lines should create visually cohesive streetscapes.

**SETBACK**—The line which defines the outside limits of where a building can be placed on a site. Exterior walls may be located any distance behind the setback line, but no part of the building can extend any closer to the edge of the property. Setbacks are designated where a minimum dimension of open area is required, for health and safety or aesthetic reasons.

**BUILD-TO LINE**—The line which defines the placement of a building from the street on which the building fronts. The build-to line of the building forms the front lot line. On a corner lot, the build-to line is located on each side of a lot abutting a street.



This image from a similar village main street, shows how similarities in the location of facades, windows, doors, cornices and other elements help define character.

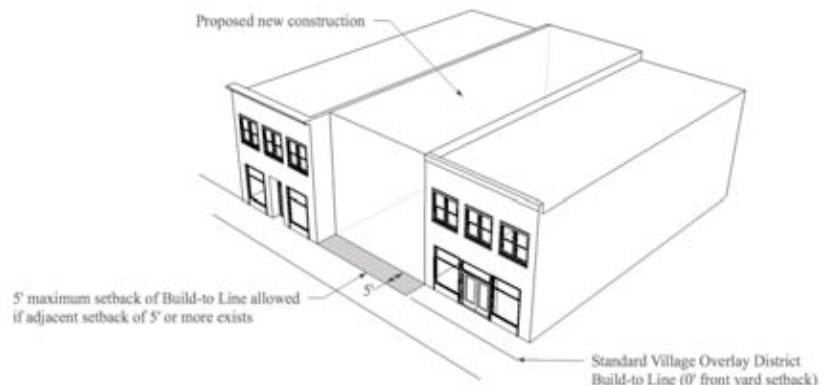
### GENERAL REQUIREMENTS (SEE ZONING CODE FOR COMPLETE DETAILS)

In the Village Overlay District, the following requirements exist:

- Both the setback and build-to line are set at 0 feet for front facades, meaning these facades must be built to the front lot line.
- Principal structures shall be built to the front yard setback build-to lines for at least 85% of their length along such line. See below for two exceptions.

### EXCEPTION FOR AN EXISTING ADJACENT SETBACK

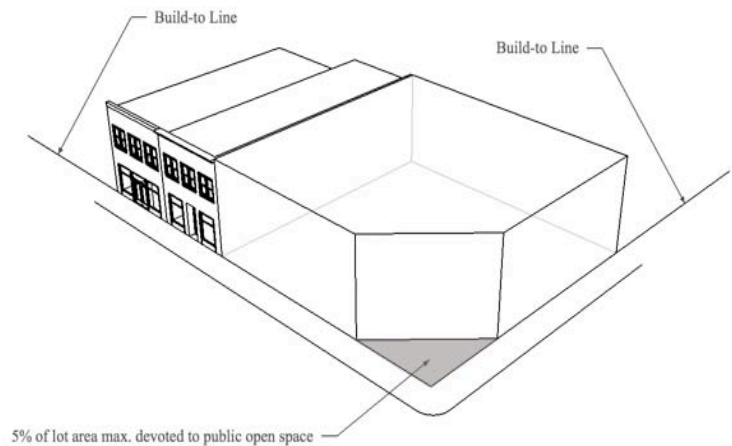
If a structure on an adjacent lot is further from the street, new construction can utilize a setback between the build-to line and that of the adjacent structure for the front yard setbacks, not to exceed 5 feet.



## CORNER LOTS

### SETBACK EXCEPTION FOR A CORNER LOT

On a corner lot, a setback not exceeding 5 percent of the lot's square footage may be allowed for public open space.



### OBJECTIVES FOR CORNER LOTS IN GENERAL

Corner development sites are prominent streetscape elements and should be given special consideration. The secondary (or side) façade may be simpler than the main façade, but should encourage street level activity and maintain visual interest to pedestrians. For instance, window and door patterns and architectural details should be continued from the front. Corner entrances are encouraged, and corner glazing that faces both streetscapes is preferred.



*Example of a strong corner building acting as an anchor or “bookend” to the rest of the block. For new construction on a corner site such as this, the creation of open space at the corner would enhance pedestrian movement and views and soften the corner.*

## FACADE COMPOSITION

### OBJECTIVES

**FACADE COMPOSITION**—*The relationship of a building's various exterior parts to each other. Facade composition (along with massing) helps to establish the visual interest of a building and determine how it blends with its surroundings.*

**GLAZING**—*Panes of glass set in frames, i.e., windows or doors.*

**FENESTRATION**—*The location of windows and doors in the facade of a building.*

Windows and doors on the ground level should ensure an active and attractive streetscape. Doors that provide direct access to public spaces or sidewalks are preferred, as are large storefront window displays. On upper levels, double-hung and vertically oriented punched openings are preferred, and should be residential in style rather than commercial.



*These local buildings are very similar in massing, but use different compositional strategies. The right image demonstrates preferred glazing styles, fenestration patterns, finish materials and colors, and facade detailing.*



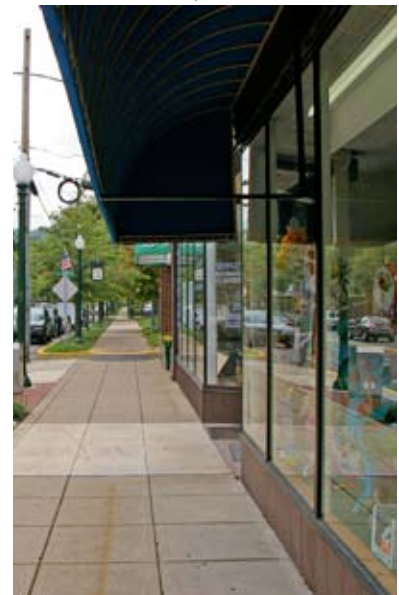
*These two buildings have similar scale and massing, but very different facade compositions. The example on the right shows preferred fenestration patterns, finish materials and proportions.*



## TRANSPARENCY

**OBJECTIVE**

The facades of buildings, especially those facing the street, should have a sense of openness or transparency. This helps ensure connections between shops and passersby and encourages pedestrian activity and economic vitality.



*Two local storefronts demonstrate the difference that facade transparency makes from the pedestrian's perspective.*

**GENERAL REQUIREMENTS  
(SEE ZONING CODE FOR  
COMPLETE DETAILS)**

Transparency requirements can be found in the Zoning Code:

- The façade of a structure facing a street, shall meet the transparency standards of the Zoning Code.
- On each façade, above the ground floor, each story shall have a transparency of at least 35% of the gross square footage of the façade of that story.
- All ground floor façades shall have a minimum transparency of 60% of the gross square footage of the ground floor facade. Within this ground floor façade, a minimum of 45% of the gross square footage of the façade from an elevation of 3 feet to an elevation of 8 feet above walkway grade shall be transparent.
- No more than 30% of a ground floor window area may be obscured by a permitted sign, shelving, other opaque surfaces or a combination thereof that would affect views into or out of the structure. Upper floors may have curtains or other window treatments which limit transparency.

**TRANSPARENCY (CONTINUED)**



0%



21%



22%



23%



30%



33%



35%



68%

*Analysis of eight facades along Beaver and Broad Streets demonstrating a range of overall facade transparency levels from 0% to 68%.*

## PUBLIC OUTDOOR SPACE

### OBJECTIVES



The apparent massing of buildings and streetscapes should be reduced by creating variations in spaces and uses along the street. One way to accomplish this is through useable public outdoor space, which is encouraged in the Village Overlay District. Street amenities should be well-designed, enhance pedestrian activities and provide visual interest.

The following principles should be considered:

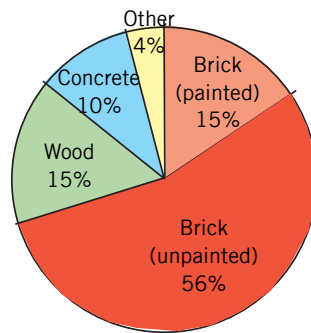
- Spaces should be intentionally planned and programmed for active uses. Benches that front on the street and café seating are encouraged, as are other amenities that provide comfort.
- Spaces must be maintained by the owner, and should provide trash and recycling receptacles as appropriate.
- Spaces should be human in scale and also in scale with buildings and other open spaces in the village, and must respect build-to lines.
- Streetscape principles, such as sidewalks, landscaping, street furniture, and lighting, should be incorporated. Suburban-style open space surrounding a building, or open space given over to parking or empty landscaping, should be avoided.
- To the extent possible, parking should not be visible from public streets (see Zoning Code for complete details).



## BUILDING MATERIALS

### OBJECTIVES

In order to ensure active and attractive streetscapes and promote visual cohesion, a common architectural language is encouraged. This means that buildings should relate to one another by using similar materials, especially materials that have been historically used throughout the district.



*Analysis of facade materials along primary streets in the Village Overlay District. New construction should be compatible with these materials.*

The following principles should be considered:

- Primary building facades should use durable, high-quality materials, with brick and wood preferred. Masonry, stone and terra cotta are also acceptable. Preferred secondary materials include appropriately detailed stucco, curtain wall systems, and wood detailing.
- These materials are encouraged on all facades visible from public streets (this is especially so for corner sites).

### PROHIBITED MATERIALS

The following materials are prohibited from use on any building façade visible from a public right-of-way:

- Particle board, plywoods and plastic sheathing
- Asphalt and Fiberglass shingles as siding
- Vinyl and aluminum siding
- Mirrored glass, that is glass coated in such a way that it prevents views to the building's interior
- Industrial metal panels
- Concrete masonry units, including prefinished types
- Exposed aggregate pre-cast concrete block
- Exterior finish insulation systems (EFIS)
- Simulated brick

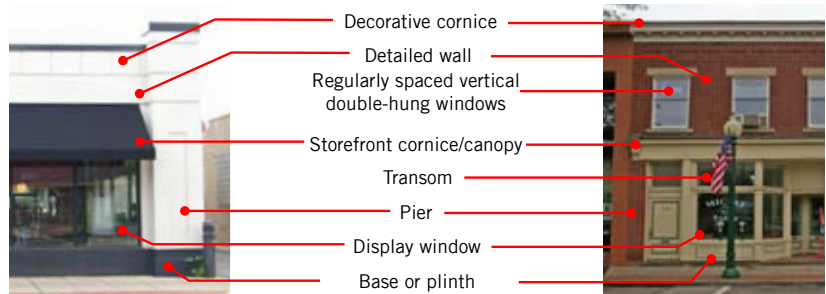
### STREETSCAPE

The streetscape includes the natural and man-made elements in or near the street right-of-way. It includes buildings, sidewalks, landscaping, street furniture, lighting, and public open spaces. The guidelines are intended to ensure an attractive and visually unified streetscape while encouraging design diversity.

## DETAILING

### OBJECTIVES

Building detailing should be compatible with the façade elements used on nearby buildings, and historically throughout the District. Material texture and relief is encouraged. Edge articulation through cornice lines, frieze elements and trimming is especially important. Window detailing should incorporate setbacks, frame openings, and articulate lintels and sills.



*Two examples of local buildings that use preferred detailing.*



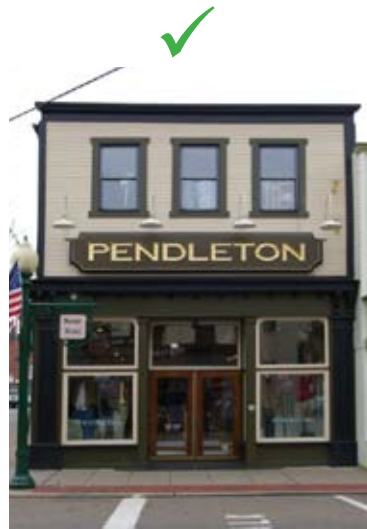
*Postcard of Broad and Beaver Streets showing the types of historic detailing that is generally desired today.*

### INNOVATION AND DIVERSITY

Diversity of building design can add to the visual interest and vitality of a commercial district. However, innovative designs should respect guidelines for contextual massing, glazing styles and rhythms, and material selection. New designs should enhance, rather than detract from, investments in nearby historic renovations.

## COLORS

**OBJECTIVES** Muted or earth-toned colors are encouraged as primary building colors. Bright colors can enhance smaller areas, details, and highlights. Colors should complement adjacent structures to reinforce the cohesiveness of the district.



*An example of earth-tones on a building in the Overlay District.*

## RENOVATIONS

**OBJECTIVES** Whenever possible, existing structures should be renovated to maintain and restore the historic character of the village and make a positive contribution to the cohesiveness of the streetscape. Original architectural details should be maintained or restored, rather than covered or removed.

The following principles should be considered:

- Doors and windows are essential elements of the overall design and architectural style. Original door and window openings should be maintained. Replacement elements should either restore lost items or be both contextual and innovative.
- New construction should be sensitive to the historic context of the village. Design innovation is preferred over literal imitation of historic styles. Infill sites should balance new and old design characteristics.

*For additional information, contact the Borough of Sewickley Planning Commission.*