

Designing the Future to Honor the Past

Design Guidelines for Cape Cod

*Prepared by the
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Community Vision, Inc.
in cooperation with*

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Architecture

The Cape has always been a region of vernacular architecture - architecture which reveals an area's unique local traditions and characteristics. Cape Cod's buildings reflect the economic and social development of the region and they express this development primarily through traditional forms and materials.

Cape Cod's earliest architecture took the form of simple wood structures based on English styles and was oriented toward the region's agricultural focus. By the 18th century, a new form had evolved to meet the early settlers' needs and protect them from the harsh environment. This form has become known as the "Cape Cod House" and its simplicity and weathered shingle or clapboard exterior define the basis of vernacular architecture in this region.

The growth of maritime industries in the early 19th century introduced architectural diversity to the Cape. The region's new wealth was reflected in larger homes de-

signed in Greek Revival and other NeoClassical styles and in the expansion and alteration of many existing buildings. Though the new structures were generally larger, they reinforced the local building traditions by maintaining the simplicity of the earlier forms and continuing the use of local materials.

The late 19th and early 20th century saw construction of a variety of Victorian styles, built primarily to accommodate Cape Cod's growth as a resort area. Although these

structures incorporated new forms, their general scale and wooden construction were compatible with the region's traditions. Throughout the Cape, small shingled structures continued to be built in simple forms reminiscent of earlier styles.

The Cape continues to bear development pressures resulting from summer and year-round population growth. Many of the sprawling residential subdivisions of the 1960's and 1970's are lacking this distinctive Cape character. In order to prevent



A classic cape



Greek Revival



Gothic Revival



Second Empire

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new development from irrevocably changing the character of Cape Cod, the following traditional principles of this region's unique architectural styles should be recognized and incorporated into its new structures:

- **Scale and Proportion** - the size of one architectural element relative to another or to its surroundings. Cape buildings appear small because they are built to human scale and were expanded incrementally. In addition, large structures were generally sheltered by mature trees and nestled into the landscape, making them seem smaller. Nearby structures are built in proportion to one another.
- **Massing** - a building's height, bulk, shape and roof angle. Traditional Cape structures are composed of a primary mass, expanded by later addition of various smaller masses. Large buildings with a single mass are uncommon. Gable and shed roofs are predominant and are usually steeply pitched.
- **Rhythm of openings** - the regular and repeated occurrence of building elements such as windows, entries and porches. Openings on Cape Cod buildings are generally evenly placed across the facade and usually constitute a certain percentage of the surface area. The asymmetrical balance created by the window and door openings on the half Cape and three-quarter Cape are part of the region's charm.

- **Materials** - those materials used on all exterior surfaces, including walls, roofs, and architectural details. Traditional Cape buildings were virtually always constructed of local materials. With some exceptions for municipal or institutional buildings and areas with local brick kilns, weathered shingles and clapboards are the primary form of exterior cladding.
- **Siting** - a structure's orientation on the lot and its relationship to the road and other surrounding elements. Traditional Cape buildings were oriented to the sun and parallel or perpendicular to the road. They often have minimal setbacks, but those with substantial setbacks usually define the road edge with stone walls, fences, or hedges.

Successful contemporary interpretations of these principles combine the traditional patterns of Cape Cod architecture with modern forms. This combination results in the creation of design elements that are both reminiscent of the region's historic buildings and truthful to the modern period in which they were constructed. Most importantly, following these patterns creates buildings that are compatible with their immediate surroundings and that are consistent with the traditional character of Cape Cod.

The following guidelines reinforce Cape Cod's architectural patterns:

6a. Complement surrounding architecture in areas with distinctive architectural styles. Use similar architectural

scale, massing and materials to relate new buildings to their surroundings. Reflect the predominant rhythm of the existing buildings in new construction. Select architectural details such as trim, eaves, shutters and other decorative elements that are consistent with the style of the building. Proportion details in scale with other elements of the structure. When developing in areas without distinctive architecture, new buildings should be designed to complement the region's traditional vernacular styles. Modern elements may be designed to achieve an asymmetrical balance which is in keeping with the Cape's traditional architecture.

6b. Harmonize roof pitches and types within a single building or group of buildings. Roofs play a major role in a building's character because they are a dominant visual element. Roof types such as gable, shed, gambrel, and hip are all seen on the Cape, although gable and shed



A harmony of roof pitches and styles



Characteristic massing of simple forms

roofs are most common. The pitch of gabled roofs generally is not more than 12 inches in height for 12 inches in length or less than 7 inches in height for 12 inches in length.

6c. Use small building masses that typify the buildings found in the historic villages and settlements of Cape Cod. Small buildings blend naturally into the hollows and contours of the Cape land-

scape. Larger buildings should be made up of smaller masses which have strong relationships to one another.

6d. Establish a rhythm of windows, doors, and other design elements that is compatible with surrounding structures. Architectural elements should be arranged in a balanced manner on the facade of the structure, and should maintain the common ratio of openings to surface area.

Shutters, if used, should be designed functionally to cover one half the width of the window they surround.

6e. Provide functional accessory structures to enhance and enliven the building and the site. The landscape of the Cape is rich with walls, fences, trellises, arbors, dormers, chimneys, cupolas, spires, porches, terraces, gazebos and



Depth and texture provided by accessory structures

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conservatories. These elements reflect a human scale, add richness and texture to the architecture, provide shelter, reinforce the connection between the structure and its surroundings, and enhance the character of the site. Also refer to Landscaping Section.

6f. Use the durable, traditional building materials of Cape Cod. Existing building materials and details reflect the indigenous crafts and artwork of a particular village. Integrate local craftsmanship whenever possible to reinforce this local identity. Use wood shingles and clapboards for most exteriors, and either paint, stain or allow them to weather naturally. Avoid using synthetic surface materials. On municipal and institutional buildings, brick, stone, and stucco are appropriate, but they should be used sparingly on residential and commercial structures. Avoid the use of concrete block as an exterior finish. On sloped roofs, use naturally weathering wood shingles or composition shingles with neutral tones that convey the sense of weathered shingles. Slate and metal roofing that oxidize to a natural patina are also desirable. When adding to or altering existing historic structures, maintain the quality of materials and workmanship found in the original structure.

6g. Promote maximum energy efficiency. Orient new buildings and additions to the south for maximum solar gain and consider installing solar heating systems where feasible. Meet or exceed state building code requirements for insulation values to minimize heating and cooling loads. Install and maintain the



Use the durable, traditional building materials of Cape Cod

most efficient heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) equipment available. Do not oversize HVAC equipment. Use the most energy efficient doors and windows available. Use or retrofit energy efficient lighting, especially in larger commercial or industrial buildings. Shelter entries and use vestibules to minimize heat loss. Use deciduous trees to shade southern and

southwestern exposures in the summer. Plant or utilize dense native evergreen species on northerly and northwesterly exposures to break winter winds. These improvements will result in cost savings in the long term.

7 Adaptive Reuse

Over time, the evolution of a community and the changing needs of society may require particular buildings or even whole districts to find new uses. The New England tradition has long been to adapt older buildings to new uses rather than raze them to make way for new construction. Because of this tradition, most Cape Cod villages have retained a large number of their original structures and thus much of their original character.

To avoid unnecessary new construction, conserve energy, and maintain those buildings that are considered architecturally and historically valuable, efforts should be made to find new uses for existing buildings. Given the unprecedented growth recently experienced on Cape Cod, it is essential to preserve and continue the traditional pattern of adaptive reuse if the Cape is to retain its special character.