

SMALL LOT HOUSE DESIGN GUIDELINES

1.0 PURPOSE

The purpose of the Guidelines are:

1. To establish the design guidelines for Development Permit Area 26;
2. To establish design principles that would result in new small lot single family detached housing (in-fill) that are more sensitive to existing houses and neighbourhoods;
3. To expose proponents to a range of possible solutions with the goal of achieving a higher standard of design;
4. To improve the approvals process for the proponents by putting the design considerations up-front;
5. To provide a set of criteria for evaluating development applications.

Proponents (owners, developers, designers, etc.) of small lot housing are encouraged to seek new, innovative and 'appropriate' design solutions. Each site will have its own unique challenges.

The proposal should not be restricted to the confines of traditional architecture. Opportunities for contemporary design should not be precluded.

The Guidelines are intended to stimulate the imagination of designers rather than to limit development flexibility or to dictate actual design solutions.

2.0 STREETScape/NEIGHBOURHOOD

In assessing the 'fit' of a new small lot house, the neighbourhood must be considered at two levels:

- The immediate context, i.e., how the building relates to and impacts upon the houses or buildings immediately around it.
- The broader context, i.e., how the small lot house relates to the visual character and scale of the neighbourhood created by the collection of houses and buildings on both sides of the street in which the project is related.

The former refers to how the design of the new house is influenced by the adjacent structures. The latter refers to what effects the new house would have upon the adjacent structures.

In some neighbourhoods visual character is clearly defined and there is little flexibility to do something 'different' and contrary to existing patterns. However, in Victoria there is great variety and richness in the visual character of the various neighbourhoods, often from street to street. Thus, in many circumstances, the house designer will be presented with unique and unusual design opportunities. There will be some neighbourhoods where major changes are acknowledged to be taking place and/or where the existing streetscape has little 'visual cohesiveness'. In these circumstances it may be appropriate for the designer not to harmonize with the existing but to set new standards.



Building patterns and rhythms, which define visual character, should be respected. A street will develop a certain pattern or rhythm giving cohesiveness to the whole streetscape. A sudden change in this pattern can appear disruptive and visually upsetting. These patterns or rhythms are established by various design elements, which include:

- Building Height
- Building Form (bungalow, 2-storey, split level, etc.)
- Roof Shape
- Architectural Massing
- Finish Materials & Details
- Landscaping

Generally new small lot housing should reinforce existing patterns/rhythms/massing respecting proportions and details and, if appropriate, incorporating some of these into the new design.

3.0 ELEMENTS OF DESIGN

In order to discuss constructively the design implications of a proposal, an understanding of how the individual elements of design work together to effect the whole composition is required. It is recommended that at the beginning of the project, the proponent photographs the site and the surrounding houses, including the streetscape. The designer should identify repeated forms, patterns and

rhythms inherent in the existing surrounding houses. In designing, the designers can then choose to repeat, or introduce new design elements. Side by side placement of similar designs should be discouraged.

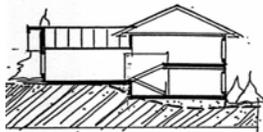
The *Small Lot House Design Guidelines* examines five fundamentally related areas of design. The guidelines are to be used in an advisory capacity and as a supplement to the zone standards.

The five areas to which the guidelines address themselves are:

1. Siting, Location, Topography
2. Architectural Envelope
3. Openings
4. Textures and Detail
5. Landscaping

3.1 SITING, LOCATION, TOPOGRAPHY

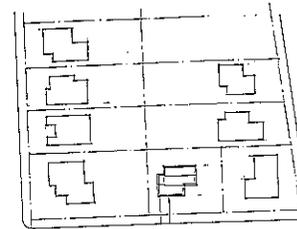
The topography and location of the project lot and the position of the building on that lot guide the most basic decisions about design. House form selection should be a reflection of site topography. For instance, a split level or stepped house design would appropriately fit a sloped site. The proposed small lot house should not disregard or significantly alter the existing topography and should avoid major reworking of the existing grades.



Many small lot housing projects in Victoria are subdivisions of existing corner lots. The proposed house is located in either the front or rear portion of the lot. If the small lot house is placed in the front portion, the new house must respond and enhance the streetscape of the front and flanking street without adversely affecting the adjoining properties. The design should respond to the dual frontage of corner lots by incorporating the same level of interesting architectural treatment (windows, projections, ornamentation, etc.) in the flanking street design as in the frontage design.

The locations of corner lot rear yard small lot housing requires special design considerations with respect to adjoining properties. A proposed house for a corner lot rear yard may break the established pattern of house form on a particularly regular block of lots. The proposed house will face the side street and its rear facade

will face all the rear yards in the block. This disruption will be acceptable if careful attention is given to maintaining privacy and significant views for the neighbours, providing privacy for the new house, preventing the overshadowing of existing yards and the location of the parking area.

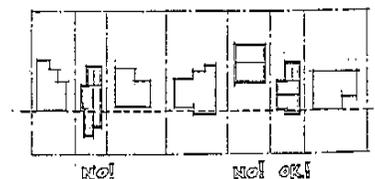


SETBACKS

Building setbacks are the distance between a structure's edges and the property lines. They create yard spaces for outdoor activity and landscaping. The pattern of street setbacks helps establish a rhythm to the streetscape and provides a transition between the public sidewalk and the privacy of the house.

FRONT

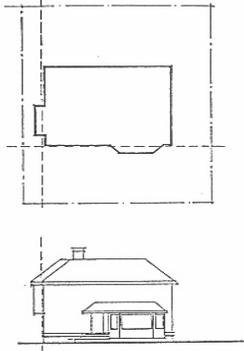
Front setbacks in Victoria vary from neighbourhood to neighbourhood and established streetscape patterns may differ from front setback requirements of the bylaw. Unless handled carefully, a setback that varies significantly from the established pattern may be disruptive to the streetscape. The extension of architectural elements (such as bay windows, chimneys and fireplaces) into the front yard requirements may add welcome variety to street facades.



SIDE

Relaxation of side yard requirements may be appropriate in some instances to facilitate interesting and innovative design solutions, provided that the encroachment into the setback does not adversely affect the privacy, sunlight, or views of the adjacent property, nor restrain potential of the adjacent property for future development.

These architectural elements and treatments (such as bay windows, chimney elements, indentations and fireplaces) which project into the side yard requirements should be setback from the front façade to lessen their impact on the streetscape.



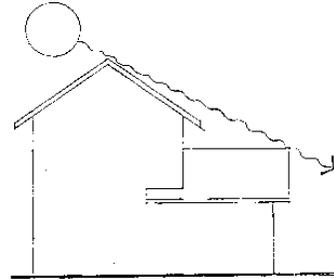
Where a neighbour's house is very close to the property line a larger than minimum setback may be warranted.

REAR

Neighbouring properties may have much greater rear yard setbacks than those of a proposed small lot house. Where such a house projects into the rear yard beyond the established pattern of existing structures, privacy, access to sunlight and views are important design considerations. In an appropriate set of circumstances the preferred rear yard setback should be 25% of lot depth.

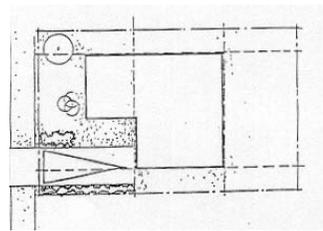
To reduce overshadowing of neighbouring properties, the small lot house can be stepped back in design, with single storey portions closer to the property line and two-storey portions confined to the central part of the plan.

Above grade balconies, decks and windows should be carefully placed and may be oriented to face away from neighbouring yards to respect neighbours wishes for privacy. The use of landscaping and fencing may increase the visual separation between residences and enhance the streetscape, however, care should be taken to consult the immediate neighbours as some may welcome a degree of 'social encroachment' if it contributes to neighbourhood security. As well, inappropriate landscaping may disrupt views and sunlight.



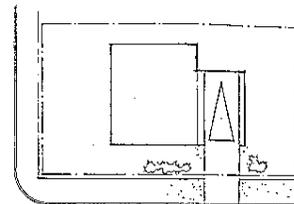
PARKING

Victoria's requirement that the parking be sited elsewhere than the front yard reserves this area primarily as open space. The resultant front drive can function as visitor parking, a practical by-product for a single family dwelling. In rare situations a variance may be sought to place the parking within the front yard setback.



Driveways on corner lots should be placed as far from the intersection as possible (minimum of 8m required).

When a front driveway or parking in the front setback is provided, some surface texture other than standard broom finished concrete or asphalt is encouraged, e.g., exposed aggregate or concrete paver border.



Generally, front yard parking will not be allowed. Where, as a variance under the Development Permit or Development Variance Permit, parking is confined to the front setback area, additional landscaping and screening should be provided to soften the visual impact

For instance a low hedge or shrub bed might be located between the neighbouring property and the parking pad or a vine or covered trellis may define the boundary between the pad and side yard access to the rear. The intent would be to make the pad an integral part of the landscaping-not an afterthought poured on the front yard. The house itself may be shaped to provide partial screening of the parking pad (such as an “L”).

Where a garage is not provided thought should be given as to how shelter may be provided for bicycles, garden tools, mowers and so on. Tool sheds and carport should appear as an integral part of the design.

To reduce surface runoff and increase green space consider a permeable alternative to pavement, e.g., “grasscrete”, tire strips or other permeable paving materials.

3.2 ARCHITECTURAL ENVELOPE

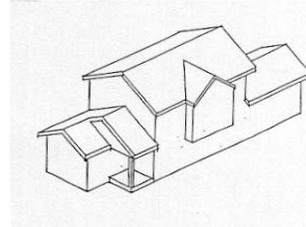
ROOFS

Respect roofline patterns if there is a dominant attractive form. The roof should relate in style and slope to the existing streetscape. Details that characterize the roof should reflect the slope, existing materials, soffit, overhang depth and decorative elements common to the character of neighbouring buildings. In general, a strong repetition of rooflines consistent in a streetscape requires a similar design for new construction. A consistent pattern may not be apparent unless the entire block is considered.



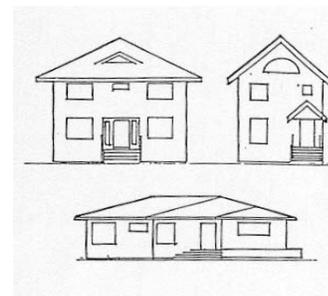
If there is no apparent pattern to the roof forms, the design may respond more specifically to one pattern over another. Picking up on several themes may help tie the visual impact of the streetscape together. If the new building is taller

than its neighbours, setting the taller element back from the lower level at the street facade may be appropriate. Corner buildings may benefit from this type of setback on both frontages. One principal roof form should be chosen for the main body of the house. This will set the slope and materials for all other roof elements. Roof forms on front small lot corner lots should acknowledge frontage on both streets.



MASSING AND PROPORTION

Massing and building proportion of established housing should be reflected in the new development. Massing has to do with the overall bulk of a building and how it is distributed in space. Several examples are given. Proportion has to do with how the parts or elements of the building dimensionally relate to each other. Massing and proportion can have a great impact on how a building fits into a neighbourhood. A building with strong horizontal elements in a streetscape of vertical elements can be disruptive.



When similar massing is not possible to achieve, the building facade of a small lot house should be broken into smaller elements creating an illusion of a smaller building in scale with its neighbours.



The most common type of small lot occurs when a lot is subdivided from the side of an existing house, between the existing house and its neighbours. Generally these lots are narrow and deep but occasionally they are wide and shallow. Narrow lot small lot houses tend to be tall and thin with a vertical massing and proportion as opposed to the existing neighbours which, in many cases, are bungalows with shallow set basements (main floors 1.5 to 1.8m from grade) and having a horizontal or square proportion. Using features with horizontal elements, stepping back the second floor from the front facade and incorporating elements of architectural detail such as bay windows, dormers and porches and the use of other similar techniques, can reduce the visual contrast between the new small lot house and its neighbours. Sometimes it may be necessary to reduce the proposed floor area of a small lot in order to achieve a building mass more appropriate for its setting.

When narrow lots are less than 10m in width and the proposed house includes a full but partially underground basement, the applicant is encouraged to provide a smaller floor plate for the second floor.

Where there is no consistent streetscape in a block the proposed house should relate to its immediate neighbours possibly incorporating some of the more appealing features found along the street.

3.3 OPENINGS

Entryways, windows and garage doors make up the most distinctive elements of a house facade.

ENTRYWAYS

Character buildings in existing neighbourhoods emphasize the principal entry. The entryway most often is placed on the front facade; it may have a wide set of stairs with an intermediate landing leading to it; the door itself may be elaborately paneled and have a glazed transom or sidelights.

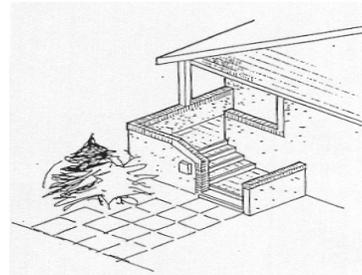


The entryways of small lot housing should be apparent and clearly visible from the street. The entryway should be emphasized by echoing

character elements from the neighbouring houses or by introducing equivalent focal detail. Entry porches are encouraged where existing streetscapes have such features. These are characteristic of much of Victoria's housing and are probably a response to the seasonal rains permitting a dry transition from outdoors to indoors. They also offer a place for socializing and are a 'welcoming' element on the streetscape. They add friendliness to the new house.

Where possible, the height of the entry from the street should reflect that of its neighbours. Ground level entry in a street of raised entries could disrupt visual continuity.

Stairs to the principal entry should be wide and interesting from the street. They may include planters, intermediate landings, sidewalls, banisters and walkway lighting.



WINDOWS

The proportion, size and detailing of windows should relate to that of neighbouring houses. The number, size and composition of windows should approximate ratios of its neighbours. From the street, excessive use of glazing should be exercised carefully and should be tempered by the need to retain a certain amount of solid wall surface. Inversely, the excessive use of solid wall should be tempered with the need to provide light and fresh air within the house, and to provide views and security to the front yard and street. Careful arrangement, placement, proportioning and detailing of windows and trim can add interest balance and order to the facade. Windows of older homes are often framed by a variety of elements such as: sash, stained glass, lintels, sills and pediments. New houses should have windows that are similarly differentiated from the wall surface utilizing such details as wide wood trim.

Generally older buildings in Victoria have double hung or casement windows. Sliding windows predominate new housing principally because they are most economical. Casement and awning windows provide reasonably economic alternatives.

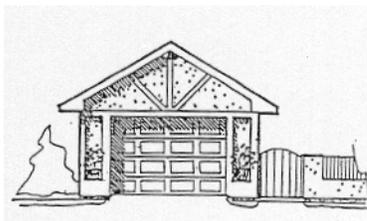


New small lot housing should as much as possible reflect the window style predominant to its neighbours. Generally, vertical window proportions should be used, however, they may be assembled into larger horizontal openings.

In general, window placement should respect the privacy of adjacent properties. Windows should be oriented away from neighbouring yards and windows. If this is not possible, they should be positioned to maximize privacy for the new house and its neighbours, although some neighbours may welcome some loss of privacy if there are positive aspects such as increased security. Neighbours should be consulted regarding the effects of window placement.

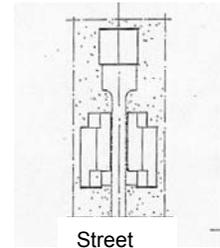
GARAGE DOORS

In most Victoria neighbourhoods, there are no back lanes which remove vehicle parking from the street. Front drive garages are common.



In a narrow lot configuration garage doors can dominate the streetscape, as they can be the largest opening in the front facade. The garage door and its immediate surround should be visually interesting. Detailing such as recessing the doorway to create deep shadows, providing plant shelf recesses flanking the door or setting the garage facade back from the rest of the house will lessen its visual impact.

Under an appropriate set of circumstances, a detached garage could be used as an element of design in resolving issues of privacy and site planning. The garage could be located in the rear yard to help define social space. In rare cases a front yard siting may be sought through a variance process.



3.4 TEXTURES AND DETAIL

FINISHES AND MATERIALS

Exterior finishes and materials should be consistent with those used in the neighbourhood. The repetition of similar finishes and materials along the street contributes to the visual continuity of the neighbourhood. Exterior finishes in Victoria vary from street to street and include stucco, with or without half timbers, cedar shingle siding, narrow horizontal siding and in older prestigious homes native stone in combination with the above. There are few houses with brick cladding. New homes should utilize materials and finishes that are visually compatible and could aid in harmonizing the new house with the existing homes. The home need not duplicate or replicate the neighbours but could reference the traditional style.

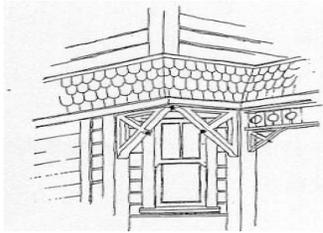
The choice of materials can help express the buildings proportions and massing. Different materials may be used to define different levels of the house such as the base and the top. Materials may be chosen for their textural appearance (rugged, smooth) or for some symbolic meaning (massive base, foundation stone).

Materials, finishes and ornamentation should appear as integral parts of the structure rather than stuck on. Front facade treatment should wrap around the sides of the house visible from the street. Corner lot small lot houses should have both exposed facades treated equally as well as any other side walls exposed to streets.

ORNAMENTATION

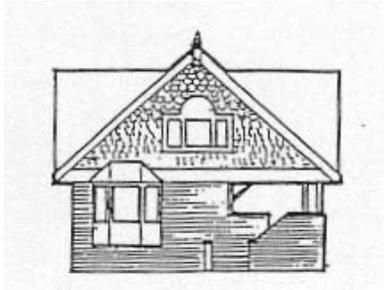
The level of richness in ornamentation of the neighbouring houses should be used as a guide without literal mimicking. Ornamentation should be used with restraint and in the context of the existing neighbourhood. When incorporated into the design, the use of brackets, eaves, cornices, columns and capitals should come from an understanding of their original structural use.

Ornamentation varies with periods of architectural style. The small lot house designer should understand the predominant style of a particular streetscape and may design the small lot house to echo those themes. This does not mean copying or repeating details, but rather using the existing detail as a basis for incorporating contemporary but visually related detail into the new house.



ROOF DETAIL

Incorporation of character elements such as dormers, eaves brackets and secondary roof elements over bay windows, porches, etc. are encouraged to reduce the impact of large roof areas and to provide a sense of scale to the house.



COLOUR

Colour schemes, which are compatible with the neighbourhood, are encouraged. Older character homes often have painted wood surfaces - siding or shingles. Often colour schemes are muted with one or two stronger accent colours on trim elements. While there are some successful

exceptions in Victoria, particularly in recalling historical colour schemes, vibrant colour should be used with extreme discretion and in small amounts.

3.5 LANDSCAPING

Front yards are prominent features of the streetscape. This area is often treated as a grassed semi-public zone with detailed planting beds particularly at the base of the house. In general front yard landscaping should reflect that of the neighbourhood, understanding that plant size and maturity may be somewhat less than the neighbours.

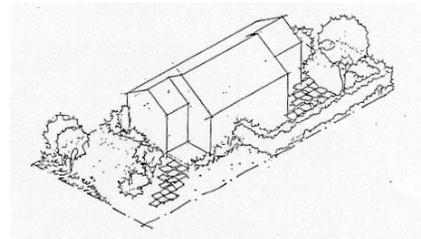
As much as possible, new small lot housing should retain the healthy mature trees on the lot. Any mature tree that is removed to accommodate the new house should be replaced with one or more other specimens. Placement of the new tree should respect neighbours' concerns, e.g., loss of views, overshadowing and so on.

In Victoria older neighbourhoods are characterized by well-developed gardens. In the front yard, new small lot housing should provide some soft landscaping to define the line between the public domain and private property.

Laurel, Cypress and species of Cedar are often used as hedge material with the goal of achieving privacy between adjacent neighbours.

Rocks form a major element of the landscape in many parts of Victoria. Rock outcroppings can enhance the visual value of a house and can form a major design attribute. Loose rocks made available by the house construction should be retained on site and made an integral part of the landscape.

Privacy fencing for rear yards may be a requirement for approval depending on the particular circumstances of a development application. These details should be worked out to the satisfaction of the immediate neighbours.



4.0 GLOSSARY

ARCHITECTURAL ENVELOPE

Refers to the exterior elements of a structure - the roof, all facades and major projecting elements such as bay windows, overhangs and deck/ balconies i.e. those parts of a house that define its exterior shape.

FINISH MATERIALS

The building materials used on the exterior of the structure.

FORM

Building form is defined by its massing, proportion and scale (refer to those terms).

MASSING

The impression and visual impact of size, shape and silhouette of a building resulting from the composition of its main volumes, roof profile, its horizontality/verticality and rhythm, and the juxtaposition of major building elements to each other and to adjacent buildings

OPENINGS

Openings include doors, windows and garage doors. They are the most distinct and common elements in a building facade.

ORNAMENTATION

The refinement of detail and application of decorative elements to enhance the building's appearance

PROPORTION

Proportions are dimensional relationships among the building parts such as: the height width and depth of each element (windows, doors, bays, balconies); the relationship of the dimensions of each element to the others and to the building as a whole; the dimensional relationship of the building to adjacent buildings.

SCALE

A consistency of relationship between the size of a building's elements (windows, porches, entrances) with each other and with adjacent buildings, trees, etc., as perceived by a person at ground level.

STREETSCAPE PATTERN

The overall appearance of the road, boulevards, sidewalks, landscaping, street furnishings and fronting buildings which together make up the street as seen and experienced from ground level. See also *Visual Character*.

TEXTURE

The visual surface characteristics (roughness, smoothness, for example) and appearance of the exterior of the building. Textures, together with details often have the strongest impact how people perceive a structure. Texture is achieved through the selection and use of exterior architectural finishes and the use of ornamentation.

TRANSITION ZONE

This term refers to an informal division of space from the 'Public' Street to the 'Private' House. The street is viewed as public territory. The house is viewed as private territory. As people move from the street to the house they pass through two 'Transition Zones'. The 'semi-public zone' (such as the front entry sidewalk to the house), and a 'semi private zone' (such as the entry porch to the house).

VISUAL CHARACTER

The visual character of a street is defined by a variety of factors including: building facade, building height and roof shape, building shapes and bulk, setbacks, finishes, details and landscaping. Taken all together these factors form a pattern or image characteristic of that particular street. This also defines the Streetscape Pattern.