Exterior Building Design Standards
Plan Commission Overview Draft 10/26/26

Article VII establishes exterior building design standards to promote attractive, durable, and high-quality development. Requirements vary by land use type.

Building Material Classifications

Exterior building materials are broken into four groups, with Class I, II, and III being "high quality."

- **Class I – Masonry and Glass:** Brick, stone, brick or stone veneer, and storefront glass.
- **Class II – Decorative Masonry:** Decorative or split-face block and stucco.
- **Class III – Siding and Architectural Panels:** Wood, vinyl, fiber cement, composite and aluminum siding, architectural metal panels, and EIFS (synthetic stucco).
- **Class IV – Utilitarian Materials:** Plain concrete block, precast concrete panels, corrugated or non-decorative metal, plywood, and similar materials.

Application by Development Type

Single- and Two-Family Residential: Single-family homes, duplexes, and similar residential uses are generally exempt from design standards, except for restrictions on bright primary colors and high-gloss finishes. Many communities will have very few regulations for single family or two-family design. Where regulations are used, common examples include garage protrusion limitations (snout houses), metal roof considerations, or anti-monotony regulations. The proposed draft Watertown code prohibits bright/high-glass primary colors and uses a 4' maximum garage protrusion for single family homes in the bulk standards section of the code.

Multifamily Residential: Such land uses may use Class I, II, and III materials; Class IV materials are prohibited. Buildings must incorporate architectural variation every 40 feet, provide at least 20% windows and doors on street-facing façades, and use durable materials such as brick or stone along the bottom 40" of façades facing streets/parking areas.

Commercial, Mixed-Use, and Institutional: Buildings must be predominantly Class I materials, with Class II and III materials limited to 50% of the façade. Class IV materials are prohibited, with exceptions for certain rear façades. Architectural variation is required every 40 feet, along with durable base materials, prominent entrances, and attractive street-facing façades.

Industrial: Greater flexibility is provided for functional building materials. Street-facing façades must incorporate at least 15% Class I materials, reducible to 10% with additional design improvements. All other materials, including Class IV, may be used for the remainder of the building. Architectural variation is required every 100 feet.

Administration and Flexibility: The Zoning Administrator reviews building designs through the site plan and building permit processes. Exceptions for comparable materials and Plan Commission waivers provide flexibility where alternative designs achieve the ordinance's intent without lengthy/costly CUP procedures. Overall, the standards establish consistent expectations for

building quality while recognizing the different design and functional needs of residential, commercial, and industrial development.

Downtown

The proposed approach for downtown is to maintain the City's existing historic preservation review process rather than establish a separate set of architectural design standards through zoning. The Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) currently reviews exterior building changes and issues Certificates of Appropriateness under Chapter 325, Historic Preservation.

The draft zoning code references Chapter 325 and clarifies that projects requiring both Site Plan Review and a Certificate of Appropriateness shall receive an HPC recommendation prior to Plan Commission action. Properties within the Downtown Mixed-Use (DMU) District that are not subject to historic preservation review would follow the applicable exterior design standards based on land use.

Rather than duplicate design standards, limited updates to Chapter 325 are proposed for consideration, including additional guidance for historic façades, storefronts, windows, architectural features, and exterior colors. These additions build upon the City's existing historic preservation criteria while maintaining flexibility for the HPC to evaluate individual projects. Two architectural graphics are also proposed to support the review process.



