

DESIGN GUIDELINES FOR TWO-FAMILY DWELLINGS (DUPLEXES)

Introduction

These Design Guidelines for Two-Family Dwellings (“Two-Family Guidelines”) are a supplement to the Northborough Design Guidelines (July 2012). The purpose of the Two-Family Guidelines is to guide the applicant and assist the Design Review Committee with its review of special permit applications for two-family dwelling construction in the Residence C, General Residential, Main Street Residential, and Downtown Neighborhood Districts. Working with the standards below (as applicable), the Design Review Committee will advise and make recommendations to the Planning Board.

The Northborough Zoning Bylaw defines a two-family dwelling as “a detached residential building designed or intended or used exclusively as the home or residence of two (2) families.” This means that “two-family dwelling” and “duplex” are used interchangeably: a building with two units next to each other, separated by a common wall, or stacked, one above the other, like apartments.

Applicants should not propose two family designs that will have the effect of overpowering older, small residences in the same neighborhood. The massing, scale, and height of a proposed two-family building should complement and reinforce, the rhythm and building forms of the neighborhood. Efforts to respect neighborhood character will be taken into account when the Design Review Committee reviews proposed two-family building designs.

Nothing in these guidelines is intended to create conditions that discriminate against people with disabilities, impede visitability to homes occupied by people with disabilities, or reduce livability for older residents. Applicants should consider site standards for livable design in accordance with the AARP’s Livable Communities Initiative. <<https://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/>>¹

Goals

The goals of the Two-Family Guidelines are to:

- Encourage harmony between two-family and single-family homes through building and site design choices that make two-family homes comparable to single-family homes in terms of massing, scale, and form, wherever possible;
- Use building elements such as entrances, roofs, dormers, and windows in ways to help a new two-family home feel welcoming and attractive from the neighborhood’s perspective;

¹ See AARP Livable Communities Brochure, Attachment A.

- Encourage street-facing design elements that enhance or improve the neighborhood's existing streetscape;
- Discourage above ground utilities (electric, cable and telephone) and the placement of other utilities such as but not limited to gas meters, electric meters, compressors, transformers, etc. on front yards and street facing facades unless proper screening is provided; and
- Provide guidance about the Town's design preferences for two-family construction.

Basic Site Planning Guidelines

Two-family homes should fit the character of the residential dwellings within the neighborhood (massing, architectural style, height, and siting) and complement those structures that have a functional or visual relationship to the proposed two-family home.

Two-family homes shall be sited to minimize disruption of existing topography. Finished site contours shall depart only minimally from the character of the natural site and abutting developed areas.



Two-family homes on corner lots shall take into consideration that both street frontages will be considered front yards. A two-family home should have a visually appealing façade on each street. Two-family homes on corner lots may be designed to face each street by providing the entrance to one unit from the primary street and the entrance to the second unit on the side or secondary street.

No parking of vehicles shall be permitted between the front building line and the street except “stacked parking” in the designated driveway.

Where garages are not provided, parking areas shall be located to the side or rear of the units.

Driveways shall not exceed 20 feet in width unless two-family homes are set back a significant distance from the roadway in which case a narrower driveway width is preferred at the roadway intersection. Large expanses of impervious surfaces are strongly discouraged.

There shall be no impervious surfaces within 5 feet of the side property line.

Two-family home design is subject to the dimensional requirements found within the most updated version of the Zoning Bylaws, Section 7-06-030(J)(5):

Dimensional Regulations per Zoning Bylaws, Section 7-06-030(J)(5)

	Minimum			Minimum Yard Setbacks					
District	Lot Area** (sq. ft.)	Lot Frontage (feet)	Lot Width (feet)	Front	Side*	Rear	Maximum Lot Coverage	Minimum Open Space Ratio	Maximum Height*** (feet)
RC	30,000	150	150	30	20	25			35
GR	25,000	150	150	30	20	25			35
MSR	20,000	100	100	30	20	25	30%		35
DN	20,000	100	100	15	20	20	30%	20%	35

*One side can be reduced to 15 feet as long as the sum of the two side setbacks is 40 feet.
 ** Lot area requirements may change due to groundwater regulations.
 ***Shall be measured as the vertical distance from the average finish grade at the perimeter of the building to the average height of the highest roof plane. Building height shall not include spires, cupolas, antennas, or similar parts of structures which do not enclose potentially habitable floor space.

Building Design

MASSING AND FORM

The Town encourages measures that reduce massing and make a two-family building seem smaller than it actually is. As an alternative to placing the entrances to both units on the front façade, one-half of the building can be recessed toward the back of the building envelope, effectively reducing massing by “breaking up” the front of the building. A two-family building designed in this manner should have a unifying roof form with cross gables to further reduce the massing.



In a predominantly single-family neighborhood, two-family homes should adhere closely to the established scale of existing homes on the street. When abutting single story homes or homes with a small footprint, the building layout should gradually transition the building height and mass downward towards the property line.

COVERED ENTRY

Front doors (excluding garage doors) should be protected by a recess, porch, or other covered element. Applicants are encouraged to provide covered porches, in part because a covered porch can have the effect of reducing the perceived height of a building. A covered porch up to 200 square feet may extend up to six feet into the minimum required front setback.

Front doors and windows (excluding windows on a garage door or above a garage door) should be designed as a focal point on the front elevation.

WINDOWS AND TRANSPARENCY

All sides of the two-family home should have windows, keeping in mind the existing pattern of window spacing in the existing structure for single-family to two-family conversions. Transparent windows and/or doors facing the street are required. At least 20 percent of the street-facing façade of a two-family dwelling must be transparent. The façade is measured from the base of the house to the start of the roofline and any other vertical walls facing the street, except for gabled portions of the facade not containing livable floor area. Garages located on the street facing wall of the house shall count as part of the facade.

Building facades visible from a public street should employ techniques to recess or project individual windows above the ground floor at least two inches from the facade or incorporate window trim at least three inches in width featuring a color that contrasts with the base building color. Exceptions will be considered where buildings employ two or more other distinctive window or facade treatments that add depth and visual interest to the building. Distinctive window or facade treatments include:

- Shutters on all street-facing windows.
- Windows containing more than 2 glass panes (or that give the appearance of multiple panes).
- Stained or custom glass.
- Exterior window sills.
- Other design techniques that effectively emphasize windows as an architectural feature as determined by the Design Review Committee.

ARCHITECTURAL DETAILS

Applicants need to provide architectural details that add visual interest and are well proportioned to achieve pedestrian scale. Specifically, at least three of the following detail elements should be incorporated into the façade of the building:

- Decorative porch design, including decorative columns or railings.

- Bay windows or balconies.
- Decorative molding/framing details around all ground floor windows and doors to accentuate entries and transitions in materials.
- Decorative door design including transom and/or side lights or other distinctive feature.
- Decorative roofline elements including brackets, multiple dormers, and chimneys.
- High quality and durable building materials, including wood and cement siding, stucco, brick, stone, or other materials with decorative or textural qualities.
- Patios, pergolas, landscaped trellises, lattices, planters, or other decorative elements that incorporate landscaping near the building entry.
- Distinctive paint schemes (such as paint scheme consisting of three or more colors) if consistent with the architectural style or theme.
- Other decorative facade elements or details that meet the intent and standards as determined by the Design Review Committee.



ARCHITECTURAL VARIETY

Development of two-family homes shall achieve architectural variety by accommodating a variety of architectural styles and variations of the same architectural style, and through the use of multiple design elements.

Duplicative building designs adjacent to each other are strongly discouraged. Simple reverse configurations of the same building design on adjacent lots are not sufficient to meet the goal of architectural variety. However, exceptions may be granted in special circumstances where similar architectural consistency provides a distinct character for a cluster of homes surrounding an open space or on a particular street.

In order to qualify as a different facade elevation, adjacent two-family homes must have different roofline configurations, different color palettes, and different porch/entry design. In addition, a minimum of two of the following alternatives shall be utilized:

- Different window openings (location and design).

- One- and two-story houses.
- Different exterior materials and finishes.
- Different garage location, configuration, and design.
- Other different design element that helps to distinguish one facade elevation from another as determined by the Design Review Committee.

EXTERIOR MATERIALS

Traditional materials consistent with architectural styles commonly found in Northborough and nearby towns are encouraged (including, but not limited to, horizontal wood siding, shake siding, and brick). Stucco and other troweled finishes should be trimmed in masonry or wood.

Mirrored glass and exposed concrete block (except for foundation/crawl space walls where not visible from the street) are prohibited. T-111 siding and other plywood types of siding (board and batten with a brick, stone, or horizontal lap siding lower portion of the building is an exception) shall not be used for façades adjacent to or directly viewable from a street or public place.

ROOF DESIGN

A variety of articulated roof forms shall be provided that emphasize building form to create visual interest to the neighborhood and to avoid a monotonous series of rooflines. Roofs should exhibit variety between planes by using front-to-rear and side-to-side gabled and hipped roofs, and/or by the introduction of single-story elements. Roof materials, colors, and treatments should correspond to the individual character or style of the home and should be compatible with the overall look of the neighborhood.



All buildings with pitched roofs shall have a minimum slope of 4 feet vertical rise for every 12 feet of horizontal run on the primary roof of the building. A continuous pitched roof shall extend no more than 40 linear feet unless it contains roof elements. Roof elements may include at least one of the following:

- Dormers
- Cupolas

- Gable or hip projection
- Hipped roofs or similar construction are encouraged alongside yards in neighborhoods with closely-adjacent homes to maximize solar access to neighboring homes and/or private open space.

BUILDING HEIGHT

In a neighborhood where many of the surrounding residences are older 1.5- or 2-story “Cape” or ranch-style homes, every effort shall be made to minimize the actual and perceived height of a two-family building. In these cases, the height of a new two-family building should not take advantage of the maximum allowed building height in Table 2 of the Zoning Bylaw. A range of other strategies should be considered as well, such as a roof form that effectively “brings down” the height of a two-story building, e.g., a hip or Gambrel roof. Incorporating living area within the volume of a sloped roof can help to reduce scale and height.



Garage Placement and Design

Where lots front on a public street and where vehicular access is from the street, garages or carports **shall** be set back at least 5 feet behind the ground floor front wall of the occupied portion of a house or front edge of an unenclosed porch.

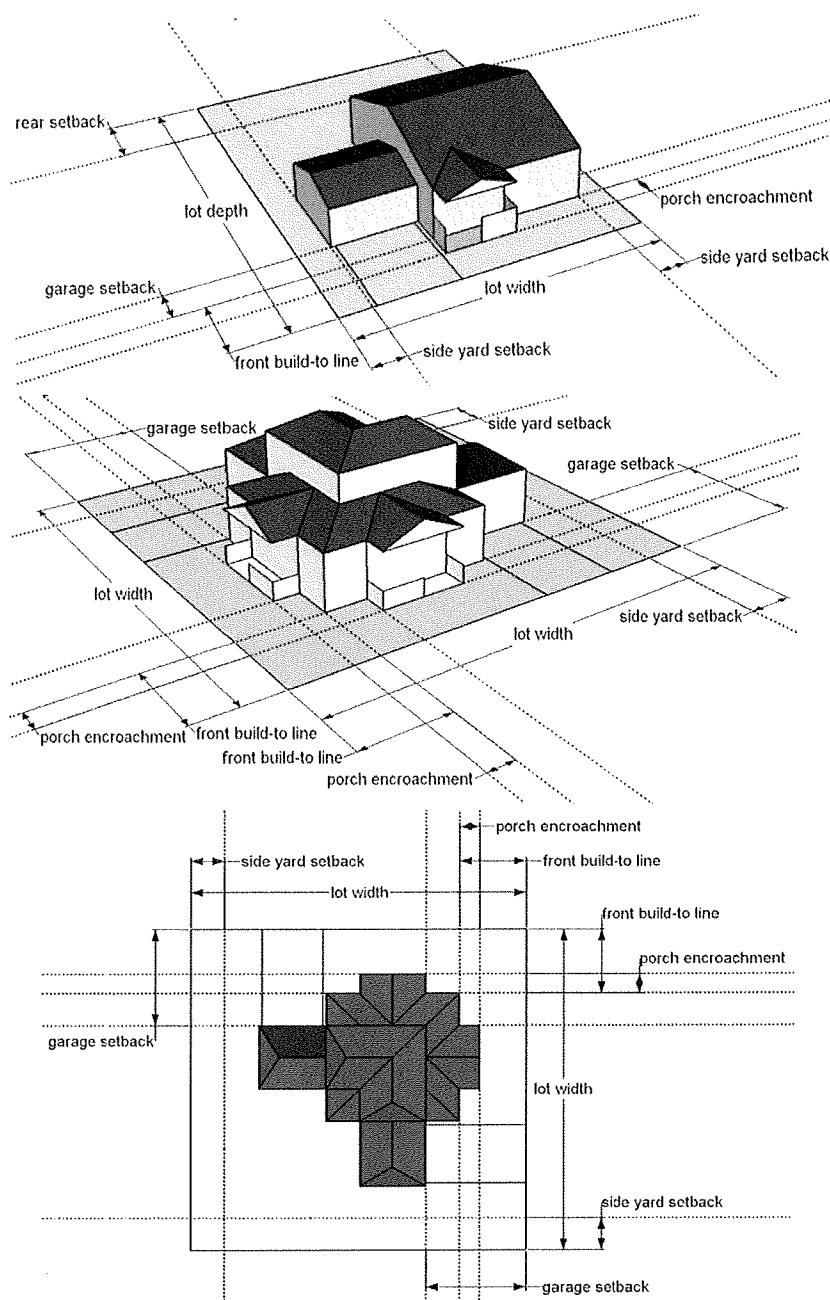
EXCEPTIONS

In limited circumstances, garages that project closer to the street than the dwelling's front entrance may be approved. A protruding garage will be considered if it is set back at least 30 feet from the property line or sidewalk edge (when sidewalks are present) and incorporates at least two of the design/detail features below. Garages placed flush with the ground floor front wall (or between 0 and 5 feet behind the front wall) of the occupied portion of the house shall incorporate at least one of the design/detail features below:

- A decorative trellis or arbor over the entire garage face, above and surrounding the garage door.
- A balcony that extends out over the garage and includes columns.
- Two separate doors for two car garages instead of one large door.
- Decorative windows on the garage door.
- Decorative details on the garage door.

Standard squares on a garage door will not qualify as a decorative detail. Traditional visible hinges and handles (functional or decorative), and other construction methods creating depth and texture on a garage door surface are acceptable forms of decorative details.

- A garage door color that matches or complements the color of the house.



- Other design techniques that effectively deemphasize the garage, as determined by the Design Review Committee.

Garages may be placed closer to the street than the front wall of the house or front edge of an unenclosed porch if the garage door faces an interior lot line and features windows facing the street, so that it appears to be habitable.

Landscaping

Existing mature, healthy trees shall be preserved wherever possible. For trees to be retained, tree protection fencing should be installed around them before any land clearing occurs on the site.

At least 65 percent of the front yard should be landscaped with lawn, native and ornamental trees, shrubs, perennials, or other acceptable plantings, exclusive of walkways or sidewalks.

Where existing mature, healthy trees cannot be preserved, street trees of at least 2" caliper shall be planted along the property frontage at 50' intervals. Small trees under 25' at maturity and shrubs can be placed below or near overhead utility lines. Medium trees that grow up to 40' at maturity should be planted at least 25' from roadside wires. Tall trees should be placed at least 50' from roadside wires and 35' from the house.

Exterior Lighting

Exterior lighting should help to provide safe access from the street and be Dark Sky compliant. Lighting fixtures should be consistent with the architectural style of the two-family home and should provide adequate illumination to and at the front entry. House numbers should be illuminated and clearly visible from the street. Lighting fixtures should be shielded and directed downward to minimize glare onto abutting properties, public ways and the sky, while providing for security and public safety. Up-lighting of the house or trees along with decorative landscape lighting is acceptable. Bright lights such as flood lights or area lights illuminating decks, patios, and/or other parts of the property should not be highly visible from abutting properties.