

PORCHES and DECKS

Porches are a defining feature in a historic neighborhood. They are the welcoming open space attached to the houses public façade. A well made porch can easily last 100 years or more. Remember the Secretary of the Interiors Standards call for retaining original features and minimal alteration of the historic structure. *“The removal of distinctive materials or alteration of features, spaces, and spatial relationships that characterize a property will be avoided.”* (Standard #2)

DEFINITION

Porch: For the purpose of these standards and guidelines a porch is a structure attached to or immediately adjacent to a permanent structure, with or without a roof, without permanent weatherproof walls or windows and connected to an entrance to the main structure. The primary use of a porch is to serve as an entry to the structure. Porches may be located on any side of a structure.

Deck: For the purpose of these standards and guidelines a deck is a roofless structure attached to the rear or side of a primary structure. The primary purpose of a deck is to provide an outside gathering place.

Projects conforming exactly to the specifications outlined in the STANDARDS following may be administratively approved by the Historic Preservation coordinator.

Complex projects that fall outside the STANDARDS are addressed in the GUIDELINES. These projects must be reviewed by the Historic District Commission at its regularly scheduled meeting.

Many common porch repairs, such as the repair of steps, rails, handrails and skirting, can be approved by the coordinator and the materials and techniques are specified in the following **STANDARDS**. More complex work, such as the restoration of a missing porch or its elements or the construction of a deck, must be reviewed by the full commission. It is highly recommended that the applicant consult with the Historic Preservation Coordinator before finalizing plans or buying materials.

STANDARDS

PORCHES

Steps, Decking, Guardrails, Handrails, Skirts

Porches are a defining feature in a historic neighborhood. They are the welcoming open space attached to the house's public façade. A well made porch can last 100 years or more.

Steps

Steps are exposed to the weather and over time are likely to require rebuilding. Replacement steps need to have treads and risers of 5/4 cedar or redwood with the tread extending at least one inch on the leading edge and past the stringers. Water drainage is easier if the outer edge of each tread is rounded or bull nosed with a router or by sanding. The stringers may be cedar, redwood or pressure treated lumber. (Pressure treated lumber is acceptable in this application because it touches the ground.) New exterior wood should be painted within a year of its installation. See following pages for illustrations of approved STANDARD Styles. ***A building permit is required for this work.***

Definitions:

Risers – the piece of a set of steps that runs from under one tread to above the one below it, perpendicular to the ground – where the toe is pointed when going up the steps.

Stringer – a piece of substantial lumber such as a 2x8 with notches cut into it to accommodate stair treads

Treads – the part of a set of steps that feet walk on, parallel to the ground.

Approved RISER AND TREAD materials: 5/4 cedar or redwood or cypress

NOTE: On rear applications only - treated lumber may be acceptable.

Approved STRINGER materials: Cedar, redwood, cypress or pressure treated.

Decking*

Decking* on a porch should slant from the house to the outer edge to direct water away from the house. Approved decking material is 5/4 tongue and groove cedar or redwood porch decking. Porch decking is cut in such a way that in time it “cups” in the center, channeling the water away from the seams. If that material is not available or affordable, pine tongue and groove decking is acceptable. Another option is 5/4” x 3” or 5/4” x 4” cedar or redwood planks, closely laid with no space between. Pressure treated decking is not appropriate. Decking planks must be perpendicular to the wall of the house and the entire floor should drop at least 1/4 inch from the wall of the house to the outer edge to facilitate drainage. The leading/outer edge of the deck should be rounded or bull-nosed and extend past the edge of the apron board at least an inch. Under the outer edge of the deck, a piece of trim supports the edge – if existing this must be retained. Missing pieces may be replaced to match. One inch quarter round or one inch cove is acceptable if this trim is entirely missing. **(REFER TO EDGE DETAIL DRAWING - PAGES 15 & 18)**

Approved DECK materials: 5/4 x 3 or 5/4x4 tongue and groove cedar, redwood OR 5/4 x 3 or 5/4 x 4 cedar or redwood planks laid tight (no spaces between) 1/2” x 3” tongue and groove kiln-dried pine MAY be approved but be aware it is a markedly inferior porch decking. *Modern composite tongue and groove decking, such as Tendura must be approved by the commission.*

Approved FRAMING materials: Cedar, redwood or pressure treated lumber. Framing may be pressure treated IF IT DOES NOT SHOW. All visible porch materials, except stair stringers, must be cedar or redwood.

****A building permit may be required for this work.***

Guardrails*

Guardrails* If at all possible original guardrails should be retained. Sometimes if the upper and lower rails are in poor shape, the spindles can be removed and re-used. All new material should be cedar or redwood and match the dimensions, height and pattern of the original rail as closely as possible.

HEIGHT – The height of the replacement rail should match the original rail. If the original rail is missing and there no clues, such as paint shadows on the wall or pockets set into piers or columns, the top of the new rail should be no higher than the lower sill. *Building code rail height requirements, which apply to rental housing, may be waived in the historic districts.* When additional height is required, such as on a second story porch, a header rail or kicker board can be added to the guardrail. See illustration on page 16.

See **Rails and Balustrades** on following pages for illustrations of approved STANDARD styles.

Approved GUARDRAIL materials: Cedar or redwood or cypress

NOTE: On rear applications only - treated lumber may be acceptable.

Handrails*

Handrails* for steps may be added to meet modern code needs. They should complement or match the porch rails and balustrades as closely as possible. Handrail grips, as required for rental housing can be added to the top or the inside of the rail. In some cases handrails may be waived for rental housing. Call the coordinator for more information. See illustrations on following pages 14 and 15 for approved STANDARD style.

Approved HANDRAIL materials: Cedar or redwood or cypress

NOTE: On rear applications only - treated lumber may be acceptable.

Skirts*

Skirts are barriers erected under the porch to keep out animals and debris. They extend from the bottom edge of the apron board to the ground. (Like a lady in a skirt and apron, the apron board extends from the bottom surface of the porch floor to cover the porch framing, the skirt, set slightly behind the apron, is below that.) A skirt can be easily made from pre-assembled lattice panels framed with 1x3. All lattice panels used as skirts must be framed. A skirt can also be vertical boards, evenly spaced and attached to framing at the top and bottom of the boards. See **illustrations** on page 18 for approved STANDARD styles. Material for the skirts may be pine, redwood, cedar, cypress or pressure treated and should be painted on all sides for protection from moisture. The lattice can be permanently attached to the porch framing, hinged for storage under the porch or secured with other removable fasteners. Lattice skirts and vertical board skirts, as specified in the illustrations, may be approved by the Historic Preservation Coordinator. The full commission must review other designs.

Approved LATTICE AND FRAME materials: cedar, redwood, pine or pressure treated.

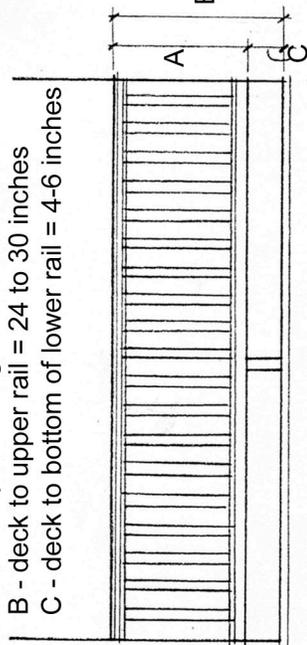
Approved PLANK SKIRT materials: cedar, redwood, pine or pressure treated.

Other changes:

Work may be proposed which does not meet these STANDARDS, including, but not limited to: enclosing a porch with screening or windows, replacing columns with different supports, new lighting, changing the location of the steps and restoration. These applications must be reviewed by the full commission. Please see the section entitled **PORCH GUIDELINES** on pages 19 and 20 for general guidelines in preparing a proposal for work.

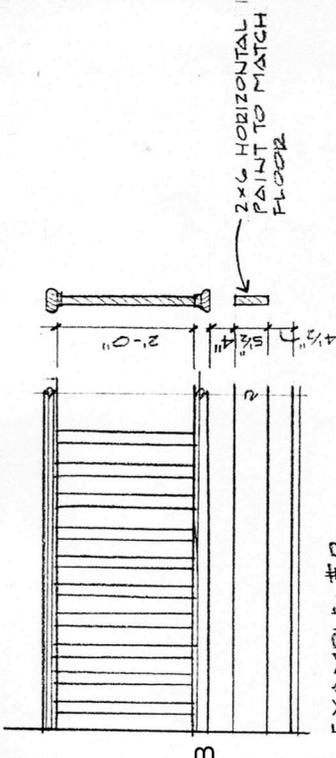
**A building permit may be required for this work.*

- A - rail + spindle height = 20 to 24 inches
- B - deck to upper rail = 24 to 30 inches
- C - deck to bottom of lower rail = 4-6 inches



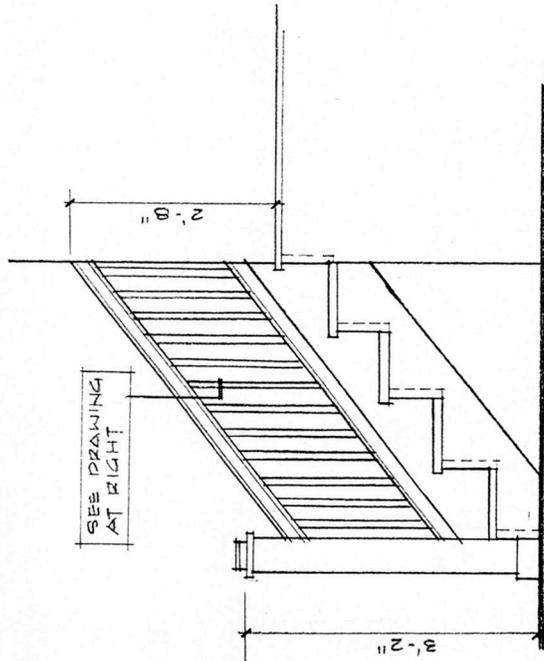
EXAMPLE #1

ONE OR TWO FAMILY DWELLINGS WHERE RAIL IS NEW OR RESULT



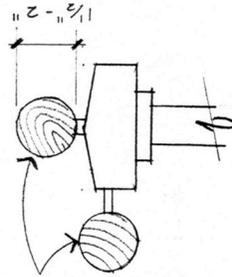
EXAMPLE #2

2ND OR 3RD STORY BALUSTRADE OR WHERE 42" HEIGHT REQUIREMENT MUST BE MET



See step details on page 17

RAILING DETAILS



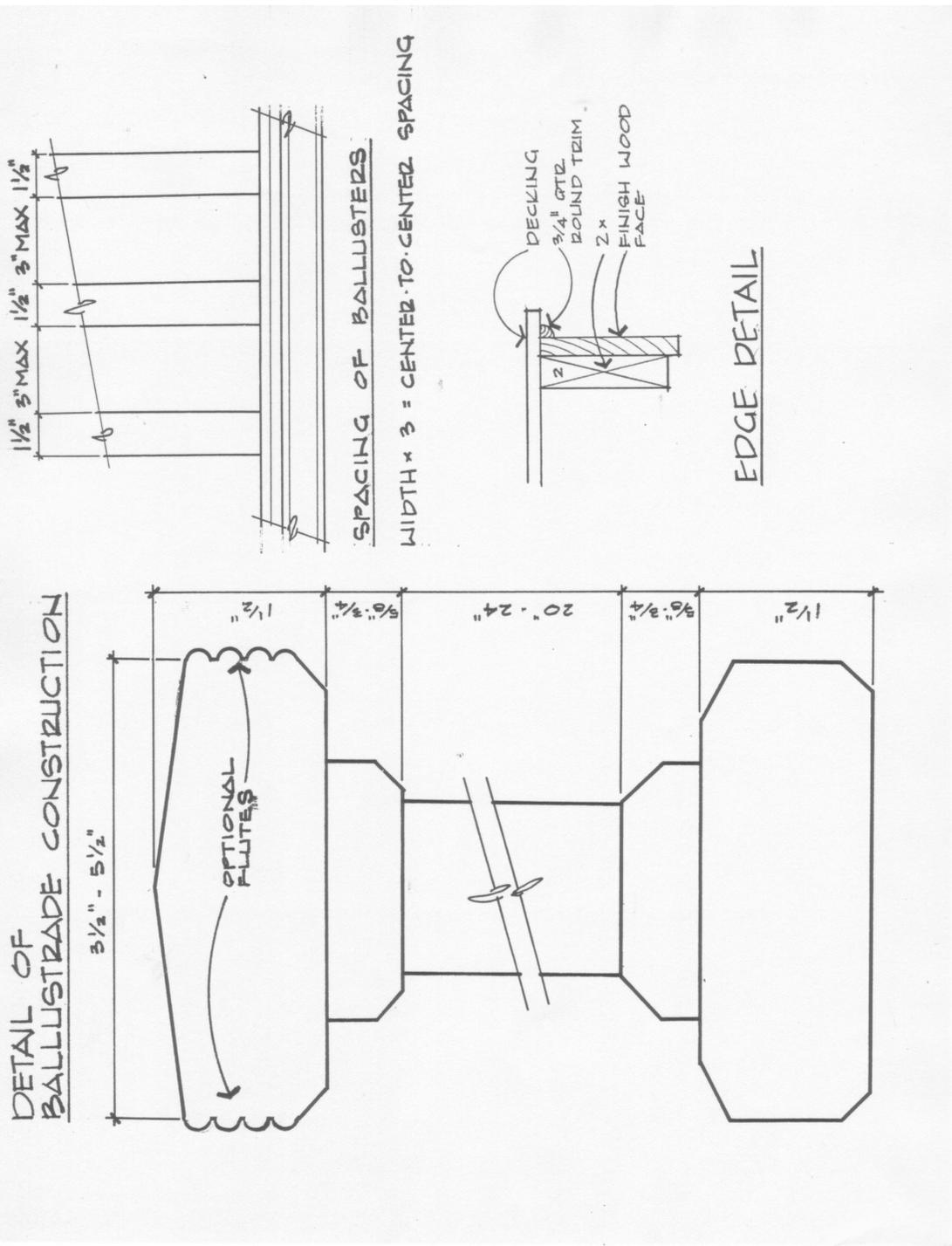
- "GRASPABLE" HANDRAIL (1 1/2" - 2" CROSS SECTIONAL DIMENSION)
- ROUNDED CORNERS

HANDRAIL CAP

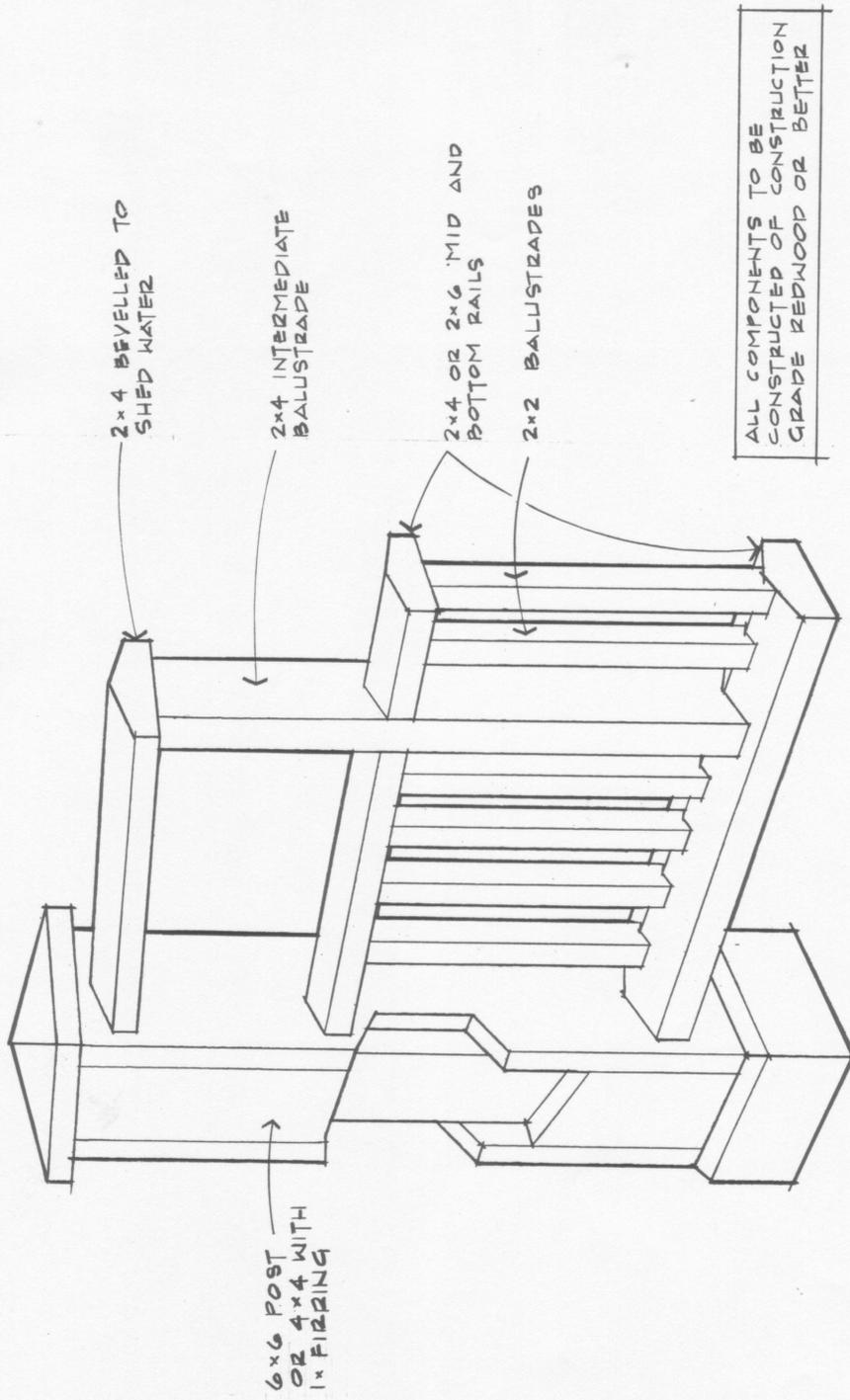
Porch Guard Rails And Handrails – STANDARDS

See step details on page 17

illustration #1



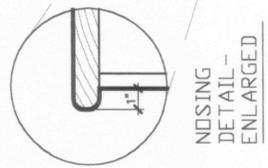
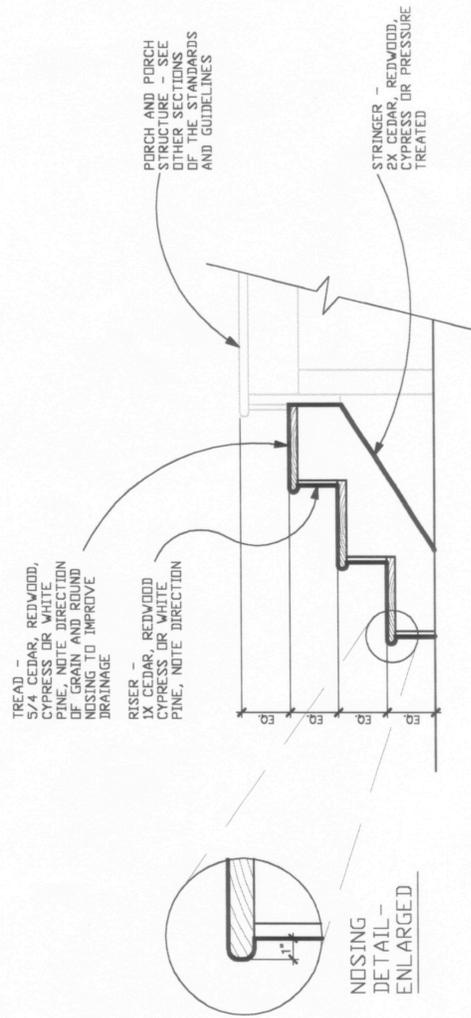
**Porch Balustrade - STANDARDS
SPINDLES AND CAPS, EDGE DETAIL**
illustration #2



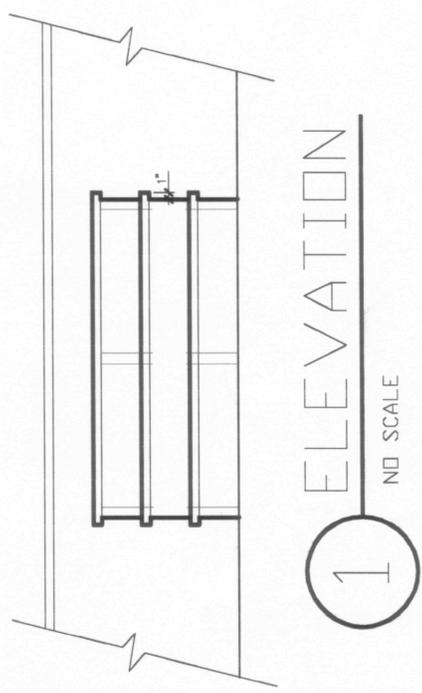
RAISED GUARDRAIL

Raised Guardrail - STANDARDS

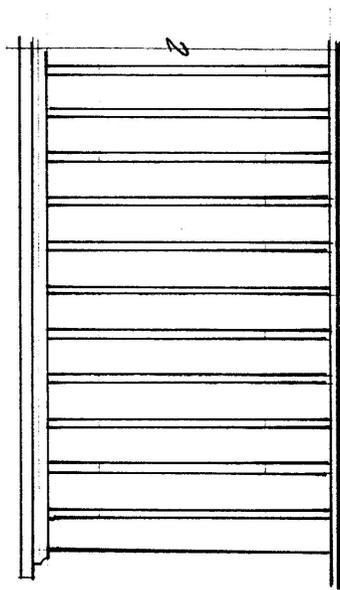
ILLUSTRATION #3



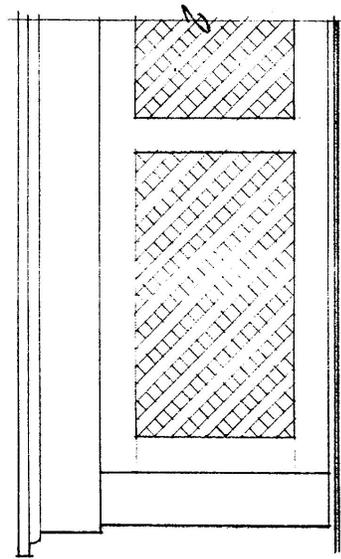
SECTION
NO SCALE
2



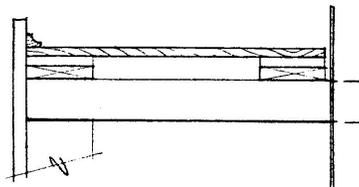
Porch Steps - STANDARDS
Illustration #4



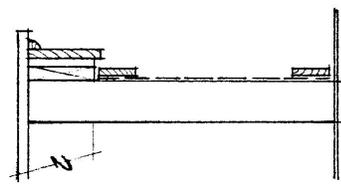
ELEVATION



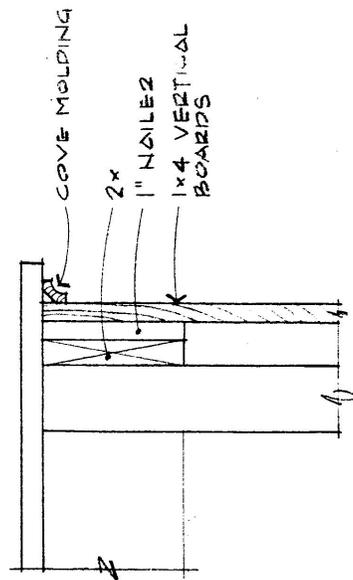
ELEVATION



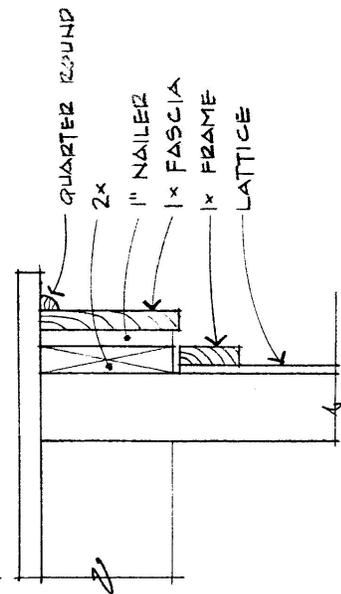
SECTION



SECTION



VERTICAL BOARDS



LATTICE

DECKING DETAILS

Porch Skirt and Edge Detail- STANDARDS

ILLUSTRATION #5

GUIDELINES

PORCHES AND DECKS BARRIER FREE RAMPS

These projects will require a full commission review because they will alter the external appearance of the structure and the impact must be evaluated.

GUIDELINES - Porches in the historic districts were designed as open spaces, the commission encourages keeping them open and does not approve closing them off for additional living space.

Secretary of the Interior's Standards recommend against:

- Removing or radically changing entrances and porches, which are important to defining the overall historic character of the building so that, as a result, the character is diminished.
- Removing an entrance or a porch because the building has been reoriented to accommodate a new use.
- Enclosing porches in a manner that results in a diminution or loss of historic character such as using solid materials such as wood stucco or masonry or permanent windows.

Applications for porch alterations should provide a lot of detail:

- Why is the change proposed? (Piers sinking, porch pulling away from wall, storm damage, restoration, broken or missing trim and/or rails, etc)
- Be specific: wooden framed screens painted to match/contrast with house measuring X" x Y" with 3" wide framing held in place with hooks and eyes on the screens and _ round on the deck.
- Measurements – depth of new porch, guardrail height, type and pitch of roof, placement of steps.

Screening should not change the details of the porch structure. On a porch with a solid rail covered with clapboard, the screens may be framed in removable window sized units and extend from the top of the rail to the frieze board of the porch. On a porch with an open rail, the best solution is individual, removable, wood framed screening units that extend from the floor to the frieze board inside the rail.

Skirting can be more elaborate than the designs described and illustrated in the standards. The vertical boards can have patterns cut into them, for example. These plans will need to be reviewed by the commission to determine if the decoration proposed is appropriate for the house.

Column repair – Over time, porch columns and the piers they rest on may settle and no longer support the weight of the porch roof properly. Repairs must be made to the original material or replacement must be in matching material. Fiberglass replacement columns may be considered if they substantially replicate the existing columns.

Handrails not to standards – On many structures, a handrail on the steps, while not part of the original design of the house, needs to be added to meet current building code or as a general safety precaution for the residents. The full commission must review any design that does not meet the standard stated above unless it is a documented restoration of missing pieces (with historic photographs). Other handrail materials may include pipe rail, vertical spindle rail and others. *Some rental properties may be eligible for a handrail waiver.* Contact the coordinator.

Balustrades –There are several common styles of balustrades including square or turned spindles set between rails. Other, more elaborate styles need to be preserved and repaired with matching materials.

Woodwork – Many older porches have elaborate woodwork trims such as ball friezes or brackets and cutwork. These details must be repaired or replaced with matching materials whenever possible.

Approved PORCH materials:

Cedar or redwood or cypress: used for all visible parts of the porch including, but not limited to: step risers and treads, hand rails, spindles, aprons, screen or window framing, screen doors and columns or posts.

Pressure treated lumber – Allowed ONLY in parts of the porch, which touch the ground, such as stair stringers and posts or as framing under the porch where it is not visible.

Note: A wide variety of decorative millwork is available today in home improvement center and lumberyards. Much of it is poplar – a fine material for interior projects but totally unsuited to Michigan weather conditions for exterior application.

DECKS

Decks are allowed on the rear of a structure and may be constructed of cedar, cypress, redwood or pressure treated lumber. They should be placed in an unobtrusive location and be minimally visible from the street. Decks are exempt from the painted exterior woodwork requirement.

Rails should be to standards as above, but may be of pressure treated lumber and may be taller than porch rails, as required by the building code for the chosen site. Very low decks may not need a rail. The decking boards should be 5/4 lumber laid with small gaps between the boards. The boards may be parallel or perpendicular to the body of the house. The flooring boards should extend past the support framing over an apron board. A lattice porch skirt may be attached under the deck, using materials and techniques as specified for porches in the standards.

Approved DECK materials: Cedar, redwood, cypress or pressure treated lumber. (Pressure treated lumber may twist, warp and check over time.)

BARRIER FREE RAMPS

Barrier Free Access Ramps – All ramp designs must be reviewed by the full commission. Preferably, ramps will be placed at the rear or as unobtrusively as possible on the side of the structure. For example if the only possible location for a ramp is at the front, its impact can be minimized with the use of pipe rail for the sides instead of a rail using balusters like a porch rail. If a portion of the porch rail must be removed to allow the ramp to be attached, that piece of rail shall be preserved and stored on the premises in a protected environment to allow for its preservation and possible restoration at a later date. (Sometimes the removed rail can be stored under the porch, hanging from large storage hooks attached to the frame.)

A barrier free ramp should be designed to be removable with minimal impact on the historic structure.

Approved BARRIER FREE RAMP materials: Cedar, redwood, cypress or pressure treated lumber. (Pressure treated lumber may twist, warp and check over time.)