

CHAPTER 11

DESIGN GUIDELINES FOR COLORS IN THE OVERLAY DISTRICTS

This chapter presents design policies and guidelines that apply to paint colors. The City of Georgetown does not have a specific color palette. Paint color changes to single-family and two-family residential properties in the Old Town Overlay District do not require design review.

In This Chapter:

| | |
|---------------|-----|
| Color schemes | 118 |
| Accent colors | 119 |
| When to paint | 120 |

Historic Color Schemes

When renovating an historic building, first consider returning to the original color scheme, which can be discovered by carefully cutting back paint layers. Accurately determining the original color scheme requires professional help, but one may get a general idea of the colors that were used by scraping back paint layers with a penknife. Since the paint will be faded, moisten it slightly to get a better idea of the original hue. It is not necessary, however, to use the original color schemes of the building. An alternative is to use colors in ways that were typical of the period or architectural style, and with them create a new color scheme.

With respect to the treatment of color on individual historic buildings, colors that represent the appropriate period of history are preferred, but not necessarily required. Color does not damage the historic materials or alter significant details and can always be changed in the future and thus its application is not as critical as some other design options.

Inappropriate applications of color, however, may hinder one's ability to perceive the character of the building's architecture. For example, if a building with jig-saw brackets and moldings is painted solid black, with no contrast between the background and the details, and little opportunity for expression of shadows, the perception of the character of the building may be diminished.

This concern for perception of character is more relevant in the context of the Downtown Overlay District, where assemblage of buildings on the street is important to one's perception of the character of the streetscape. In this sense, one building that stands out from the rest with an inappropriate color scheme will impede one's perception of the continuity in the district. For this reason, the city reviews the use of color as part of its consideration of design issues. In general, HARC will consider color on a case-by-case basis, and in context with the building's location.

Policy: In general, bright colors used on large surfaces are discouraged. In all cases, the following standards for use of color shall apply.



Develop a color scheme for the entire building that coordinates all the façade elements.



Choose colors for trim, accents, and architectural details that complement the main color on the body of the structure.

11.1 Develop a color scheme for the entire building that coordinates all the façade elements.

- Using the historic color scheme is encouraged.
- Choose a base color that will link elements of the entire building face together. It can tie signs, ornamentation, awnings, and entrances together. It can also help the building better relate to others on the block.
- A single color scheme should be used for the entire exterior so upper and lower floors and subordinate wings of buildings are seen as components of a single structure.
- For a newer building in the Overlay Districts, a color scheme that complements the historic character of this district should be used.

11.2 Paint colors should enhance individual building elements while creating a unified, coordinated appearance for the entire structure.

- Paint colors and placement should create a cohesive look for the structure. There should be one main color on the body of the building to unify the façade.
- Choose colors for trim, accents, and architectural details that complement the main color on the body of the structure.
- Consider the palette of surrounding structures to create a harmonized appearance along the block face.
- Background and accent colors should be consistent within separate buildings, where a number of buildings are attached or where unity in theme is desired.

11.3 A muted color is preferred for the base color of most buildings.

- Use muted colors to minimize the apparent scale of buildings and blend them with the natural colors of area.
- Matte finishes are preferred to glossy ones.

11.4 Roof colors must complement the style and overall color scheme of the structure.

Policy: Focus attention to a building's decorative details and entrances.

11.5 In general, use bright colors for accents only.

- Colors of a vivid saturation are not appropriate for the body of commercial buildings.
- Overly strong or bold colors are not appropriate for the main body of a structure. Reserve the use of strong, bright colors for accents when you want to draw the customer's eye, such as to the sign, the building's ornamentation or entrance.
- In most cases only one or two accent colors should be used in addition to the base color.
- Doors may be painted a bright accent color or they may be left a natural wood finish. Historically, many of the doors would have simply had a stain applied.
- Window sashes, casings, and trims are also an excellent opportunity for accent color.
- Brilliant luminescent or day-glow colors are not appropriate.
- Minimize the metallic shine of aluminum and door frames.



Bright colors can be used to identify a building entrance.



Paint colors should highlight architectural details

11.6 Paint colors should highlight architectural details.

- Plan painting to use more than one color. It is inappropriate to allow architectural details to be camouflaged by painting them the same color as the background of the structure
- Strong or bold colors can be appropriate for trim, accents, and architectural details.

Policy: It is important to know when to paint buildings and when to leave the material in its natural state or color.



Leave natural masonry finishes unpainted when feasible.

11.7 Wooden structures must be painted.

- Historically wooden structures in Georgetown were painted and would not have been left exposed wood.
- Stained wood is inappropriate for the body of a structure.
- Certain wooden details, such as doors and windows, may remain unpainted. But the wood must not be exposed to the elements, so the materials need to be treated.
- The use and color of stain must be a typical style for the period of the structure.

11.8 Leave natural masonry finishes unpainted when feasible.

- Where the natural color of the materials exists, such as with stone or brick, they should be left unpainted.
- Painting an unpainted brick or stone wall may trap moisture inside the walls and will drastically alter its character and appearance.
- For other parts of the building that do require painting, select colors that will complement those of the natural materials.

11.9 Where brick has been painted historically it should remain painted.

- If a wall is made of porous brick, which has always been painted, it should remain painted. Removing the paint will expose the brick to weather, accelerating its deterioration.
- If a building was originally plain brick, but was painted sometime in the past, consider applying new paint colors that simulate the original brick color.