

## SECTION 5A

# Rehabilitation Standards for Postwar Houses



## Introduction

The Village of Pittsford is known for its well-preserved nineteenth and early twentieth-century buildings, including Federal, Greek Revival, Gothic Revival, Queen Anne, Italianate, and Craftsman style houses, as well as a number of excellent examples of vernacular buildings. These buildings define the unique physical character of the center of the village. In 1971, the entire village was designated as a local preservation district. The designation of the entire village was justified because:

1. Most village buildings are over 50 years old and represent historic vernacular architectural styles.
2. Changes to newer areas affect the setting of older buildings, neighborhoods, and districts.
3. The whole village as an entity is more significant and valuable as a resource than the sum of its individual buildings.

Because the preservation district boundaries coincide with the village limits, all buildings within the village, regardless of age, are included in the district, with no regulatory distinction between “contributing” and “noncontributing” buildings. All building owners must receive a Certificate of Appropriateness (C of A) from the Architectural and Preservation Review Board before making exterior alterations to their building.

The purpose of this section is to:

1. Identify and define the key architectural features that define Post-World War II residential architecture in the village.
2. Assist owners with the preservation of the character of their houses.
3. Provide the Architectural and Preservation Review Board with reasonable criteria to evaluate Certificate of Appropriateness applications for Post-WWII houses.

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Now more than 50 years old, houses built in the 1940s and 1950s have passed the first threshold established by the National Park Service to determine if a property is potentially eligible for National Register listing. Properties under 50 years old may qualify if they are “exceptionally significant” at the local, state, or national level. Although few communities have designated large numbers of Post-WWII buildings, and few examples of design standards for these buildings exist, there is a growing trend to recognize the importance of historic resources from this period.

During the twentieth century, home construction in Pittsford was influenced by national trends. Due to the Great Depression and World War II, residential construction in Pittsford nearly ceased between the late 1920s and 1945. After the war, housing construction boomed. Several neighborhoods and scattered houses were constructed during this period within the village. Of the approximately 800 buildings located within the village, approximately 185 houses – nearly one-quarter of the total housing stock – were built after World War II, most of these between 1948 and 1966. By the late 1960s, the village was largely built out, and residential construction slowed once again. The handful of houses built in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s were built individually or in small groups, either on infill lots along the existing streets, on “flag lots,” or on new streets carved into the interior of blocks.

Houses built during the Post-WWII period differ sharply from those built a few decades earlier. Postwar residential construction relied on improved mass production of building components and of houses themselves. Mass production, cost efficiency, and national stylistic trends during the period favored simpler architectural forms and fewer decorative details. As the automobile became the predominant form of transportation, neighborhoods were designed with wider lots, without sidewalks, and incorporating attached two-car garages on every house.

Most Post-WWII village houses fall into two categories: custom-built houses and mass-produced builder houses.

Custom-built houses were often architect designed for individual owners. These houses often have a unique character and may possess distinctive architectural features that respond to the home’s orientation and site. These houses were often built on single lots or in very small subdivisions. Examples can be found on Sutherland Street, Stonegate Lane, Jackson Park, and Eastview Terrace, among others. Custom-built houses were usually built with high-quality construction materials similar to materials used in older homes. Many of these houses employ historically derived details that represent a continuation of motifs common in the village in the Pre-War period. Floor plans vary tremendously, reflecting the owner’s preferences. Although some of the village’s custom-built Post-WWII houses are sited in traditional relationships to the street, many are tucked back on large lots with lush landscaping. Some Post-WWII custom-built homes incorporate traditional materials and styling, and therefore do not stand out from earlier homes; others are more intentionally Modern in design and clearly represent their own period in history.

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Mass-produced builder houses were built speculatively by developers subdividing larger plots of land into numerous residential lots. Most houses located in these neighborhoods represent popular Postwar styles, such as Minimal Traditional, Cape Cod, Ranch, and Post-WWII Colonial Revival. These houses and neighborhoods are similar to Post-WWII housing subdivisions in the Town of Pittsford and elsewhere in the suburban Rochester region. The village contains two sizable Post-WWII subdivisions: East Jefferson Circle was developed by W. Brown, and the Courtenay Circle/Heatherhurst Drive/Green Hill Lane neighborhood was developed by Robert Wilmot, Neil Hirsch, and Sam Morrell. Houses in both areas were designed by the architects Stevens and Burton. Houses in the two neighborhoods exhibit uniformity in style, layout, and materials. In some cases, mass-produced builder houses were built on individual infill lots or in small groups of two or three similar houses. Examples include the north side of East Jefferson Road, South Street, Rand Place extension, Austin Park, and Maple Street.

In the Village of Pittsford, most mass-produced builder houses fall into five general categories:

1. Minimal Traditional
2. Ranch
3. Cape Cod
4. Split-Level Ranch
5. Post-WWII Colonial Revival

These styles overlap, and many houses fall into more than one category. The Post-WWII Colonial Revival style is a broad category that may be further refined as time passes and historians gain a better perspective on the architecture of this period.

Compared with houses constructed before the 1940s, the five Post-WWII styles exhibit less decorative detail, so it is usually easiest to classify them using overall mass, height, and orientation, rather than specific decorative details. In early twentieth-century architecture, the mass and floor plan of a Tudor Revival house could be virtually identical to that of a Colonial Revival house, with superficial details establishing distinct style languages. By contrast, in Post-WWII housing, it is the mass, floor plan, orientation, and roofline that distinguish a Cape Cod from a Ranch-style house, while siding, window surrounds, doors, porch posts, and other details are virtually interchangeable.

### **Methodology**

This section of this document was prepared by The Landmark Society of Western New York for the Village of Pittsford. The project was managed by Katie Eggers Comeau, with research and field work conducted by interns Daniel Palmer and Nimisha Thakur. The first step was a literature review, involving the analysis and collection of documents from other regions where similar studies have been conducted. These models were used to create a working draft of the style guide.

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Following the literature review, the project team visited the site for an overview of village architecture. The two interns then conducted historical research, which involved going through the 1976 architectural inventory books to produce a list of properties built between 1945 and 1976. The interns assigned each of the properties a stylistic category based on the working draft of the style guide, and conducted field work to photograph the questionable properties whose styles could not be identified. The team then extended the inventory beyond the initial 1976 cut-off date, by using building permit records to identify houses built after 1976 and visiting each of those properties to determine its character-defining features. The project manager incorporated the field survey information into a revised version of the draft style guide, verified the property inventory, and wrote the supporting text.

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### Minimal Traditional

1935 - 1955

The Minimal Traditional style first appeared during the 1930s and continued through the early years of the Post-WWII period, representing the first wave in the housing boom. These houses are characterized by a traditional form, with minimal decorative detail. Typically small and asymmetrical, they have few ornamental features, but display a relatively high level of workmanship and some high-quality interior features. Examples can be seen on Maple Street, Rand Place, Green Hill Lane, and East Jefferson Circle. Later, in the 1950s, this house type increasingly overlapped with the Cape Cod and Ranch house forms as those grew in popularity, and some houses do not fall neatly into one category or the other. Generally, however, Minimal Traditional houses can be identified by their compact size, simple, but generally traditional, features, and early construction date.

Character-defining features:

- **Orientation and setting:** Traditional relationship to the street; typically, the primary gable roof form is oriented parallel to the street with a street-facing front gable. Houses were often sited individually or in small groups along existing village streets, although some were built on newly developed streets.
- **Form:** Usually 1 or 1½ stories; compact floor plan; generally asymmetrical.
- **Interior space:** Relatively traditional floor plan.
- **Exterior materials:** Typically wood siding, but can be almost any material.
- **Roof:** Usually cross-gable with low or intermediate pitch; prominent front-facing gable is common; lack of eaves or overhangs.
- **Porch:** Sometimes a small front porch, portico, or stoop, which may be recessed.
- **Windows:** Typically double hung, multiple panes.
- **Door:** Typically wood with solid panels.



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- **Details:** Very little architectural detail or ornament. Details, usually related to the Colonial Revival style, may be present in a very simplified form around the entrance; for example, porch supports are usually simple posts. Shutters are common.
- **Garage:** Early examples were typically built without garages, or with detached garages. Later examples may have attached garages; where attached garage exists, it is a subordinate element.
- **Color:** White or light colors with dark accents were typical.



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### Ranch

1955-1980

Ranch houses became very popular in the Post-WWII period, particularly in the 1960s and 1970s. Nationwide, this house type had its roots in the west, where long, low rooflines were reminiscent of the Prairie Style of the early twentieth century. One-story houses with deep roof overhangs, a strong horizontal emphasis, and horizontal ribbons of windows reflect this emphasis. The decorative details may vary, with many of the houses in Pittsford displaying historically inspired details, such as diamond-paned windows and shutters, while a few are distinctly contemporary in their styling. Exotic variations of the style that are common in some regions of the country are not found here. The popularity of the style reflects a desire for an informal lifestyle, one-story living space, and the increased reliance on the automobile.



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- **Form:** One story, horizontal orientation with wide street frontage. Some examples have a shallow L-shaped plan, but retain their overall orientation parallel to the street. Overall design is asymmetrical.
- **Interior space:** Open floor plan.
- **Materials:** Shingle or wood lap siding; 13” reveal is common (and nearly universal in the Courtenay Circle/Heatherhurst Drive/Green Hill Lane subdivision); there are a few examples where brick is the original exterior material and a few examples of narrow stone veneer.
- **Roof:** Low- to moderate-pitched hipped or gable roof; may have moderate or deep overhang; may have cross gable.
- **Porch:** Porches are not typical of the Ranch form. Often the entry or a portion of the façade is recessed beneath the primary roof to create a shallow enclosure at ground level that is similar to a small porch; where this exists, porch posts are simplified in form.
- **Windows:** Picture, bay, and casement windows are common; may be wood, steel, or aluminum frame. There may be decorative shutters. Diamond-paned windows are fairly common.
- **Door:** May be single or paired; paneled or plain.
- **Details:** Decorative details are minimal.
- **Garage:** Attached, usually with a roofline continuous with the rest of the house.



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### **Cape Cod** 1920s-present

The Cape Cod house form was derived from a form typical of colonial New England. The hallmarks of this type of house are its massing (1½ stories, often three bays) and steep gabled roof. Houses of this style in Pittsford are traditional in appearance; there were Cape Cod-style houses built before World War II, as well as after. Although this was a common house type nationwide, it is not as common as the other Post-WWII house types in the Village of Pittsford; this can be attributed to the fact that the builders of the Courtenay Circle/Heatherhurst Drive/Green Hill Lane neighborhood, the largest concentration of Post-WWII housing, did not build any Cape Cod-style houses. Cape Cod-style houses appear singly or in small groups on streets like East/West Jefferson Roads, Stonegate Lane, and Rand Place.

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- **Form:** Usually 1½ story, horizontal orientation; somewhat symmetrical with central entrance common.
- **Interior space:** Relatively formal arrangement with traditionally delineated rooms; center entrance common.
- **Materials:** Wood siding (wide clapboard or shingle), may be brick.
- **Roof:** Steep gabled roof, ridgeline parallel to street, with a small overhang and dormers.
- **Porch:** Usually no front porch.
- **Windows:** Relatively tall with small panes, usually double-hung.
- **Door:** Paneled wood door with simple Colonial-inspired detail surrounding it.
- **Details:** Usually simplified Colonial Revival details are present; shutters are common.
- **Garage:** Detached, or attached with a breezeway and clearly subordinate to the main house form; early examples were built without garages.



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### Split-Level

1957-1970

The Split-Level house was a novel form that developed at the end of the 1950s and remained popular through the 1970s. Split-Level houses are innovative for their use of space, with the interior divided according to use: typically the kitchen, dining, and living rooms were on the main level, with a family room a half-level down and bedrooms a half-level up. Like the other house types of this era, Split-Level houses characteristically display little decorative detail; where ornamentation exists, it is minimal and may reflect Colonial, Modern, or Prairie influences in a very simplified manner. Thus, the Split Level house shares many characteristics with the Post-WWII Colonial or the Ranch-style house. As with the Ranch style, the garage is fully integrated into the house, reflecting the predominance of the automobile in this era.

- **Form:** Asymmetrical; one section of the house is a half-story taller than the other, and often has a front-facing gable (side-facing gable on the lower portion is common). Hipped roofs are common as well. May be three levels.
- **Interior space:** Innovative organization of interior space with functions separated by half-levels.
- **Materials:** Wood siding, wide reveal; some brick or stone veneer is possible.
- **Roof:** Low to moderate pitch, multiple levels, with cross-gable; hip or gable is possible.
- **Windows:** Picture and bay windows are common. Early examples typically had double-hung windows; later examples had sliding windows.
- **Door:** Modern door, often a solid wood door with small windows.
- **Details:** Little decorative ornamentation. Where present, details may reflect some Colonial Revival influence, but other stylistic references are possible.
- **Garage:** Fully integrated.



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### Postwar Colonial Revival

1940s-present

The Postwar Colonial Revival is the continuation of a trend in which architects and builders recycled motifs from the eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. While early twentieth -century Colonial Revival-style houses were fairly faithful to historical precedent, in the Postwar period, Colonial motifs were usually suggested rather than overtly imitated. The floor plan and massing of the houses are traditional and generally symmetrical; the most common version of the form is a three-bay, two-story center entrance house. Some have a slightly overhanging second story, evocative of Colonial-era New England house forms. A less common variation seen in a few houses in the village is an L-shaped or other floor plan. The village also has several examples of houses with more overt Colonial Revival details, such as two-story columns; usually, these are simplified and abstracted, rather than exactly mimicking historical precedents.

- **Form:** Two stories; usually symmetrical. Second story may slightly overhang the first. The most common variation of this house form is three bays wide with a center entrance. A rectilinear floor plan is the most common, although a variation has an L-shaped floor plan.
- **Interior space:** Relatively formal with center entrance.
- **Materials:** Wood siding, typically wide clapboard or shingle; some have partial brick facades. Starting in the 1970s, a wider variety of original siding materials was possible, including masonite, asbestos, aluminum, and (particularly starting in the 1980s) vinyl, but these do not appear to have been used as the original material on any houses in the Village of Pittsford. Wood siding with a wide reveal was the near-universal exterior material in the Courtenay Circle/Heatherhurst Drive/Green Hill Lane neighborhood.
- **Roof:** Moderate pitch, gabled, with little overhang and no returns.
- **Porch:** Shallow front porch at ground level (not raised); porch may be two stories. Columns are narrow and unornamented, and there is no railing. Alternatively, there may be a small portico or stoop.



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- **Windows:** Most are double-hung with multiple panes; picture and bay windows are also common. Second-story windows are just below the eaves.
- **Door:** Traditionally, the door is styled plain or paneled.
- **Details:** The details vary; some are very simple with little or no decorative ornament, while others have details such as simplified columns that demonstrate specific Colonial influence.
- **Garage:** Attached.



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### Design Standards for Postwar Mass-Produced Builder Houses

Postwar subdivision homes were constructed with manufactured, and generally interchangeable, elements; the goal of design review should be to maintain the general design character of homes and the neighborhood. Compared with older houses, exterior materials used during the Postwar Period tend to have a shorter lifespan and may require replacement. In some cases, certain materials are not practical to replace in-kind, because they are not durable or are no longer readily available. Certain types of aluminum windows, steel casement windows, and asbestos shingles are a few examples of building components that were once common, but are no longer readily available. Alterations should respect the scale and design vocabulary of the neighborhood and should maintain a consistent streetscape. Character-defining features, as described above, should be respected and retained wherever possible.

- Exterior materials:
  - Original exterior materials should be retained and repaired, rather than replaced. Vinyl, aluminum, and other synthetic siding materials were not commonly used as original materials when these houses were built and are not appropriate to the style.
  - Newer materials, such as fiber-cement siding, may be appropriate if properly installed with dimensions and texture matching the original, and if their appearance is indistinguishable from the original material from arm's length view (or from the public right-of-way, depending on how strict the commission wants to be).
- Ornamentation:
  - Restrained, simplified ornamentation is typical of all Post-WWII styles. Original ornamentation should be preserved where it exists; new decorative ornamentation that was not on the building historically, or is not appropriate to the era, should not

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- be added. This includes features intended to give the building a more traditional, pre-war appearance.
- Specific subdivisions (East Jefferson Circle, Courtenay Circle/Heatherhurst Drive/Green Hill Lane) used a consistent design vocabulary with mass-produced, and generally interchangeable, details, even among different house types. Because the design vocabulary was so consistent, it may be appropriate to draw inspiration from other houses in the same subdivision in the case of additions or alterations.
  - Windows:
    - Original windows should be retained, unless they are beyond repair. Wood windows, in particular, are often relatively easy and inexpensive to repair, and homeowners can save considerable money by keeping their windows in good repair or hiring someone to repair them, rather than replacing them.
    - Unobtrusive exterior or interior storm windows are appropriate and (along with appropriate repair) is the preferred method of increasing the energy performance of windows.
    - With that said, the quality of windows from 1945 on is not as high as the quality of windows built of old-growth wood before 1945. The expected lifespan of these windows is not as long as for earlier buildings, and replacement may be needed sooner.
    - If replacement is necessary, the configuration, type, and overall appearance of windows should match the original. For example, a double-hung window should not be replaced by a casement window.
    - The use of newer materials, such as vinyl-clad or aluminum-clad windows, may be an appropriate substitution for wood windows if the appearance is indistinguishable from wood from the public right-of-way (or arm's-length). Substitute material should be similar in form, configuration, color, texture, and profile to the windows they replace. Decision of appropriateness will be determined on a case-by-case basis.
    - The original muntin configuration and dimensions should be replicated as closely as possible. Interior muntins or muntins sandwiched between panes of glass do not sufficiently resemble the appearance of a true divided-light window; windows with exterior and interior-applied dividers, plus spacers within the panes of glass (for double-glazed windows), are preferable.
    - If windows are replaced, replacement of the sash only is preferred. The new sash should fit the opening; window openings should not be reduced or increased in size to accommodate ill-fitting windows.
  - Additions:
    - Rear additions are appropriate and should be subordinate in scale, height, and roofline to the main body of the house.
    - In order to maintain a consistent streetscape, front additions are generally not appropriate.

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- Streetscape Considerations:
    - Additions and new construction should be consistent with the neighborhood, including uniformly deep setbacks, consistent side yards, one- to two-story height, and consistent scale. Front additions are generally not appropriate, as they alter these characteristics. New buildings that are much larger or smaller than the typical scale of houses in the neighborhood are also not appropriate.
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### Custom-Built Houses

While most post-WWII houses in the village are located in the large subdivisions, some are located in scattered locations, and were designed in a more customized manner. This became increasingly the case as the village became nearly fully developed and few building lots remained. Future study will continue to refine and add detail to these descriptions, and develop better names and descriptions for the categories, as there is not yet a consistent terminology used by architectural historians to describe architecture of this era.

Generally, the houses fall into two categories: “Small-Tract” houses that appear to be somewhat customized, but that display characteristics indicating a common design vocabulary; and “Individual Custom” houses that are one-of-a-kind, designed for individual owners.

#### Small-Tract Development, 1980s-1990s

In a few locations, one to eight houses were built either on traditional street-fronting lots or on small new streets carved into mid-block locations off of the traditional streets. While, due to their small numbers and evidence of customization in their design, these could all be identified as “custom” houses and treated as such in the design standards, there are certain design characteristics common to these houses that can be called out individually.

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### Late Twentieth Century Ranch

- Massing and layout: Similar to the ranch-style builder houses described previously: primary gable roof; may have secondary cross-gables, particularly at entrance. Broad side usually faces the street, although sideways orientation is possible.



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- Footprint: Fairly simple, L-shaped or rectangular.
- Windows: Single-paned casement windows (no mullions) common.
- Exterior materials: Wood siding (either vertical or horizontal) is the primary cladding material.
- Details: No historically-derived decorative detail.
- Garage: Fully integrated with the house.

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### Late Modern Snout House (contemporary)

- Footprint: may be complex, asymmetrical, and not traditional; may have an L shape or other complex footprint. Garage projects forward of front facade.
- Interior space: often an open floor plan.
- Massing: complex, and may be composed of different sections having different heights and roof pitches. Hip or gabled roofs are common. Some examples have very complex rooflines with multiple intersecting forms.
- Windows: Single-paned casement windows (no mullions) common; nontraditional shapes (e.g., triangles, trapezoids) and proportions common. Various window types and shapes on the same house. Windows are often very large.
- Exterior materials: Wood siding (either vertical or horizontal) is the primary cladding material, sometimes in combination with light-colored brick.
- Relationship to the street: Nontraditional; built in small clusters on newly created dead-end/cul-de-



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sac streets, set back from the historic roads (e.g., Durham Lane, Village Grove). Primary entrance may not be obvious from the street; house may be oriented in a direction other than toward the street (e.g., toward the Erie Canal).

- Garage: Oriented to the street, fully oriented with the house, and may be the most prominent feature of the façade.
  - Details: No historically-derived decorative detail.
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### Neo-Traditional

- Layout and massing: Traditional; most are two stories in height with traditional roof pitch; usually a gabled roof with one or more cross-gables.
- Details: Clearly imitative of traditional design, especially Queen Anne; windows, porches, shutters, and other details mimic historical precedent, but proportions are not accurate to historical models. Some details that have functional origins (e.g., shutters) are used in a decorative fashion, and are not functional. Details may be used in combination or relationship to one another that would not be seen on traditional examples. Simulated divided-light windows are common.
- Garage: Fully integrated with the house.
- Relationship to the street: May be traditional, in an infill setting, with primary façade parallel to the street; or the house may be located on a new cul-de-sac set back from the older street.
- Materials: Clapboard siding is the most common exterior material; may be used in combination with brick.



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### Individual Custom Houses

The village has a fine tradition of distinctive, custom-built houses. These houses were individually designed for specific owners on specific sites, and each is unique in terms of its materials, form, and/or design. Some of these could be categorized as reflecting the Minimal Traditional, Ranch, Split-Level, or Post-WWII Colonial Revival design approach, but others cannot be labeled according to any of these categories. While detailed research into each custom-designed house was beyond the scope of this study, the project team did research a few examples to determine what type of information was available.

The survey team used the houses at 44 Sutherland Street, 43 Monroe Avenue, and 44 Rand Place to test the availability of more detailed records. In all three cases, the survey and/or the computerized records contained valuable information about the appearance of the house in the 1970s, original architect/builder, and alterations to the original design. This information is undoubtedly very helpful to the APRB in reviewing applications, and the village is fortunate to have retained such well-organized and accessible records.



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### Design Standards for Small-Tract and Custom Houses

Because so few small-tract and custom houses exist in the village, and because they exhibit a high degree of individuality, it would be impossible to create a specific set of design standards for individual “styles.” Each house will have to be considered on a case-by-case basis, much as a one-of-a-kind house of an earlier era would be considered. A useful summary of this approach appears in the *Training Manual for Historic Preservation Commissions*, produced by the State Historic Preservation Office:

1. Gauge the importance and location of affected historic features through site visits, research and discussion;
2. Consider the minimal acceptable treatment possible to accomplish an applicant’s request, and
3. In cases where discordant design elements cannot be avoided, learn how to ameliorate the effect through innovative solutions.

Some factors to be taken into consideration include the context (surrounding neighborhood), whether the house was designed by a notable architect, and the distinctiveness and quality of the original design. These houses typically used elements of higher quality than the mass-produced windows, doors, etc., seen in the large Post-WWII tracts, and care should be taken to retain those elements that contribute to the character of the design.