



# • DESIGN • REVIEW • GUIDE •

## Porches

Burlington is well known as a community with a high quality of life, small and cohesive neighborhoods, a vibrant downtown and waterfront – all within a spectacular setting on the shores of Lake Champlain. This deserving reputation is due in part to the City's small size, entrepreneurial spirit, civic-minded citizens and activist government. One of the many factors that makes Burlington such a great place to live, work and visit is the community's attention to detail, and respect for its setting, heritage and quality urban design.

Burlington's Design Review process strives to protect the city's unique qualities and strong sense of place by carrying out citywide development and design objectives. The purpose of this *Design Review Guide* is to help applicants in preparing projects to be reviewed by the Design Review Board and the Burlington Planning Commission. Through materials such as this, the Department of Planning & Zoning seeks to make information available well before the final design of a project saving the applicant, and the city, time and money.

### ADDING TO OUR SENSE OF COMMUNITY

It's hard to imagine a tree-lined neighborhood street without front porches on every home, each attractively outfitted with a comfortable rocker or two. Porches provide a transition between the building and the street, and into the surrounding neighborhood.



The front porch originated from a desire to enjoy the warm weather while still being protected from the hot sun or a sudden rainstorm. By the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, porches were an omnipresent design feature of almost any home, making them a defining element throughout many Burlington neighborhoods. A wonderful by-product of a porch is the ability to talk with someone in a neighboring yard, wave to passersby, or lounge away a Saturday afternoon in a rocker. This social interaction is an important component to building and maintaining "community" in our neighborhoods.

### AN IMPORTANT ARCHITECTURAL DETAIL

Front porches are an important part of architectural styling. Many times buildings are designed specifically to include a porch for both functional and aesthetic reasons. This allows an architect to include decorative detailing, and provide balance to the



massing of the structure. Sometimes they are assumed within the outline of the building, while in other cases they are an addition.

As times have changed, rear decks have replaced the once-popular front porches. Many of the original front porches have been enclosed for additional living space, or the large porch has been replaced with a small portico over the main entry. If done carefully, this can be an attractive and functional evolution to the original building design.



### DESIGN

Porches are about scale and symmetry. The overall size of the porch must be compatible with the mass of the building facade. A porch's placement must serve to balance the other elements of the building such as windows, doors and rooflines.

Railings must not overwhelm the porch, but add detailing to it. Columns are often substantial in both appearance and materials, and are designed to compliment the height of the railing. Brackets and trellises are added to add character and detail to the porch. This level of detailing extends to the building materials themselves by using smooth, knot-free materials in order to achieve a smooth painted finish.



## COMMON TERMS:

**Balustrade:** A series of spindles or sometimes solid materials held together to form the railing or skirt of the porch.

**Brackets:** Projecting supports along the ceiling line commonly used for covered entryways.

**Chamfer:** When the edges of a square column have been removed.

**Frieze:** The decorative band running under the roof cornice.

**Latticework or Trellis-work:** Often an open weave, either diamond or square, produced with interlocking lath or thin strips of wood or iron.

**Portico:** A small covered entry, supported by columns.

## CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING:

1. **Replicate materials needing replacement.** The style and size were specifically chosen to compliment the structure. Often by keeping the porch intact, other alterations to the original architectural integrity of the structure are not as visually harmful.

2. **Don't use pressure treated wood.** Other than on a floor, typically porch materials are sheltered by the roof. Pressure treated materials are unnecessary, more expensive and harder to paint, and more difficult to find in more delicate pieces as needed in repair jobs.

3. **Use your eye.** If components are going to be replaced or removed keep in mind the scale or size of each element and try to mimic that size. In other words, don't replace an 8" diameter column with a 2"x 4"!

### 4. Making room.

Porches can be enclosed if the original lines and balance of the porch are maintained. Often the best solution is to put the wall behind the railing and include lots of windows to retain the openness between the building and the yard.



### 5. Use Plants.

Porches are a great place for plants - both on the porch, and around the perimeter. They add color and texture, and enhance the transition between the building and the yard.



## CITY OBJECTIVES

✓ **Porches are an important component to Burlington's heritage, visual character and sense of community.**

✓ **Porches should be retained and are encouraged as important architectural elements of city buildings.**

✓ **Replacement materials should closely resemble original materials in size, shape, scale, finish, and texture.**

✓ **When a porch is enclosed, the original size, shape and character should be retained.**



## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

*city zoning permits & general information*

- **Burlington Dept. of Planning & Zoning**  
135 Church Street  
Burlington, VT 05401  
802.865.7188

*city building permits*

- **Burlington Dept. of Public Works**  
645 Pine Street  
Burlington, VT 05401  
802.863.9094

*property information and tax maps*

- **Burlington Assessor's Office**  
Burlington City Hall, Room 10  
Burlington, VT 05401  
802.865.7111

*historic photographs and building surveys*

- **UVM Special Collections**  
Bailey-Howe Library  
University of Vermont

*historic building rehabilitation*

- **VT Division for Historic Preservation**  
National Life Bldg., Drawer 20  
Montpelier, VT 05620-0501  
800.622.4553

This information has been prepared with the assistance of a matching grant from the Vermont Division for Historic Preservation through the National Park Service, US Department of the Interior under the provisions of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966. The contents and opinions do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Department of the Interior, nor does the mention of trade names or commercial products constitute endorsement or recommendation by the Department of the Interior.

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*Prepared by the Burlington Department of Planning & Zoning, 2000.*