

University of Minnesota
Greek Letter Chapter House Historic District

Design Guidelines



Alpha Tau Omega Fraternity, 1821 University Avenue, ca. 1925.

Minneapolis Heritage Preservation Commission
2004

The University of Minnesota Greek Letter Chapter House Historic District Design Guidelines provide a framework for evaluating proposed alterations to existing buildings and new construction. Guidelines should be consulted before planning exterior maintenance tasks such as tuckpointing, masonry cleaning, and roofing, as well as major rehabilitation and adaptive reuse projects.

The Minneapolis Heritage Preservation Commission (HPC) and planning staff must review plans for all exterior alterations, new construction, demolition, and moving. Following approval, a Certificate of Appropriateness or a Certificate of No Change authorizing the work will be issued. The HPC and Planning staff evaluate each project for consistency with the design guidelines, but consideration is given to special situations. These include but are not limited to building condition, rehabilitation feasibility, building orientation, and exceptional design proposals. The guidelines are not retroactive, and do not require building owners to make any exterior changes.

For more information about the University of Minnesota Greek Letter Chapter House Historic District contact the Department of Community Planning and Economic Development-Planning Division at (612) 673-2597.



Delta Kappa Epsilon, 1711 University Ave. S.E., in 2002.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Who must use the design guidelines?

Owners of designated property planning new construction, maintenance, renovation, demolition, or moving projects should consult the design guidelines. The Minneapolis Heritage Preservation Commission (HPC) and staff conduct review for all proposed alterations. HPC or staff approval is required before beginning any proposed exterior work.

How does a property owner use the guidelines?

Before applying for a building permit, property owners and their architects and/or contractors should carefully review the guidelines to determine if the plans are consistent with the design guidelines. Planning staff is available to review the plans with applicants at all stages of a project. Once plans are complete, an application for a **Certificate of No Change** or **Certificate of Appropriateness** must be submitted.

What about other codes and ordinances?

Properties within the historic district are subject to all applicable building codes and zoning ordinances.

What about decorations?

Temporary exterior decorations for homecoming and other events do not require HPC review unless they involve building alteration.

How long does it take to get a Certificate of No Change or Certificate of Appropriateness?

Applicants should allow ample time for staff review and assistance. Staff will review the proposed work and determine if the work will require a **Certificate of No Change** or a **Certificate of Appropriateness**.

A **Certificate of No Change** may be issued by staff for minor alterations that do not affect the historic integrity of the property. Examples include roofing, window repair, in-kind window replacement, masonry and wood repairs, chimney reconstruction and exterior cleaning. A **Certificate of No Change** may be approved within several business days once the application is complete.

A **Certificate of Appropriateness** is required for major alterations including new construction, additions and demolition. Approval generally takes one month and requires review by the HPC at its regular monthly public hearing.

After receiving the signed copy of the approved **Certificate of No Change** or **Certificate of Appropriateness**, the applicant may take the approved application and stamped plans to the Inspections Department to receive a permit, if required. Alterations must also comply with all other applicable regulations, including zoning and building code requirements.



Homecoming decorations, ca. 1925, at Kappa Kappa Gamma Sorority, 329 10th Ave. S.E. Historic photographs can provide good information for planning repair and restoration projects. (Minnesota Historical Society)

**A BRIEF HISTORY OF GREEK LETTER CHAPTER HOUSES
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA**

Fraternalities and sororities at the University of Minnesota have been a part of campus life since the founding of the Alpha Nu chapter of Chi Psi in 1874, and present or former chapter houses are part of nearly every street near the east bank campus. The number of residential Greek letter society chapters at the University of Minnesota peaked at approximately 75 in 1930. This total included 30 academic fraternities, 23 professional fraternities, and 22 sororities. The houses erected by chapters, as well as buildings converted to chapter house use, are evidence of the success of the Greek system and its architectural program. Between 1883 and 1936, 36 fraternities and sororities built 41 new chapter houses, primarily on University Avenue S.E., 4th and 5th streets S.E., and 10th Avenue S.E.

The designated “Fraternity Row” occupies four blocks between 1515 and 1901 University Avenue. Nineteen designated houses are included. The closely-sited houses facing University Avenue have a generally uniform setback and create an almost continuous streetscape. Nearby, in the vicinity of University Avenue and 10th Avenue S.E., and along 5th Street S.E., there are ten designated fraternity or sorority houses. In addition, there is one designated fraternity house on Harvard Street. In contrast to Fraternity Row, most of these buildings are sited on large lots with deep setbacks.



University Ave. and Fraternity Row, looking west from 19th Ave. S.E., in ca. 1928.



*Phi Kappa Psi Fraternity, 1609 University Ave. S.E.
(1907)*



*Kappa Kappa Gamma Sorority, 329 10th Ave. S.E.
(1915)*

The fraternity and sorority chapter houses designated as part of the historic district were built between 1907 and 1936. Some are richly detailed in stone, with slate roofs and leaded glass, while others have stucco and brick exteriors. Many architectural models were available to Minnesota's chapters, and local architects' work reflects national stylistic trends. Most chapter houses are exemplary of English Revival styles, but there are examples inspired by the Prairie School and the Viennese Secession. Local architects adopted a nationally-tested architectural program for many of the chapter houses; an impressive yet domestic, mansion like-or country house exterior, with chapter rooms, libraries, dining rooms, parlors as well as kitchens, servant's quarters and sleeping rooms was employed to offer living, meeting, and social accommodations. Standard exterior features on many houses included French doors opening to a highly visible terrace, and prominently placed Greek chapter insignia. Stone, brick, slate, and iron were crafted to convey a sense of history and tradition.



*Alpha Gamma Delta Sorority, 311 11th Ave. S.E.
(1916)*



*Phi Sigma Kappa Fraternity, 317 18th Ave. S.E.
(1928)*

THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR'S STANDARDS

The University of Minnesota Greek Letter Chapter House Historic District Design Guidelines are based upon the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation*. The intent of the *Standards* is to promote the preservation of historic materials and features that contribute to a property's significance. The *Standards* can be applied to projects of nearly every description, including historic buildings and structures, related landscape features, and new construction.

1. A property shall be used for its historic purpose or be placed in a new use that requires minimal change to the defining characteristics of the building and its site and environment.
2. The historic character of a property shall be retained and preserved. The removal of historic materials or alteration of features and spaces that characterize a property shall be avoided.
3. Each property shall be recognized as a physical record of its time, place, and use. Changes that create a false sense of historical development, such as adding conjectural features or architectural elements from other buildings, shall not be undertaken.
4. Most properties change over time; those changes that have acquired historic significance in their own right shall be retained and preserved.
5. Distinctive features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a property shall be preserved.
6. Deteriorated historic features shall be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new features shall match the old in design, color, texture, and other visual qualities and, where possible, materials. Replacement of missing features shall be substantiated by documentary, physical, or pictorial evidence.
7. Chemical or physical treatments, such as sandblasting, that cause damage to historic materials shall not be used. Surface cleaning of structures, if appropriate, shall be undertaken by the gentlest means possible.
8. Significant archaeological resources affected by a project shall be protected and preserved. If such resources must be disturbed, mitigation measures shall be undertaken.
9. New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction shall not destroy historic materials that characterize the property. The new work shall be differentiated from the old and shall be compatible with the massing, size, scale, and architectural features to protect the historic integrity of the property and its environment.
10. New additions and adjacent or related new construction shall be undertaken in such a manner that if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment would be unimpaired.

DESIGN GUIDELINES

1. MASONRY

a. Decorative Masonry Features

Decorative masonry features should be retained in repair or renovation projects. Deteriorated brick, stone, mortar, stucco, and other materials should be replaced with material used in the original construction or with materials that resemble the appearance of the original as closely as possible.

b. Cleaning and Waterproofing

Masonry cleaning should be conducted only to halt deterioration and by means such as low-pressure water, soft brushes, and/or appropriate chemical treatment. Sandblasting should not be used under any circumstances. Waterproof and water repellent coatings should not be used unless there is evidence of past water penetration.

c. Repointing and Replacement

Original mortar joint size and profile should be retained and/or duplicated in repointing. Mortar mixtures should duplicate the cement proportion and should duplicate the original mortar in color and texture. New brick, terra cotta, stone, and stucco should match the color, size, texture, profile and detail of the historic material wherever possible.

d. Stucco Resurfacing; other Resurfacing

Repairs to historic stucco surfaces should duplicate the original in color, composition, and texture, if evidence exists. Smooth or heavy dashed surfaces should be avoided unless they were used on the historic surface. Stucco, artificial stone, brick veneer, vinyl, and aluminum products should not be applied over historic masonry surfaces.

e. Painting and Paint Removal

The original color and texture of masonry surfaces should be retained. Unpainted stone and brick surfaces should not be painted. The removal of paint from painted masonry surfaces should only be attempted if unpainted surfaces are historically appropriate and if removal can be accomplished without damage to the masonry.



Phi Sigma Kappa Fraternity, 317 18th Ave. S.E.



Slate, metal, and asphalt are among roofing materials used on historic chapter houses.

2. ROOFS, PARAPETS, AND CORNICES

- a. The original roofline including the cornice, parapet, dormers and other elements should be maintained. No part of the cornice or parapet should be covered or removed.
- b. Where a cornice or parapet is missing, replacements should be based on historic photos or other evidence. New cornices of wood, masonry, or sheet metal should be compatible with those on similar historic buildings.
- c. Original masonry copings should be maintained. Where coping is missing, metal coping with an appropriate painted finish may be acceptable. It should not extend on the exterior building wall farther than the approximate width of a single brick or masonry unit.
- d. Modern roofing materials such as rolled rubber are suitable for flat roofs not visible from the street.
- e. Where slate roofing was part of the historic design, it should be conserved. If replacement is necessary, manufactured products that replicate the size, texture, profile, and color of the original may be acceptable.
- f. Rooftop equipment that projects above the roofline should be set back from the principal building elevation. It should not be visible from the street level.
- g. Skylights should be flat in profile and should not be placed on the front roof plane.
- h. Dormers should not be added to the front roof plane. If placed at the side elevations they should have an appropriate setback.



Designers of chapter houses employed many window types and sizes, including double-hung, casement, and half-round.

3. WINDOWS

a. Windows and Sash: Size and Shape

All existing historic window openings should be retained, and window openings should not be enlarged or reduced to fit new units. New windows should be compatible with existing historic units. New window openings should not be introduced into principal elevations. Windows should not be removed or permanently blocked for the installation of air conditioners.

b. Sash and Glazing

Historic wood or metal sash should be conserved rather than replaced. New sash, if installed, should duplicate the existing or other appropriate historic models, including the division of lights. If historic sash requires replacement, the size and division of lights in each sash should not be altered. Replacement sash may be wood or metal with a painted or baked enamel finish. Vinyl is not acceptable.

In most cases, new casement units are not appropriate replacements for double-hung units. Where egress or other safety issues exist, the division of lights in new casements should be compatible with historic models. Glazing should be clear unless historical documentation shows other treatments. Low E and other energy-efficient glazing is acceptable.

In the case of modernized sash, repair of broken glass does not require complete replacement with historically appropriate units. Glazing in modernized units may be repaired with similar treatments. However, if complete sash replacement is needed, or there are a significant number of units to be replaced, historically appropriate units should be selected.

c. Trim

All decorative trim around the windows should be retained, including brick or terra cotta detail, wood or stone lintels, pediments, and hoods. If replacement is necessary the original shape and profile should be replicated.



Chapter house entries often include a heavy paneled door and an elaborate stone or wood surround.

4. ENTRIES

a. Size and Shape

All historic entry components should be retained. Entry openings should not be enlarged or reduced to fit a new door. New entry openings should not be introduced into principal elevations.

b. Trim

Original or historic features of the entry including sidelights, fanlights, transoms, moldings, tile, and ornamental hardware should be retained. If replacement is necessary, historic trim details should be replicated.

c. Entrances

Historic doors and ornamental hardware should be repaired rather than replaced. If replacement of original or historic doors is necessary, the replacement should be compatible with the design, material, and hardware of the historic model.

d. Security

When necessary, security-related hardware may be added or replaced. It should be compatible with the existing materials and design of the entry or other feature.

5. TERRACES

a. Terraces should be preserved in their original location and historic materials should be conserved or replicated.

b. Replacement railings should replicate the original. If the original does not exist, the new railing style should be similar to other historically compatible examples.



Features such as half-timbering, turned wood trim, terra cotta plaques, and molded brick add surface richness to many historic chapter houses.

6. ARCHITECTURAL FEATURES

- a. Molded brick corbelling, decorative cast concrete, wrought iron, carved stone, terra cotta, wood half-timbering, brackets and columns are among features that should be retained and conserved using appropriate materials and techniques.
- b. Replacement of deteriorated or missing materials and features as shown in historic photographs should replicate the size, scale, design, material, and texture of the original as closely as possible.
- c. Replacement of missing materials and features *not* documented by historic photographs or other information should replicate the size, scale, design, material, and texture of materials and features on *similar* historic buildings as closely as possible.



Historic stone or terra cotta plaques are often supplemented by individual letter signs.

7. SIGNS, AWNINGS, AND LIGHTING

a. Signs and awnings should follow regulations subject to provisions of Chapter 543 of the city's zoning ordinance. Refer to the HPC-adopted "Design Guidelines for On-Premise Signs and Awnings" (2003).

b. No part of the historic facade should be irreversibly damaged or altered in the installation of signs and awnings. Whenever possible, signs must be attached to the building with holes drilled into mortar joints. Existing hardware should be reused wherever possible.

c. The "Design Guidelines for On-Premise Signs and Awnings" (2003) do not allow individually applied letters. Greek letters, symbols and insignia plaques, however, are part of the historic signage tradition of chapter houses. A Greek organization may apply Greek letters, symbols, and insignia plaques to their chapter house provided that the letters are attached to the building in the mortar joints without damage to stone or brick. Whenever possible, the letters, symbols, or plaques should not damage or cover historic architectural features.

d. It may be necessary for a current Greek occupant to change or cover a previous occupant's historic signage. The new installation should not damage the historic signage or surrounding masonry. It should be easily removable.



Some chapter houses retain historic wrought iron light fixtures.

Lighting

a. Historic light fixtures should be conserved wherever possible.

b. Lighting should highlight building elements, signs, or other features rather than be the focus of attention. New light fixtures should be of a design that is compatible with the architectural character of the building.

Lighting, continued

c. No part of the historic facade should be irreversibly damaged or altered in the installation of lighting. Electrical conduit and other hardware should be concealed and not be installed across the building facade.

8. NEW CONSTRUCTION AND ADDITIONS

New Construction

a. New buildings should relate to the placement and orientation of adjacent historic buildings. To reinforce the historic streetscape, new buildings should maintain the setback of existing historic buildings.

b. New buildings should relate to the scale, size, height, massing, and materials of adjacent historic buildings and the streetscape. Acceptable exterior materials include stone, brick, rusticated concrete block, stucco, terra cotta and wood.

c. Pitched or flat roofs should be compatible with historic buildings in the adjacent streetscape. All roofs should have appropriately detailed parapets and/or cornices.

d. Facades should maintain the traditional multi-story division of adjacent buildings, usually including an articulated entry-level base, an upper facade with appropriately spaced windows, and a well-defined roofline.

e. Windows, entries, and other openings should be compatible with adjacent historic buildings in their type, size, alignment, and proportion.

f. Large residential buildings with few entries are traditional in the district. Rowhouse-style buildings with multiple single entries and porches are not compatible.

Additions

a. Additions to existing historic buildings should not be placed on principal elevations. Where the rear or side elevation allows placement of an addition, the new construction should preserve the form and character of the original building. Additions should be located so as not to damage important historic architectural features and details of the original building.

b. New additions should not exactly replicate the historic building but should be a contemporary design that is compatible with the existing scale, height, massing, materials, and details of the original building and surrounding streetscape. In the case of some larger additions, it should be possible to discern the historic building from the new construction.



*Historic fraternity buildings often have rear additions.
Such construction should not cover principal elevations.*

c. New windows and entries should be compatible with those on the original building and surrounding historic buildings in type, size, alignment, orientation, and proportion. Whenever possible, ADA ramps and entrances should be placed at the rear of the building.

9. PARKING LOTS

- a. Parking lots should not be constructed at the front elevation.
- b. When required, parking lots at the rear and side elevations should be screened with landscaping, low masonry walls, or iron or steel fencing of appropriate design.

10. LANDSCAPE DESIGN

- a. Historic masonry retaining walls should be conserved.
- b. New retaining walls should be compatible with the character of the building and surrounding area. Stone, brick, and rusticated concrete block with a square or rectangular profile are acceptable materials for new walls. In some cases, stamped concrete and stucco are acceptable choices.
- c. Pressure-treated and other timber retaining walls are not acceptable.
- d. Wood fences are acceptable at the rear and at non-principal elevations.
- e. New steps should be compatible with the building façade and historic precedent. Masonry steps should not be replaced with timbers.
- f. Existing lawn at the principal elevation should not be landscaped with berms, timbers, or boulders.