

## SECTION 1

# Purpose of Design Standards



## Introduction

The historic village that residents enjoy and visitors admire today is not an accident, but rather the product of decades of continuous community stewardship. This effort is a partnership of residents, property owners, business people, and the Village's Architectural and Preservation Review Board (APRB).

The Village of Pittsford was one of the first communities in upstate New York to adopt an historic preservation ordinance. The village contains an unusually well-preserved collection of historic homes, stores, public buildings, churches, mills, and barns. Pittsford is unique in New York State in that its entire corporate limits are designated as an historic district

Most of the village's approximately 800 buildings are vernacular interpretations of popular nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century architectural styles. Unique resources include a concentration of Federal-era buildings, a mid nineteenth-century farm (still a working farm), a cobblestone school, and an Erie Canal warehouse district. The central section of the village and several individual properties are listed in the National and State Registers of Historic Places.

During the 1960s, a number of the village's important historic buildings were threatened, and several were demolished. To prevent further erosion of the village's character, citizens lobbied Village officials to enact a



**Today, the Phoenix Building is one of the village's most visible and most important historic landmarks.**

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historic preservation ordinance. Adoption of the ordinance in 1971 halted demolitions.

The purpose of the APRB is to educate the community on the value of its historic architecture, to guide the course of further development to preserve our history, and improve the village's aesthetic character. The five appointed members of the APRB review applications once a month to consider the appropriateness of proposed changes to village properties. The Board also serves as a resource to find both practical and architecturally appropriate options for additions and alterations.

Preservation regulation has had many positive effects. Residents are proud of our community. The charm of the village's residential neighborhoods has attracted a tremendous amount of investment. Village homes have increased significantly in value over the last two decades. The charm of the Main Street business district has attracted specialty retail stores and has kept storefronts full in a challenging era of big-box chain stores located a short drive away. As well-tended villages have become rare, Pittsford has emerged as a regional destination for shopping, eating, and recreation. The village's historic port area is one of the busiest on the entire length of the Erie Canal. The Village of Pittsford is now recognized around the state for the success of its preservation program. The success of the village's preservation efforts has encouraged Village officials to tackle other issues such as traffic calming, streetscape improvements, and progressive planning policies. None of this would have occurred without the protection afforded by a preservation ordinance.

Today, preservation is an integral part of life in our village. Despite the village's past success, we cannot afford to become complacent as new threats emerge each year. Continued vigilance and balanced design review are the best ways we can preserve the village and its outstanding historic legacy for future generations.



**In 1957, before the Village's preservation ordinance was adopted, a gas station was constructed disfiguring the main facade of the Phoenix Building.**



**In 1965, Pittsford citizens organized to save the Little House, ca. 1819 Federal style Building, from demolition. The group founded Historic Pittsford, a community preservation advocacy organization that remains active today.**



**The Hotel Stephany was one of the last historic buildings to be demolished before the enactment of the village's preservation ordinance.**

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### Why Design Standards?

The mission of the APRB is to manage change rather than prevent it. The APRB seeks to identify ways to adapt old buildings to changing needs while preserving their historic character. In recent years, significant change occurred along the Erie Canal, one of the village's outstanding treasures. Despite the construction of additions, new buildings, and even parking lots, the charm and character of the village's neighborhoods and commercial districts have been preserved.

Each application submitted to the APRB is evaluated based on the property's unique set of design characteristics. APRB determinations of compatibility are based on what is appropriate to the style and period of the building, rather than what is subjectively viewed to be "ugly" or "pretty." When reviewing proposed changes to village buildings, the APRB refers to the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation*. These philosophical principles define best practices for the treatment of historic buildings adapted for modern use. The *Standards* were developed by the National Park Service and are used by professionals and municipalities throughout the nation.

Through its history, the APRB has evolved following the development of the field of historic preservation. The Board has faced a number of challenges, including the introduction of new building materials that can damage older buildings, and a decreasing understanding of traditional construction and building maintenance practices among contractors and architects.

The *Village of Pittsford Design Standards* is an easy-to-use reference intended to help applicants, APRB members, and the Village staff navigate the design review process and the administration of the village's Preservation Code.



**This house in a neighboring village has lost its historic character due to poorly designed additions and alterations.**



**Changing historic features such as the windows can harm the character of the building and neighborhood.**



**Carefully designed changes to this Village of Pittsford house do not compromise the character of the building or neighborhood.**

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### Using the Standards

The *Village of Pittsford Design Standards* incorporates information and established design review principles found in the preservation guidelines of other communities across the state. Pittsford's standards precisely target the nuances of history, materials, architectural traditions, and local building practices. This document contains a chapter addressing the unique challenges of preservation and architectural review of the postwar homes and neighborhoods within the village. The *Design Standards* are meant to help identify acceptable solutions to some of the common changes proposed to historic properties.

#### **The *Standards* were prepared to help property owners in three ways:**

1. Provide owners with information about the historic style of their building/home and the architectural elements that comprise the style. The Standards contain a primer describing the village's most common architectural styles, including a list of typical characteristics and elements. Each style and each building has its own appropriate elements, and not every element is correct for every style or building.
2. Illustrate how a property can be altered while maintaining its historic character. The Village of Pittsford's Preservation Code is not intended to prevent alterations. The *Code* acknowledges that buildings often must change to remain usable. Alterations, including additions, are expected and allowed. The *Standards* address some of the more common changes and give guidance on how new work can be done without harming historic character.
3. Describe the information and detail that the APRB requires, so that owners will be prepared to describe their proposed changes to the Board. Each historic property is comprised of many small details. The village is comprised of many historic properties. The incremental loss of details on a building will eventually destroy the building's character. The spread of inappropriate details throughout a district eventually degrades the entire area. So, while it may seem that the Board can be overly particular about small issues, its attention to detail over many years is the primary reason that the Village's overall historic character remains intact.



**Most of the earliest homes constructed in the village were small, 1-1/2-story, simple structures like the South Street house pictured here. Although many of these homes have survived, most have been expanded. In many village homes, the original building is the rear wing.**