

Design Guidelines

Historic District Commission

Town of Swampscott



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Table of Contents

Introduction 4

Secretary’s Standards for Rehabilitation5

Terminology 7

Design Guidelines 9

Historic District Maps 14

Introduction

In May 2014 the Swampscott Town Meeting voted overwhelmingly to establish four historic districts. Three of them- The Swampscott Fish House, the Swampscott Railroad Depot, and The Swampscott Cemetery and Andrews Chapel- were previously recognized as individual buildings and landscapes for their historic and architectural significance by inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places.

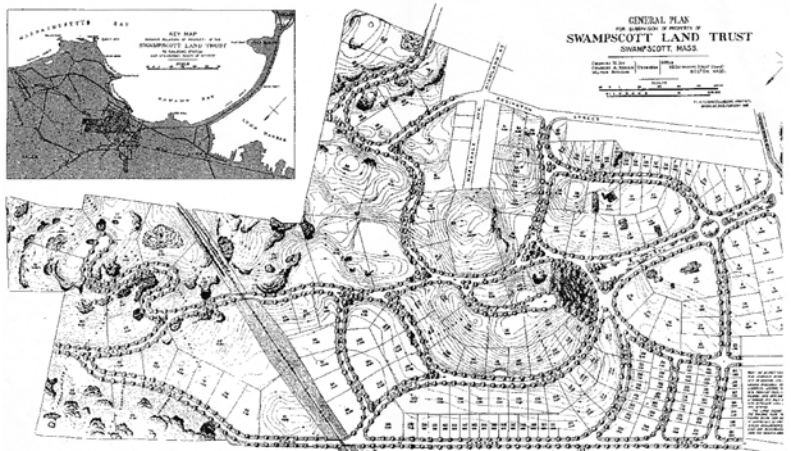
The fourth district, the Olmsted Historic District was placed on the National Register in 2002. This neighborhood was created in 1888 by the redevelopment of the former Enoch Mudge Estate. The subdivision plan, planting plans for public spaces, and road layout were designed by the Olmsted firm, with a curvilinear street layout that took full advantage of the varied topography and views. Lots were first offered for sale in 1888, and the neighborhood as we see it today was mostly built between 1889 and 1920, with some later development off the north end of Walker Road and around Reid Terrace. Almost all of the houses that stand today are original and retain most of their key architectural features. As a result, the neighborhood has an unusual architectural coherence and a consistent character.

From the Olmsted District National Register nomination:

The Olmsted area is consistently well preserved, and well maintained, with only small amounts of modern development. The vast majority of the houses constructed for the district have survived, and few have been significantly altered from their original form and finish. Most of the houses in the area retain their original detailing, including porches, fenestration, and sheathing. The small number of additions or alterations have generally been executed with a high degree of sensitivity to the original fabric. Houses are also well maintained, some retaining their original historical paint schemes. The few modern houses which have been built are located on subdivided larger lots, rather than replacing demolished older houses. The Olmsted Subdivision Historic District is a fine example of a turn-of-the-century middle-class suburb, including fine residences in an outstanding landscape, a well-preserved example of the work of one of the country's most respected designers.

The houses in the Olmsted District reflect the architectural styles popular in New England in the late 19th and early 20th centuries- Queen Anne, Shingle Style, Colonial Revival, Dutch Colonial, Arts and Crafts, Bungalow, and American Foursquare. The survival of many of their key features and details are what gives the district its character and significance, and the intention of these design guidelines is convey how to preserve, maintain and alter houses in the district in harmony with its historic character.

The guidelines following, which apply to all districts, are based on the Secretary of the Interior's Guidelines for the Rehabilitation of Historic Properties, a standard widely used nationally as a basis for historic district design guidelines.



Secretary's Standards for Rehabilitation

The Secretary of the Interior is responsible for establishing standards for all national preservation programs under Departmental authority and for advising Federal agencies on the preservation of historic properties listed or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. The Standards for Rehabilitation, a section of the Secretary's Standards for Historic Preservation Projects, address the most prevalent preservation treatment today: rehabilitation.

Rehabilitation is defined as the process of returning a property to a state of utility, through repair or alteration, which makes possible an efficient contemporary use while preserving those portions and features of the property which are significant to its historic, architectural and cultural uses. The Standards that follow were originally published in 1977 and revised in 1990. They pertain to historic buildings of all materials, construction types, sizes, and occupancy and encompass the exterior and the interior of historic buildings. The Standards also encompass related landscape features and the building's site and environment as well as attached, adjacent or related new construction.

The Standards are to be applied to specific rehabilitation projects in a reasonable manner, taking into consideration economic and technical feasibility.

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 historic 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 feature 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. The surface cleaning of structures, if appropriate, shall be undertaken using the gentlest means possible.

8.Significant archeological 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.

Terminology

(As used by the Swampscott Historic District Commission)

Appearance

The outward aspect, condition, or style of a building and involves its materials, color texture and finish.

Composition

The organization and relationship of the building elements, including massing, windows, doors, trim, roof lines, etc.

Context

The surrounding conditions of landscape, neighborhood, buildings or significant structures which are considered in the evaluation by the Commission.

Massing

The building and its parts. Massing includes aspects such as building width, depth and height, and should be coordinated by a harmonic proportionality regarding the original condition of the building when changes have to take place. Additions to historic buildings should be subordinated to the existing original structure.

Materiality

The exterior materials and textures that make up the building.

Permanent/Temporary

A condition that is planned to last more than 12 months is considered permanent, others meant to remain for less than 12 months will be considered temporary.

Preservation

The process of retaining and maintaining the historic architectural character of a building and its context.

Proportion

The relationship between parts and the whole, of a building. See Composition.

Alterations and additions should be designed to be compatible in scale and proportion to original building conditions and to buildings within their immediate context.

Reconstruction

The process of replicating a no-longer existing historic structure, building element, or site based on its documented historic appearance.

Rehabilitation

The process of repairing and upgrading an existing historic structure, building element, or site for continued or new uses while preserving its historic architectural character.

Restoration

The process of repairing an existing historic structure, building element, or site to its documented historic appearance.

Reversibility

The ability to return a historic structure, building element, or site to its historic condition.

Rhythm

Systematic repetition of building elements in relation to each other.

Scale

The dimensional relationship of one element of a building to another or of one element to the whole. Also the dimensional relationship between a building and its context. See Context, Composition, and Proportion.

Style

An architectural language with a particular set of character-defining features and elements.

Design Guidelines

Access

The Architectural Access Board (AAB) controls the procedures and requirements for the creation of accessibility to buildings, including the ability to obtain variances from full compliance for historic buildings. Their definition of historic buildings includes all properties within a local historic district.

The historic district will review a proposal for accessibility to ensure that significant character features of the building, including front stairs, porches, doors and door surrounds are minimally impacted. Where creating accessibility in the primary entrance will negatively affect significant character defining features, the Commission has the authority to require the applicant to seek alternate means of accessibility, including secondary entrances, in consultation with the AAB and Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC).

Additions

New additions to historic buildings should be in harmony with the original building, and its settings. These new additions should meet the following guidelines:

- Additions on the main façade are discouraged. Side additions should be stepped back from the façade to reduce their impact on the general building mass.
- The scale, shape and size of the addition should be subordinate to the main building.
- An addition to any elevation that may alter the significance of the building is generally prohibited.
- Decorative features (windows doors, siding, and other materials) should be chosen to harmonize with the original building.
- Additions to modern buildings that are not historic should follow the same principles of design. The addition should remain subordinate to the existing structure and quality and materials should be consistent with the existing structure and the district.
- Existing additions to historic buildings may have gained historic significance if they are in a style that displays historic or stylistic development that contributes to the original building or the district. If additions on existing buildings are determined by the Commission to be significant, they will be reviewed in the same manner as other historic defining features within the District.

Awnings

Awnings should be consistent with the character of the period of the building, and should not obscure its architectural significance. Awning design and material should be canvas or canvas-like in appearance and will be approved on a case-by-case basis.

Signage on awnings must be reviewed in the context of an overall sign plan – please refer to the Town’s Sign Guidelines.

Chimneys

Chimneys with historical importance must be preserved. If repointing or replacing is required, the new chimney must reuse the existing brick where possible, or otherwise match the original brick and mortar in color, shape, and size. New chimneys should match original ornamental details.



Decks

Decks will be considered attachments or additions to the original building. Decks and all elements (flooring, balusters, railing, and skirting) should be installed on elevations that don’t alter the historical significance of the building. Wood decks will be considered in those cases where the installation is reversible and not cause any damage to the historic integrity of the building. Balusters, railings, skirting, and other vertical elements should be wood or materials matching original wood dimensions and be painted.

Demolition and Removal

The Commission generally prohibits demolition or partial demolition of historic buildings. If a request is made for a building to be demolished and reconstructed, the Commission will review the complete building plans prior to the issuance of any certificate of appropriateness. Applications shall include complete documentation of the existing building. The removal of additions to historic buildings will be reviewed on a case-by case basis.

Doors and Entrances

Historic exterior doors, should be retained, including fanlights, sidelights, surrounds, canopies, transoms, and other features. If a door must be replaced it should be replaced with a door consistent to the period of the building. In most cases, doors should be made of wood, and constructed and assembled of stiles and rails, with wood panels or glass lites, consistent with traditional manufacturing technics, and matching the historic detail of the building. Original door hardware is recommended. When there is a need of a storm or screen door, a wood unit is preferred.

The original entrance design and arrangement of door openings should be retained. New openings in existing walls are discouraged. Altering the size of the original door openings for the purpose of fitting stock doors will generally not be allowed.

Dormers

The original historical significance of the roof shall be retained when considering the addition, relocation, or removal of dormers. Dormers should be appropriate in scale and in harmony with the original building proportions. Dormers that are part of the original structure should not be altered. New and existing dormers should match. New dormers should correspond with the rest of the building elements and composition



Exterior Materials and Details:

Traditional materials including, but not limited to, wood, stone, slate, brick and copper, are appropriate.

Synthetic or imitation materials, such as vinyl and aluminum windows, siding and rail systems, are not appropriate and will normally not be approved. Paintable composite materials that are indistinguishable from natural or traditional products will be considered for use on a case-by-case basis.

Trim work is an essential part of a building's architectural character. Features such as cornices, brackets, window mouldings, doorway pediments, corner quoins, and all other decorative elements should be retained.

Original siding material should be retained whenever possible.

Deteriorated material should be repaired or replaced, where necessary, with new material that duplicates the original as closely as possible.



Fences

Fences in front of buildings should be open and low (not exceeding 42" in height) so as not to block the public view. Fences should be compatible with the existing building in material, proportion, style and historic period and should enhance the streetscape. Architecturally significant fences should be maintained and repaired or restored whenever possible.

Fences remote from public view.

More solid, taller fences are appropriate to provide privacy or safety but should be located where they have minimal visual impact from public ways. These fences should also be appropriate to the structure and surrounding area. Five feet is the recommended maximum height.

Vinyl, stockade, chain link, light gauge metal and concrete block are not appropriate materials for fences and generally will not be approved.

Fire Escapes

If necessary, fire escapes should be located to minimize visibility from a public way. In all cases, fire escapes should be designed to have a minimal visual impact on the appearance and integrity of the building.

Foundations

Within the district, typical existing foundation materials include unpainted brick, rubble stone or granite. In all cases, the material and design of original foundations should be preserved. Where repair or re-pointing is necessary, refer to the Masonry Guideline for mortar specifications. The painting of brick or stone is discouraged.

New foundations are often substantially higher than historic foundations and expose large areas of concrete or concrete block. This construction technique can detract from the appearance of the entire building. Every effort should be made to design a low foundation and to screen or cover concrete foundations that must be high due to site or building code considerations.

Gutters and Downspouts

Gutters may be made of wood or copper and in some cases painted aluminum. The commission also allows composite material in a true wood gutter profile. Unpainted mill-finished aluminum is generally not appropriate for flashing, gutters and down-spouts.

Removing trim pieces from the roofline in order to more easily attach gutters is generally not appropriate. In older buildings, gutters were often designed as part of the eave profile. In these cases, the gutters become a particularly important architectural feature and should be repaired whenever possible; if they are beyond repair, they should be replaced with like materials and design. Hung gutters (those not designed as part of the eave) should be as unobtrusive as possible.

Natural stone splash beds near the foundation at the drip edge are appropriate, and should be considered.



Lighting

New exterior light fixtures installed on a property in the historic district are subject to review by the Commission. Lighting of historic buildings and structures can have a dramatic, and sometimes inappropriate impact on the setting of the building within the district. Sodium vapor, metal halide and neon lights should not be used. Energy efficient lighting such as LEDs are encouraged, but should be of a color temperature equivalent to warm incandescent light.

Original historic light fixtures

Original light fixtures, where they survive, can be important and rare architectural features, contributing significantly to the structure's historic resource value. For this reason, original or later appropriate light fixtures should be retained, and if possible, repaired using recognized preservation methods. Deteriorated or missing elements should be replaced with like materials. Replacement should be based, if possible, on physical or documentary evidence.

New light fixtures should be of a design and scale that is appropriate to the style and period of the building rather than imitate styles earlier than the building or structure. Historical style lighting fixtures may appear appropriate in the daylight, but many of these authentic-looking fixtures are among the worst in creating night time glare from their unshielded lamps or bulbs.

Wall packs, and box floods will not be approved. It is recommended that they be removed and replaced with shielded, low-glare fixtures aimed at the object intended for illumination, or retrofitted with a shield and aimed to keep the illumination below a 180 degree plane with the fixture.

Modern Equipment

Modern equipment includes utility and other mechanical equipment located outside a building and visible from a public way, including antennas, cellular towers, satellite dishes, propane and other tanks, dumpsters, utility meters, alarm systems, HVAC equipment (including air conditioners, heating units, ducts, piping, fans and associated mounting devices, strapping, fasteners, cables, and related equipment.

Modern equipment should, in general, be as small and inconspicuous as possible. All modern equipment should be installed in locations which (a) create the least disturbance to the historical appearance of the building, (b) involve the least additional structural alterations and (c) are screened, hidden or otherwise shielded from view to the greatest extent possible.

Modern equipment placed on the ground should be sited in the rear of the building and may be screened by vegetation, walls or fences. Front yard locations are strongly discouraged. If modern equipment is mounted on a roof, it should be located behind chimneys, sloped roofs and parapets or placed in the central portion of flat roofs behind sight lines as seen from ground level or other portions of the roof not visible from any public way. Flues and vents should be concealed in chimneys or cupolas. Electrical wires and other cables should be run inside the building, underground, or along the foundation.

New Construction

The design of new construction within the historic district is subject to review by the commission and should carefully consider massing, height, scale and alignments in plan section and elevation, in relation to the immediate and neighborhood context and local historic fabric.

Outbuildings

Outbuildings, such as barns, garages, sheds, greenhouses, and gazebos are subject to review and require approval if they are visible from a public way. Outbuildings which date to the District's period of significance should be retained and restored, and are subject to these Guidelines. Particular attention will be given to siding, roof, windows and doors.

The construction of a new outbuilding may be approved by the Commission provided it is designed and located in a manner that respects the style of the other building(s) on its site, and respects the development pattern and siting of other historic outbuildings in the District. The Commission will consider the size, scale, design, and location of new outbuildings. A site plan should be provided to indicate the relationship to other buildings and structures on the lot and neighboring lots. Please note that new outbuildings are subject to the dimensional requirements of the Swampscott Zoning Code.



Porches, Hoods and Balconies

Porches can be an important character-defining feature, and their ornamentation is often a character defining element in the style of the building. Original or architecturally significant porches should be retained and restored. Where replacement of deteriorated elements is necessary, the replacement should match the original in appearance, material, and design. Replacement of decorative elements with simpler design or synthetic materials generally will not be approved. Replacement of missing porches, or decorative elements on porches, should be documented by physical or pictorial evidence. Enclosure of porches that obliterates the original design character is discouraged.

The addition of new porches should follow the design of porches on buildings of similar period and massing. Restoration of a missing porch is permitted provided there is adequate photo or other documentation of its prior appearance.

Hoods are projecting roof elements that provide shelter at a door, but do not incorporate columns or walls supporting them on a porch floor or steps. These often have decorative shapes and cornice mouldings, brackets, and soffits that are important character defining elements of the entrance façade, and they should be preserved and maintained.

Where balconies are original or historically/architecturally significant to a building, they should be preserved and repaired. The addition of new balconies on historic buildings is inappropriate unless documentation shows that they previously existed. Balconies on non-historic or new buildings may be allowed provided they do not dominate the elevation or detract from a significant streetscape. The number of balconies and the design should be consistent with balconies on other buildings in the district.

Roofs and Roof Materials

The shape of a roof is a key feature of an historic building and relates to the period of development as well as the style. There is a variety of roof shapes in the Olmsted Historic District from gabled roofs as the most common form to hipped and gambrel roofs. A key factor of the shape is the pitch of the roof slope. Roof shape and slope should be retained on historically significant buildings. Additions should be designed with a compatible roof shape and slope. Roofing material also reflects the style and the period of development of a building. Traditionally, most roofs were clad in cedar shakes or slate, depending on the style and prominence of the building. Characteristics of roofing include material, size, shape, and exposure of the individual shingles, pattern and color. Each of these characteristics will be considered when determining appropriateness of roofing material changes. Slate roofs should be repaired by roofers specializing in slate work. Where slate is intact, it should be retained and repaired, rather than replaced. When a slate roof deteriorates, it is frequently the flashing that needs repair rather than the slate. Where replacement is necessary due to severe deterioration, slate roofs should be replaced-in-kind, including size, shape, color, and pattern or closely simulated. Where wooden shake shingles should be replaced, they must match the existing if original or architecturally appropriate, including shape and size. Where roof cladding has been replaced with asphalt shingles, it is encouraged, but not required, that traditional wood shakes or slate be used, depending on documentation of the original cladding material and pattern. If asphalt shingles are used, note that "Architectural" asphalt shingles have a heavy texture and color contrast that calls attention to itself; the use of three tab asphalt shingles or shingles that replicate the texture and proportion of wood shingles is encouraged. All architectural features that give the roof its essential character, such as dormers, cupolas, cornices, brackets, chimneys, cresting, and weather vanes should be preserved or, if necessary, replaced in kind.

Shutters

Shutters were an important decorative and practical element of many residential styles. Original or architecturally significant shutters should be retained and restored where possible. If replacement is required due to deterioration, the replacement should match the original in material, size, and design, including shutter hardware, such as shutter dogs and pintles.

New shutters, including replacement of missing shutters, may be added to windows provided shutters are appropriate to the style of the building, and are designed and installed in an historically appropriate manner. The size of the shutters should equal the height of the window and one-half the width of the window opening. Historically appropriate shutter hardware should be used. Shutters should be hung next to the window opening and be able to close over the window.

Siding and Trim

Siding materials and patterns are an important character-defining feature of many architectural styles. The majority of historically significant buildings in the district have wood siding, either clapboards or shingles. Some buildings have stone or brick elements in the facades, and some have half timbering with stucco panels. Original or architecturally significant siding materials should be retained and restored whenever possible. Where replacement is necessary due to severe deterioration, the replacement should match the existing siding in material, size, and design. Back priming of new wood siding and trim can significantly improve paint adhesion and longevity of the materials.

The replacement of existing non-appropriate siding materials, such as vinyl and aluminum, with wood is encouraged. All siding, other than brick, stucco, or stone, must have the appearance and detail of painted wood and be paintable. Samples must be presented for approval. Vinyl and aluminum siding will not be approved. Solid PVC or fiber cement materials that match the appearance, profile and detail of wood siding and trim may be considered by the Commission.

All original or architecturally significant trim boards, cornerboards, rakes, friezes, cornices, brackets and other decorative or structural elements of building facades should be retained and restored where possible. Where replacement is necessary due to severe deterioration, the replacement should match the existing in material, size, profile, and design. Painting of stucco, brick and stone is not generally appropriate and is highly discouraged.

Skylights

Skylights should not become dominating elements of the façade. Installation should observe the following:

- The size and shape of a skylight should be appropriate to the size of the roof, and the composition of the skylights should relate to the adjacent facades.
- The number of skylights should not dominate the roof plane.
- Skylights should be minimally visible from a public way.
- Skylights should have a low profile.

Synthetic vs Historic Materials

Natural materials, such as wood, glass, brick and stone are the preferred building materials in the Historic District. These are the materials historically used in construction, and it is appropriate to use the same materials when building, renovating or expanding. Synthetic materials, such as vinyl or plastic and usually aluminum, are generally not appropriate. These materials frequently try to imitate natural materials but usually with limited success. Synthetic materials often look inauthentic because they do not have all the same properties as the original material and cannot be detailed in the same way. Synthetic, substitute or imitation materials are often described as “no maintenance”. Unfortunately, this means that the materials cannot be maintained. When the vinyl windows or aluminum siding or plastic signs fade, chip, dent, scratch or crack, they cannot be repaired, repainted or repointed. They can only be replaced. Synthetic materials do not age gracefully. They are disposable, most with a relatively short life expectancy when compared to the natural materials they replace. Vinyl, aluminum and plastic are better suited to construction that is completely rebuilt every 20 years or so. Solid composite materials, such as Azek trim or fiber cement clapboards, will be considered where they can accurately replicate the details and installation techniques of wood siding and trim. The architectural fabric of the historic districts should be woven of wood, brick, stone and similar materials that will last generations when properly maintained.



Windows

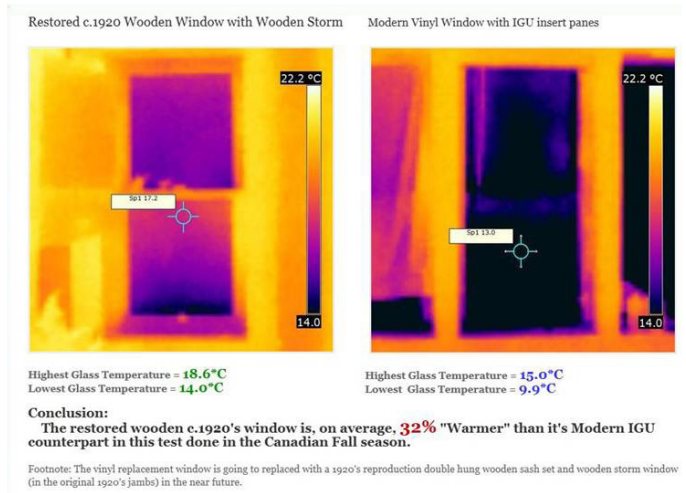
Windows are one of the most distinctive character-defining features of a building. Original or historic windows shall be retained, restored or repaired whenever possible, especially on significant older houses. The profiles, shadow lines, muntin size and pattern of historic windows and the irregularity and bubbles in old glass are important to the historic character of a building. The original windows of houses in the district were constructed with wood of a quality largely unavailable today, and beneath any surface deterioration they are often very repairable.

Replacement of windows should occur only if the existing windows are beyond repair or inappropriate replacements themselves. Wood windows are preferred, and muntin size, profiles and patterns should match the originals. If replacing windows, the Commission will favor replacement wood sash in existing frames and “true-divided lights” rather than pop-in grids or dividers. The use of paintable composite or metal -clad windows that match historic profiles and details may be approved on a case by case basis in new construction. Only clear-paned non-tinted glass shall be used (except to replace original stained glass). Mirrored and tinted heat-reflective glass is not appropriate. The dimension between the face of the sash and the face of the glass creates shadow lines that are essential to the historic character. The use of flat muntin grids between insulating glass panes or behind the glass will not be approved.

Where original windows have been replaced by windows of a different pattern and detail, the Commission encourages replacement with windows of the appropriate patterns and details for the period and style of the house.

Homeowners should be aware that replacement vinyl window units typically include a frame that is set within the existing window frame, thus reducing the size of the windows. Unlike traditional windows, these windows are also difficult to repair, and they must usually be replaced if there is a failure.

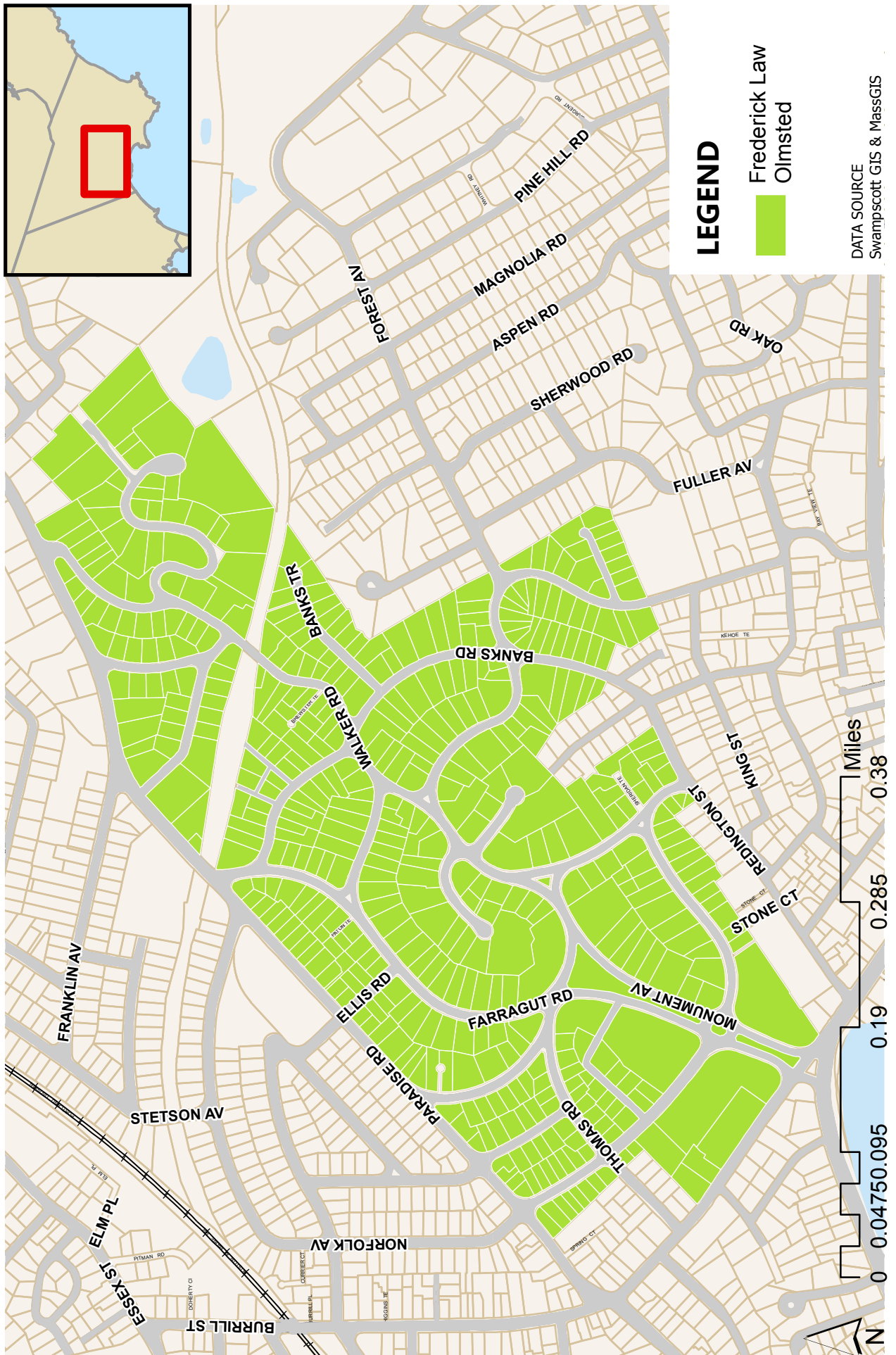
The commission encourages the use of storm windows in combination with historic prime windows, and notes that properly weatherstripped prime windows in combination with good quality storm windows can deliver comparable thermal performance.





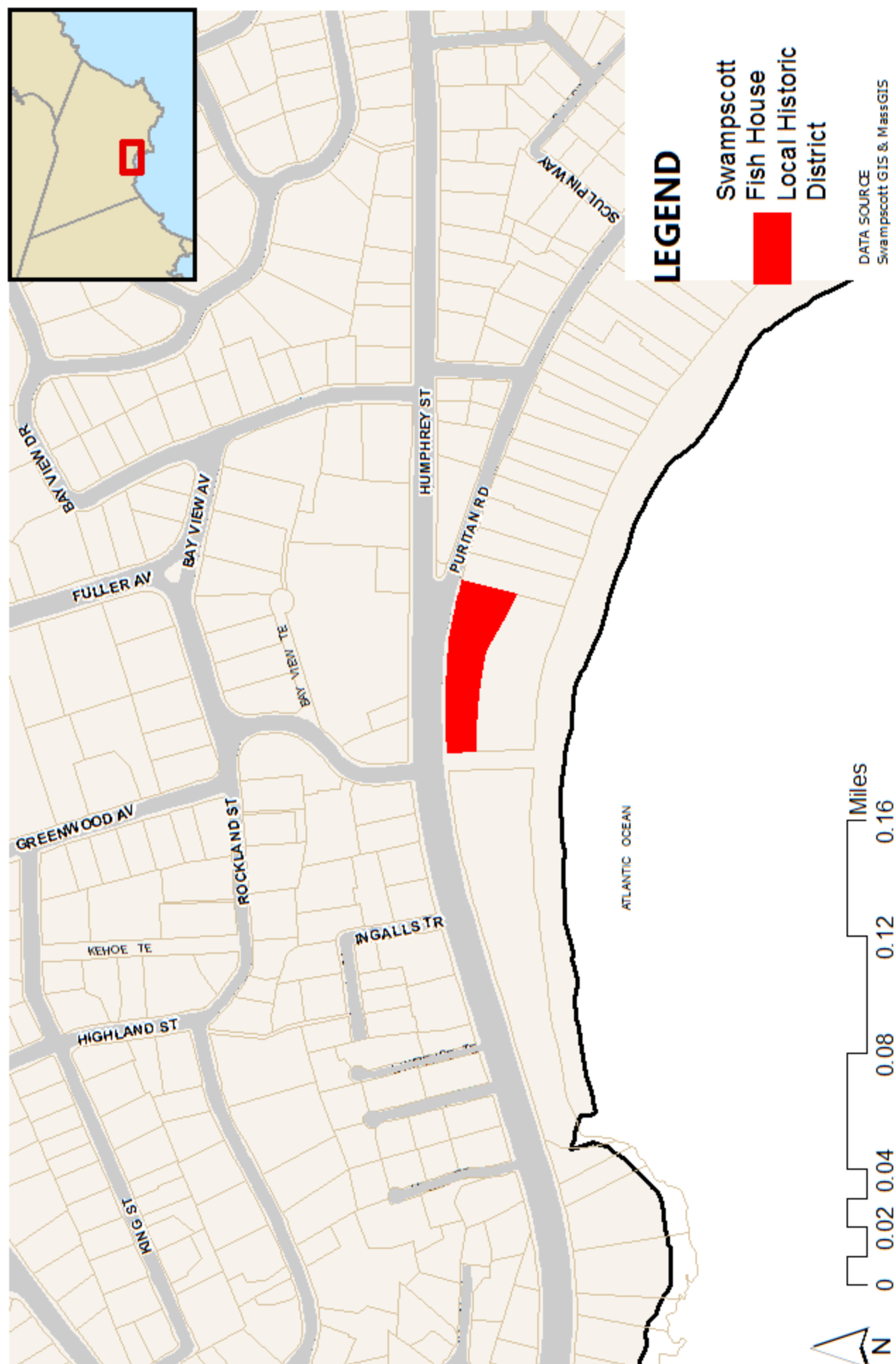
SWAMPSCOTT HISTORIC DISTRICTS

Frederick Law Olmsted Local Historic District



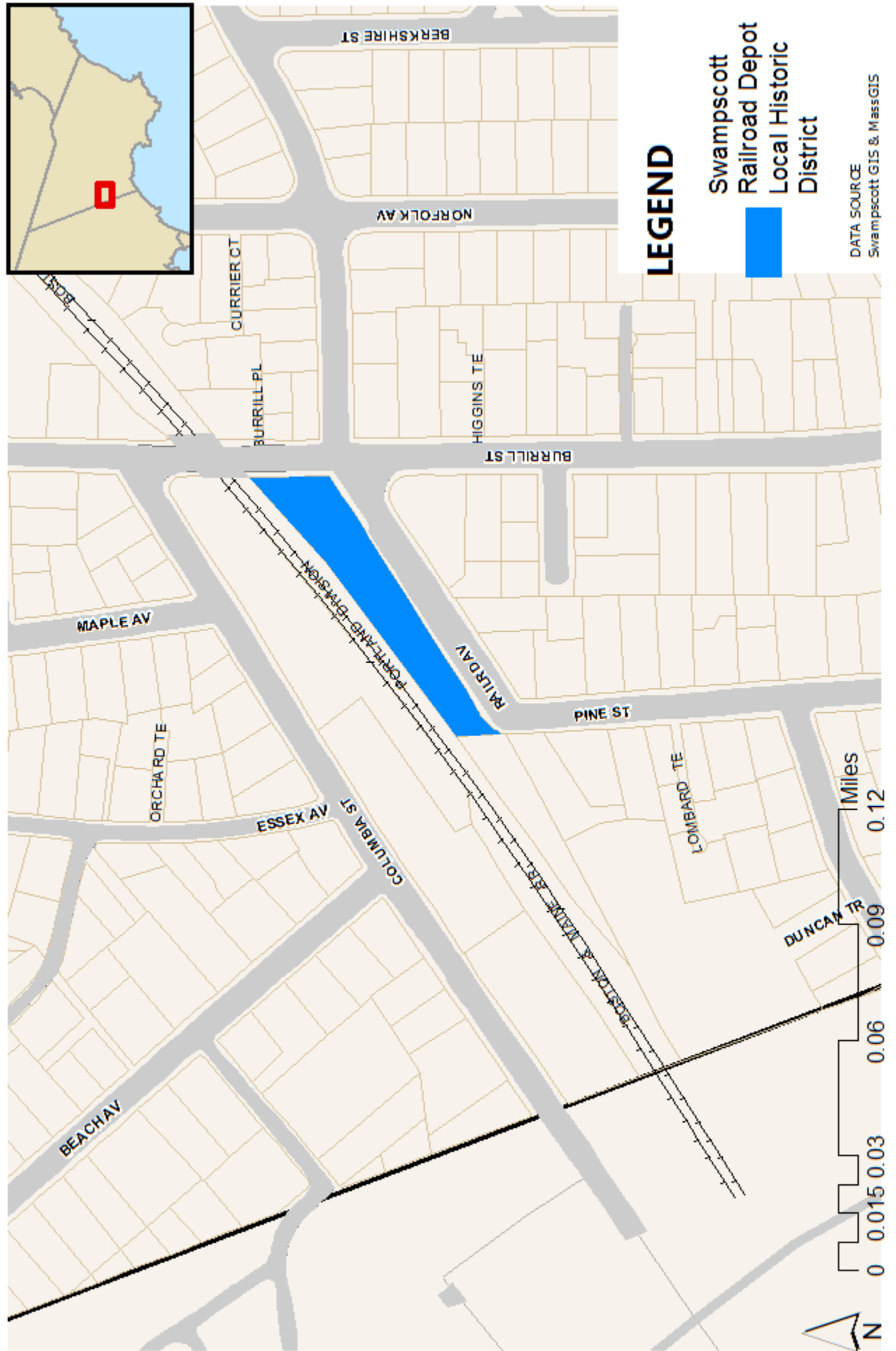
Historic Swampscott - Preliminary Report

Map 2 -Swampscott Fish House Local Historic District



Historic Swampscott - Preliminary Report

Map 3 -Swampscott Railroad Depot Local Historic District



Historic Swampscott - Preliminary Report

Map 4 -Swampscott Cemetery Local Historic District

