

THE LOWER WEST SIDE  
NEIGHBORHOOD STABILIZATION  
DEMONSTRATION PROJECT



HOUSING DESIGN REVIEW GUIDELINES

# THE LOWER WEST SIDE NEIGHBORHOOD STABILIZATION DEMONSTRATION PROJECT

## Housing Design Review Guidelines

BY

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Housing Design Advisory Board

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The Lower West Side Resource and Development Corporation

IN COOPERATION WITH

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The Honorable Barbara Miller-Williams, Ellicott District Council Member

The Honorable Beverly Gray, Council Member at Large

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The Honorable David Franczyk, Fillmore District Council Member

The Honorable Dale Zuchlewski, North District Council Member

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Edited by Robert G. Shibley and Bradshaw Hovey



**University at Buffalo** *The State University of New York*

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## FOREWORD TO THE SECOND EDITION

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IN 1996, MAYOR ANTHONY M. MASIELLO appointed a Housing Design Advisory Board for the purpose of developing guidelines for the design of new housing in Buffalo's older neighborhoods. Over the past two decades, Buffalo has invested heavily in new single family housing to fill in where housing has been demolished. Unfortunately, the new homes have not always been compatible with their neighborhoods.

The Housing Design Advisory Board and the guidelines it developed were an attempt to address that problem. They were developed and applied in the context of a specific street in the Lower West Side, but they were intended to model how such guidelines might be developed and employed throughout the city.

This second edition of the Housing Design Review Guidelines is intended, first of all, to republish the original work of the advisory board for continued and broader use. The value of these guidelines as direct advice to developers who may work on the Lower West Side, and as a model for similar efforts elsewhere in Buffalo, has yet to be exhausted.

This volume is also intended to report on and evaluate what was, in effect, an experiment in the development, application, and proliferation of housing design guidelines in Buffalo. So, in addition to all of the original material, this second edition includes a detailed evaluation of the application of the guidelines as they were applied – or neglected – on the 200 block of Prospect Avenue.

The guidelines were developed by a committee composed of professional architects, planners, designers, builders, and real estate brokers, as well as members of the communities involved and their elected representatives. The process brought together what people – both professionals and lay people – know about housing and urban design for the benefit of a unique urban residential community in Buffalo. The committee was staffed by representatives of the Department of Community Development and the Urban Design Project at the University at Buffalo, and Mayor Masiello endorsed the conclusions.

As the concluding section of this second edition indicates, the impact of the guidelines was mixed. The 200 block of Prospect where they were applied is in far better shape than it was before. But the results were not nearly what they could have been if the guidelines had been followed more closely.

Clearly, there are limits to the impact that any purely voluntary guidelines will have. Certainly, a process of mandatory design review based on such guidelines would have far more impact. Community, industry, and government have yet to embrace such an approach.

Still, the guidelines have value. They carry forward important knowledge about what makes good city neighborhoods. The process by which they were created also offers guidance for other parts of the city to adopt their own guidelines. Finally, even as voluntary standards, they had a positive impact on the redevelopment of one of Buffalo's older neighborhoods. The work deserves to be continued.

Robert G. Shibley, AIA, AICP



There is a good stock of housing in the Lower West Side with some problems that can be addressed by programs of rehabilitation, new infill housing, improved landscaping and street tree planting. In some areas in the community there is an uneven streetscape (some places with street trees and some without); irregular housing elevations with one, two, and two and one-half story heights; and most areas with no off-street parking provisions.

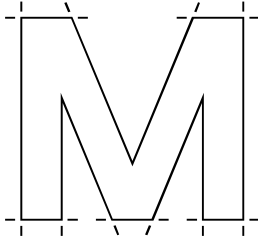


The Lower West Side has the potential to be one of the healthiest and most diverse neighborhoods in the City of Buffalo. It is strategically located between the Peace Bridge, the foot of Main Street, and the downtown. It has a good stock of affordable housing and the potential for an even broader base of middle as well as upper income housing. It has a base of commercial retail service establishments on Niagara Street that could be more concentrated, delivering comprehensive neighborhood services in the area south of Porter Avenue, and more community wide commercial services north of the Virginia/Carolina interchange of the Thruway. Finally, there are several strong block clubs, community service organizations, and concerned business establishments that form the nucleus of the community constituency. The Lower West Side is ready to be a great place to live and a great gateway to Buffalo.

FROM THE PREFACE TO *THE LOWER WEST SIDE: STRATEGIES FOR COMMUNITY AND NEIGHBORHOOD DEVELOPMENT*, 1994.

## INTRODUCTION AND PROJECT OVERVIEW

### *Making Good Neighborhoods*



aking good neighborhoods is not a simple process, but is essential to good city living. The Lower West Side Neighborhood Stabilization Demonstration Project is intended to become an example of how to bring professional expertise and community values to the process of neighborhood improvement.

In 1994 *The Lower West Side Strategies for Neighborhood and Community Development* was published as an initial step in this process. The strategy document was subsequently adopted by the City Planning Board and now serves as a guide for city and community action. It presents a community consensus around three broad goals for the Lower West Side: the establishment of the area as a gateway; the revitalization of Niagara Street as a commercial corridor; and the stabilization of the surrounding neighborhoods. The goals are about making the Lower West Side a really good place to live.

As part of the continuing process of making the Lower West Side and other neighborhoods in the city great places to live, Mayor Anthony Masiello has charged a new Housing Design Advisory Board with developing new housing guidelines for Buffalo's urban neighborhoods and with developing a process of professional and community review. Toward that end, the Board has been working with city staff, the Common Council, and community members on a demonstration project intended to

develop a first draft of the standards that will be consistent with the character of a specific neighborhood.

They also plan to implement such standards as part of a larger strategy of neighborhood stabilization in the Lower West Side. As one member of the Board stated, "people buy neighborhoods – they do not just buy houses."

The text and diagrams to follow: 1) briefly describe the Lower West Side and specifically a demonstration site for housing stabilization on the 200 block of Prospect Avenue, 2) outline current activities intended to further establish the area as a good place to live, 3) define ten key design patterns for housing in the neighborhoods of the Lower West Side that are consistent with its good stock of existing housing, and 4) outline a process of review for both the design standards and responses to builder proposals to provide housing consistent with the guidelines.

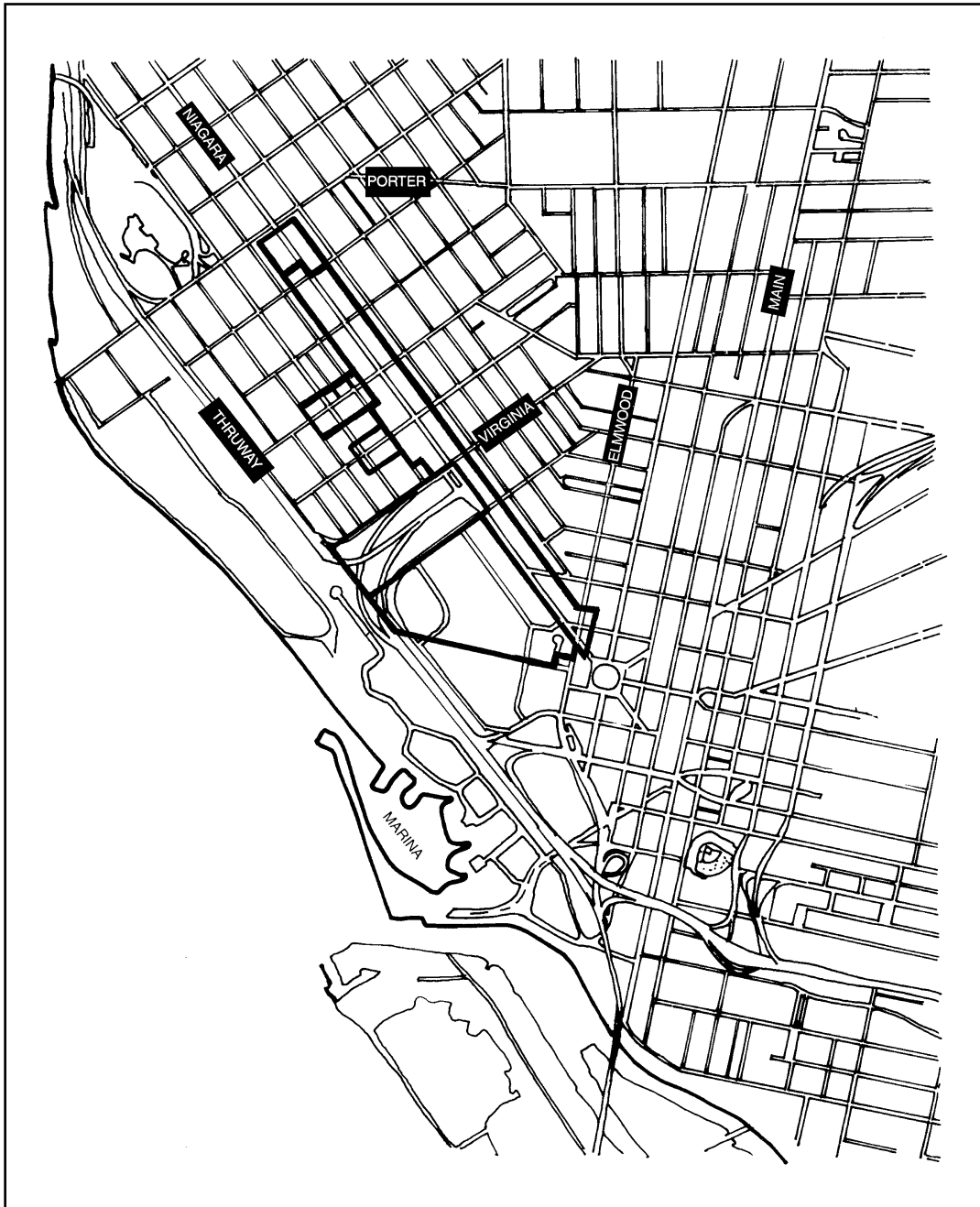
## SITE DESCRIPTION

*The Lower West Side*

The Lower West Side has historically served as a gateway to the City of Buffalo. It was the initial destination for many Europeans in the 19th and early 20th centuries, and currently functions as a primary point of entry for immigrants from Puerto Rico, Latin America, and Southeast Asia. Its main thoroughfare – Niagara Street – was part of Ellicott’s original radial plan for the city, and has long been a portal to downtown Buffalo, as well as a vital link to the Peace Bridge and Canada.

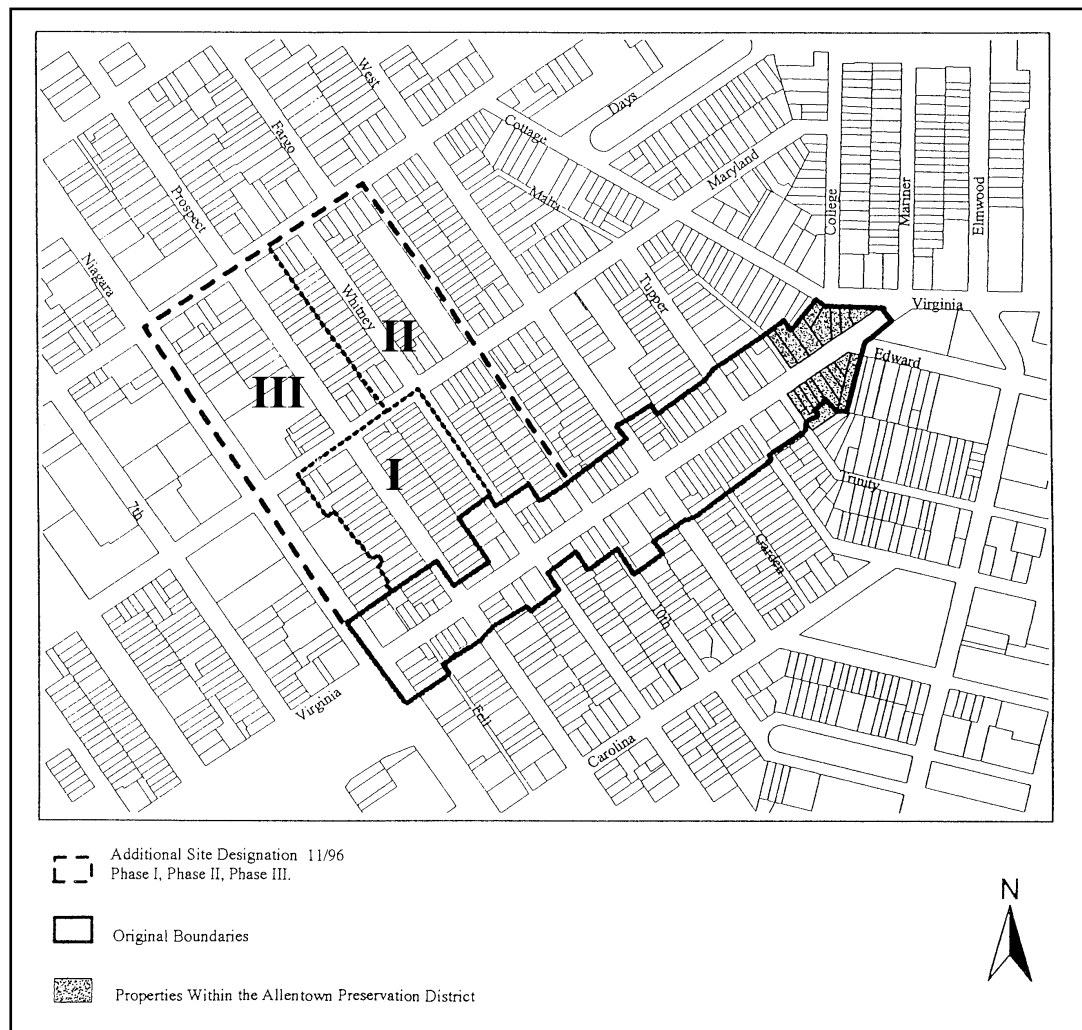
The increasing importance of the region’s connection with Canada has given the Lower West Side and its role as an international gateway added significance. As plans for expansion at the Peace Bridge proceed and the desire to create a vibrant downtown neighborhood gains momentum, it is clear that the city needs a healthy Lower West Side. And, as the poverty and distress on the Lower West Side deepens, it is clear that the neighborhood needs the support of the surrounding community.

**TAKEN FROM *THE LOWER WEST SIDE:*  
STRATEGIES FOR COMMUNITY AND NEIGHBORHOOD DEVELOPMENT**



For purposes of these guidelines, the Lower West Side has been defined as the area south of Porter Avenue, bounded by Allentown, downtown, and the waterfront. According to the 1990 Census, 12,143 persons reside in this neighborhood, down more than fifty percent from its peak of 26,445 in 1940. Most of the population loss in the community can be attributed to two factors: a decline in household size, which went from four persons per household in 1940 to two and four-tenths in 1990; and a loss of housing, which decreased from 6,744 year-round units in 1940 to 6,024 in 1990.

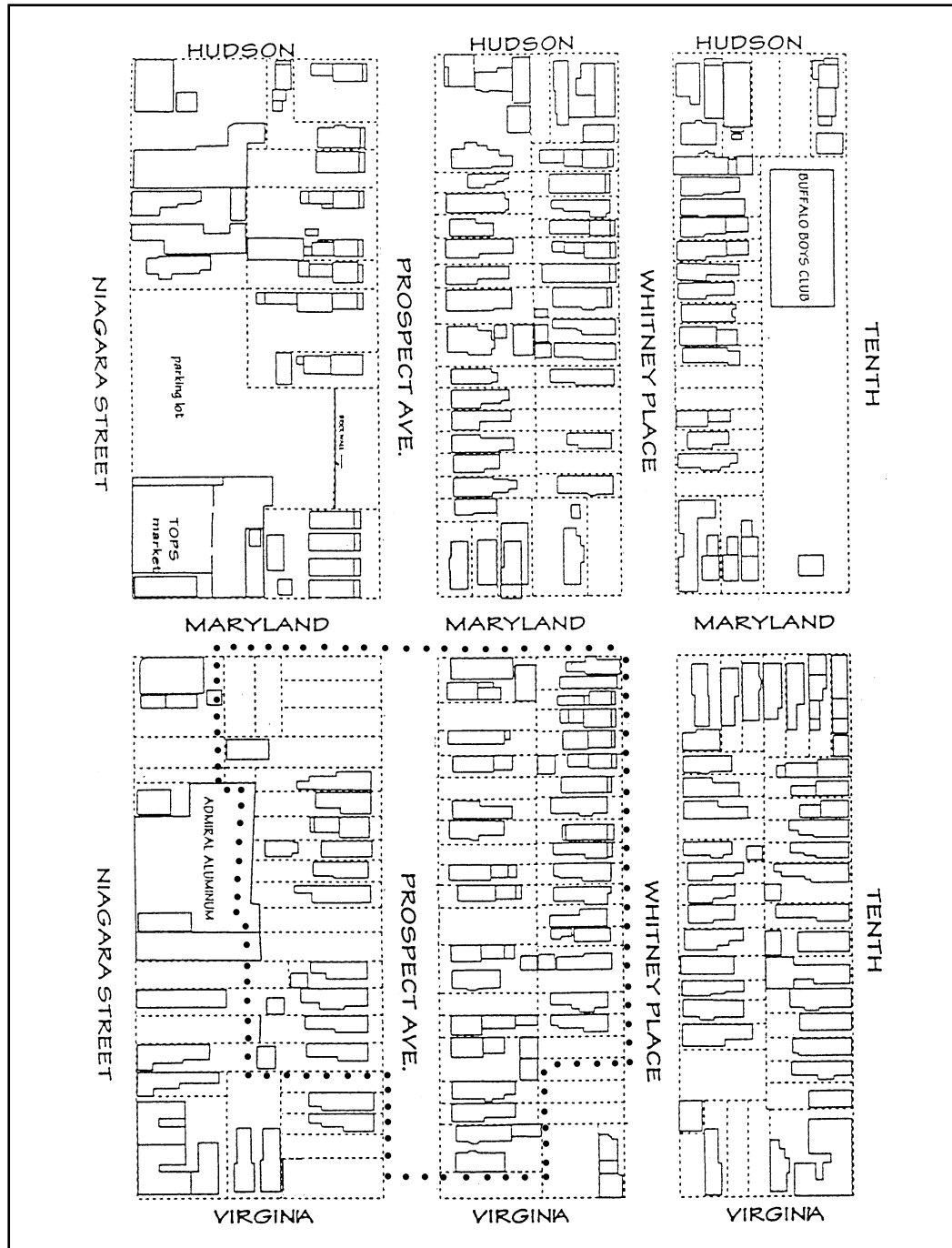
## THE URBAN RENEWAL SITE DESIGNATION



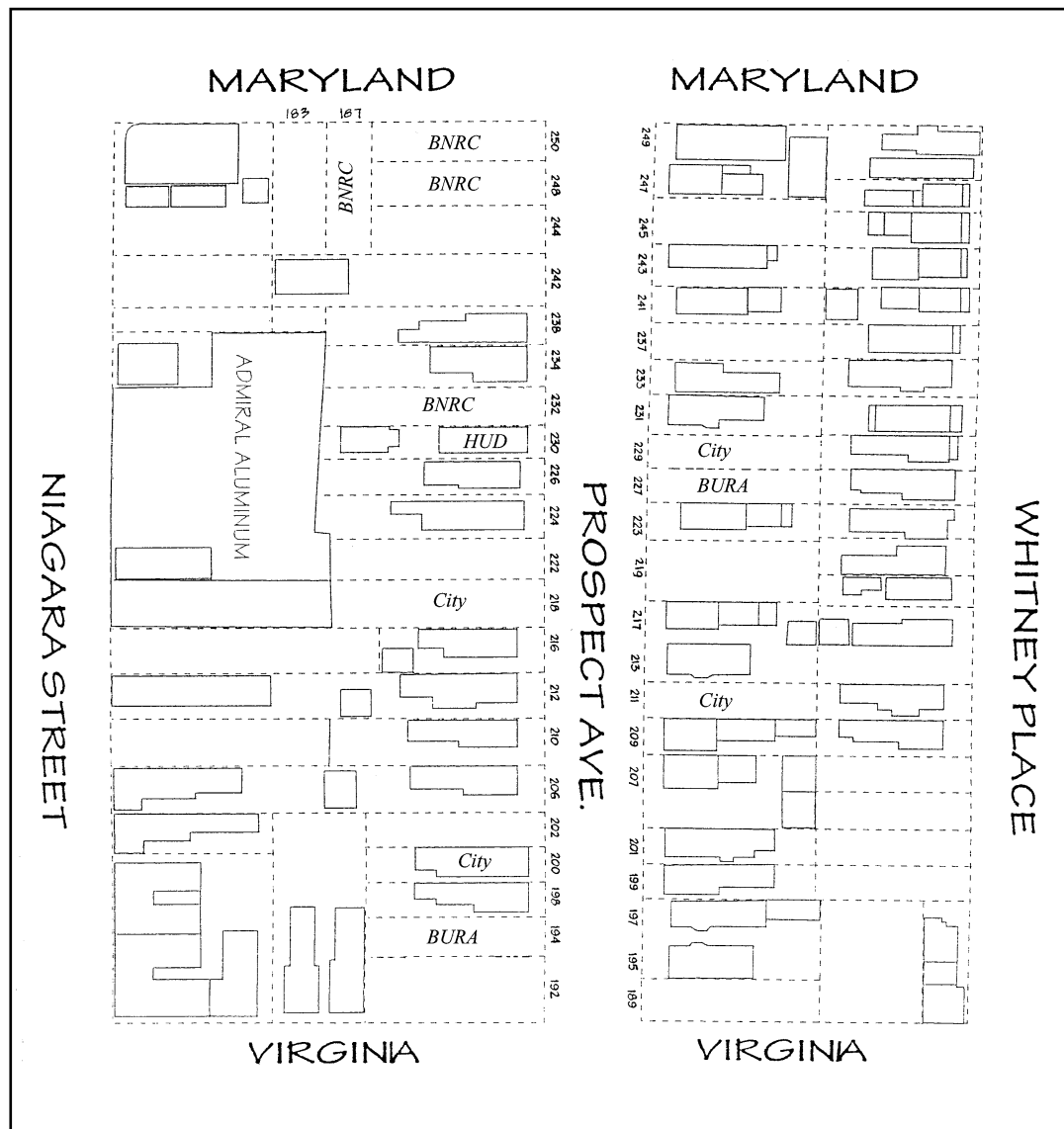
In preparing for a neighborhood stabilization demonstration project on Prospect Avenue, the community and city asked for and received approval from the Buffalo Urban Renewal Agency to designate the area outlined above as an extension to the urban renewal plan for the Virginia Street Corridor.

# THE URBAN RENEWAL SITE DESIGNATION

## *Phase I Context*



## THE 200 BLOCK OF PROSPECT



The 200 block of Prospect Avenue between Maryland and Virginia – 1997

There were 40 parcels in the existing layout of the 200 block of Prospect. The proposal was to reduce the density by approximately 25% combining lots where they are under 30 feet wide with neighboring lots making side yards and shared drive access to off-street parking.

1997 Site Control – 200 Block of Prospect				
Address	Site Condition	Ownership	Size	Notes
WEST SIDE/PROSPECT AVENUE				
194 Prospect	Vacant Lot	BURA	25 x 100	
200 Prospect	2 Family	City	25 x 100	Rehab
218 Prospect	Vacant Lot	City	30 x 100	
230 Prospect	3 Family	Being Assigned to HUD	25 x 132	Review for Rehab Potential
232 Prospect	Vacant Lot	BNRC	25 x 100	
248 Prospect	Vacant Lot	BNRC	35 x 80	
250 Prospect	Vacant Lot	BNRC	30 x 80	
187 Maryland	Vacant Lot	BNRC	30 x 90	
EAST SIDE/PROSPECT AVENUE				
211 Prospect	Vacant Lot	City	25 x 100	
227 Prospect	Vacant Lot	BURA	30 x 100	
229 Prospect	Vacant Lot	City	25 x 100	

Eleven parcels in the demonstration block in 1997 were owned by the City, the Buffalo Urban Renewal Agency, the Buffalo Neighborhood Revitalization Corporation, or the Department of Housing and Urban Renewal. Four additional sites on the block were a full two years in arrears in their taxes with an anticipated “in rem” tax sale in 1998. Still further parcels are likely to be available in the area based on private ownership sales, and the availability of both City and HUD owned property.

## GENERAL ATTRIBUTES

### *Lower West Side Housing*

#### **1. DENSITY – LOT SIZES/ STREET FRONTAGE VARIATION**

The majority of housing in the site area is two or two and one-half stories, with twenty-five to fifty-foot frontage, and ten-foot setbacks from the front property line.

#### **2. MIXED NEW AND OLD HOUSING**

Some new infill housing is in evidence in the Lower West Side.

#### **3. CONTINUOUS SIDEWALKS AND STREETScape AMENITIES**

Most of the Lower West Side has a six-foot planting strip separating the street from the sidewalk. In some instances the sidewalks are in poor repair and the street trees are missing in the planting strip.

#### **4. LANDSCAPE**

Many homes have one tree in the front yard as well as the street trees maintained by the city. Front yards are otherwise minimally landscaped with simple lawns and some foundation planting. Several homes have modest wood slat, chain link, or hedge fencing in front, usually not more than about three feet in height.

#### **5. PORCHES**

The majority of porches tend to cover the full front of the house and are usable. In two-family houses porches are available in the front of the house on both stories.

#### **6. MATERIALS**

The majority of homes are of wood frame construction, the rest are brick. Siding tends to be horizontal with typically four-inch-wide wood boards – there is some vinyl siding.

#### **7. GARAGES**

The majority of homes do not have off-street parking and this is seen as a major disadvantage.

#### **8. ROOF PITCHES AND ELEVATION ELEMENTS**

Lower West Side housing has a roof slope range between 8:12 and 11:12 for two story homes and between 9:12 and 11:12 for two and one-half story homes. Hipped roof homes tend to have roof pitches at a ratio of 7:12.

#### **9. WINDOW PROPORTIONS**

The majority of homes use vertical double-hung windows with proportions of 1:2.

#### **10. DETAILS**

Most houses in the area have window trim, open porch enclosures, and decorative details on fascia board ends. They have exposed and rusticated concrete foundations and use detailed column capitals and bases with columns sized in scale with porch and porch roof details.



Some of the general attributes of Lower West Side housing

## TO MAKE A GOOD NEIGHBORHOOD



A few of the recent “new builds” in the Lower West Side were designed without the benefit of simple guidelines. They do not provide full or useful front porches. Some turn their entrances to side yards and not to the street. Still others use roof pitches and details that are inconsistent with the general character of the street.



This home demonstrates most of the characteristics of housing in the Lower West Side, which may best suit the needs of future residents and be most consistent with the neighborhood character. Note the full porch; details in the door, porch railing, and window treatment; the off street parking; the roof slope; and, the landscape treatments.

### *Recent and Current Actions*

Making good neighborhoods is not just a matter of designing appropriate houses. It's about creating a safe and attractive residential environment and developing the array of services that people need to live on a day-to-day basis. In concert with the development and application of these housing design guidelines, and pursuant to the Lower West Side strategy document, a range of actions have been taken, or are planned, to help make the Lower West Side a better neighborhood.

Work has been ongoing to develop new neighborhood commercial services on Niagara Street – immediately adjacent to the demonstration project site. A new Rite Aid drug store opened several years ago at the corner of Virginia and Niagara streets. New facade improvement loans have been made available for merchants and businesses on Niagara. The area has been designated as part of the Federal Enterprise Community, which has established some business incubation opportunities. A ground breaking is planned soon for the long awaited new and expanded Tops Supermarket.

Other improvements are being made in housing, neighborhood institutions, and community environment. Work is underway on the ambitious Hope VI redevelopment of the former Lakeview public housing development. The Los Tainos senior housing development is complete. A new community health clinic is open at the site of the former Columbus Hospital. And the Father Belle Community Center has won a major grant to provide job training for neighborhood residents. Niagara Street itself was resurfaced several years ago and some new street trees planted.

The area in and around the demonstration project site has been the subject of stepped-up housing code inspections, with some properties brought into compliance and others made available for development through tax foreclosure “in rem” sales, HUD foreclosures, demolitions, and City acquisition. Still other opportunities for home ownership or home improvement assistance are available through the work of Hispanics United for Buffalo.

### *Draft Patterns*

Making a good neighborhood also depends on establishing criteria for design development that will assure consistency and quality in neighborhood design.

The draft patterns that follow were based on work by the Housing Design Advisory Board and the Urban Design Project at the University at Buffalo's School of Architecture and Planning. The work involved a review of: 1) twelve other cities that instituted housing design review procedures; 2) the planning and design literature on design review; and, 3) the current conditions of housing in the Lower West Side.

The intention was to provide simple and very specific guides, which are related to conditions in the Lower West Side, and which are testable in design review. Simplicity was seen as critical to satisfy the request that the proposal process be manageable and to ensure interest by the potential builder/developer community.

It is anticipated that housing patterns need to be adapted to fit the unique character of each neighborhood. As such, the patterns developed for this neighborhood would need to be modified for application in other areas of the city.

## TEN KEY DESIGN PATTERNS

*For The Neighborhoods In The Lower West Side*

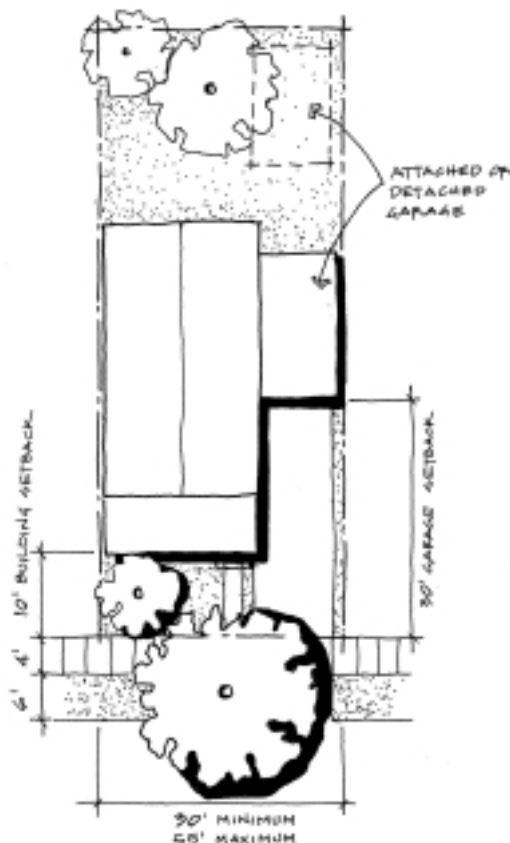
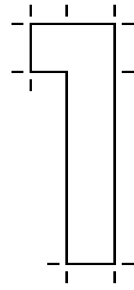


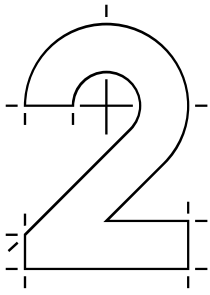
A reduction in the overall density of the neighborhood can be achieved while maintaining the urban pattern. When vacant twenty-five foot lots are isolated between two existing homes, they can be divided between them creating opportunities for off-street parking and garages as well as side yards. Two such lots together make a single building lot.

### *An Urban Density*

Housing in the city should offer something not available in suburban housing markets. Density and pedestrian convenience are both important parts of the urban experience that city-dwellers seek. At the same time, approaches to achieving experiences that are more urban in character can also allow for more generous lot sizes, enabling as much as a twenty five percent reduction in density on any given block. In this fashion, a twenty-five-foot lot can be used to provide side lots and off-street parking to adjacent properties or be combined to allow for two lots with a minimum width of thirty feet each. The resulting sub-division provides for a variety of lot sizes but still maintains a pattern consistent with the rest of the housing in the Lower West Side. This new pattern also enables more off-street parking, garages, and the occasional side yard. Lot sizes in the Lower West Side vary from twenty-five to more than fifty feet of frontage. In design tests by the Housing Design Advisory Board it was determined that a marketable infill house could be built on a lot as narrow as thirty feet. Combining a twenty-five and a thirty-foot lot establishes a maximum new build lot size of fifty-five feet.

**Therefore, provide housing with a two story minimum height, a thirty-foot minimum frontage, and the standard ten-foot housing set back.**





### *A Mix Of Rehabilitation and New Construction*

The Lower West Side has a large stock of deteriorating buildings, many of which can and should be rehabilitated, while still others need to be demolished. The opportunity in the demonstration project is to mix the rehabilitation effort with new infill construction on vacant lots. The challenge is to develop the mix in a manner that retains the character of the neighborhood, sustains an urban density, provides more off-street parking, provides some new side yards on lots too small to support new infill housing, and concurrently, upgrades the physical condition of the entire community.

**Therefore, mix rehabilitation opportunities and new construction whenever possible, sustaining the neighborhood's urban density and connecting the neighborhood to its past even while it looks forward.**



Two old houses next to three new houses on the east side of Prospect Avenue, shows how new construction and rehab can knit a tattered streetscape together again.

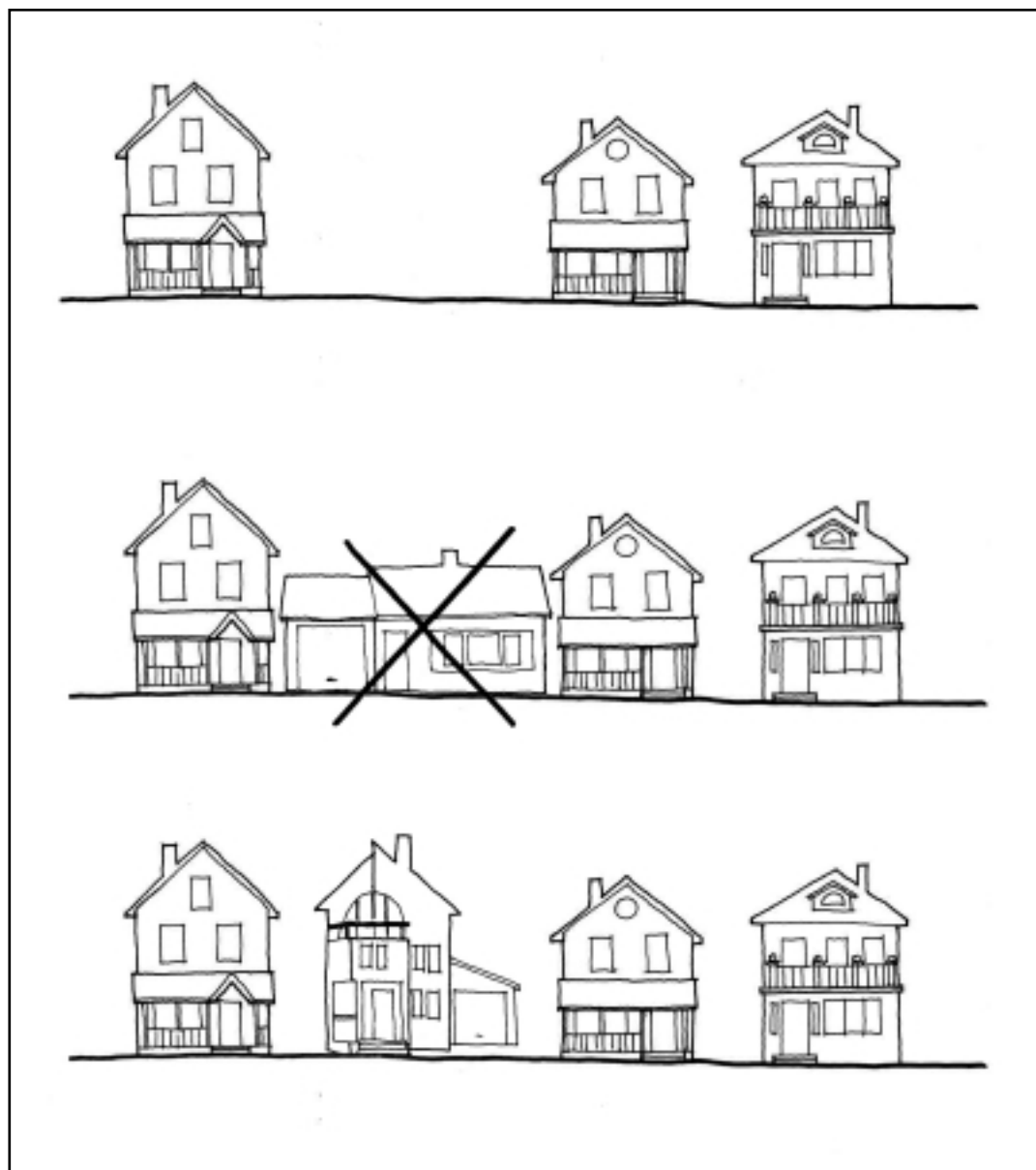
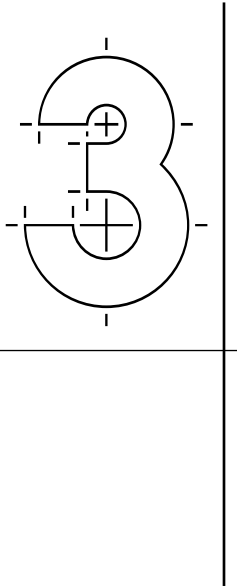


Illustration from *Choices*

The top elevation shows an infill site. The second strip shows how inappropriate it is to infill with reduced building heights and changes in the orientation of the roof pitch. The bottom shows a new infill house that is both modern and fits with the character of existing homes.



### *Continuous Sidewalk / Streetscape Amenities*

Sidewalks, street trees, street lamps, and crosswalks help to establish the pedestrian quality needed to make a good urban neighborhood. In the Lower West Side neighborhoods, residents are walking distance from downtown and the commercial strip on Niagara Street. The car is simply less important if the neighborhood supports the pedestrian paths. Making good pedestrian experiences requires a pedestrian system with six key characteristics. The sidewalks need to be:

- 1. CONTINUOUS** – where the sidewalk ends the community stops.
- 2. WELL DEFINED** – the pedestrian zone must be a clearly defined and bounded pathway.
- 3. ORGANIZED TO BE UNOBSTRUCTED** – public spaces must be able to accommodate many kinds of objects other than pedestrians; there must be logical places for bus benches, light poles, traffic signs, etc.
- 4. SAFE FROM VEHICULAR ENCROACHMENT** – pedestrians should not feel threatened, either physically or psychologically, by passing traffic. The pedestrian path should be buffered from the street by distance and landscape.
- 5. RHYTHMIC** – the sidewalk must relate to surrounding architectural features or landscaping. Pathways are not static corridors but are dynamic rhythmic conveyors of pedestrians.
- 6. ACCESSIBLE** – sidewalks must give efficient access to places – sidewalk to house, car to house, house to car and sidewalk, a walk to the store, a walk downtown, a walk to work.

ADAPTED FROM MIKE GREENBURG'S  
*THE POETICS OF CITIES: DESIGNING NEIGHBORHOODS THAT WORK*

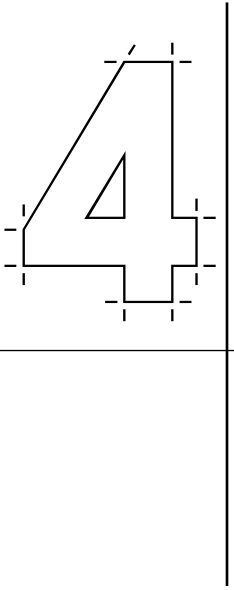
**Therefore, pay close attention to the pedestrian environment.  
Make it a central part of why people choose to live in the City.**



The section above suggests that the pedestrian environment would be further enhanced by planting in the front yards, which creates a pedestrian space in front of every house.



The photo above illustrates that there are many mature street trees in the Lower West Side to use as part of the development of a great pedestrian environment. Care should be taken during construction to preserve every tree possible on the block.



### *Usable Front Porches*

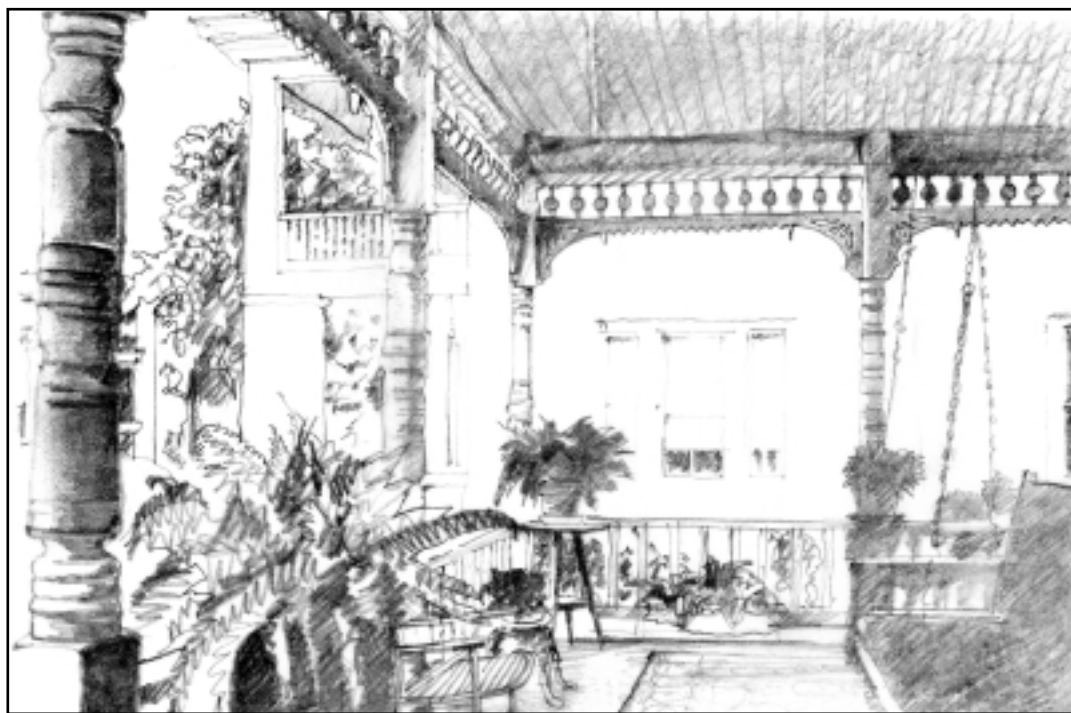
Many of the doubles and singles in the Lower West Side have usable front porches. Porches encourage interaction between neighbors, put “eyes on the street,” and introduce a distinctly urban and human scale to the community. A number of characteristics make the porch usable and consistent with the character of the Lower West Side neighborhoods:

1. Two family homes should have two porches, one for each level of living. Each porch should use similar materials and details where appropriate. For example, the roofing material of the house and the porch or porches should be comparable.
2. Porches throughout the Lower West Side tend to run the full width of the house and tend to incorporate the entrance to the house.
3. Porches tend to be visible from the street and have enclosure systems that are relatively open, rather than enclosed and fortress like. They present a welcoming face to the house from the street and create a semi-private transition from the public street to the private home.
4. Column and handrail details should be consistent with the mass of the house and the roofs. Thin columns supporting apparently massive roofs or massive columns supporting thin line porch roofs should be avoided.

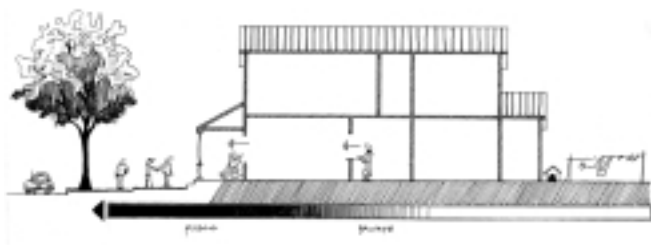
The best way to make a house and neighborhood welcoming and to give people a comfortable place to sit outside is a porch. Porches should be nearer to the street than any other part of the house and deep enough for people to sit and still let someone walk by – about six feet minimum. A porch is a place which feels like being inside yet lets people share their block’s outdoor space with their neighbors. It contributes greatly to the quality of life in the Lower West Side by helping people get to know each other and by letting them watch over each other’s houses from the safety of their own dwelling. It is the most important part of a good Lower West Side house.

**ADAPTED FROM  
THE TEN ESSENTIALS**

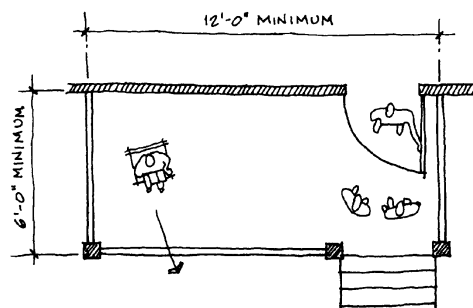
**Therefore, make a usable porch (at least six feet by twelve feet) for each family. Where possible, extend the porch across the full front of the house and incorporate the main entrance to the house. Keep the porches relatively transparent from the street with details consistent with the massing and materials of other houses on the street.**

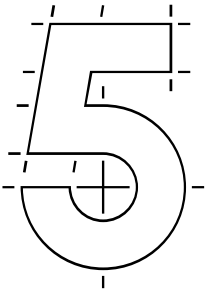


A full front porch spanning the width of the house is seen as the most usable. A minimum condition would provide at least six feet by twelve feet of outdoor porch area. (Original photo from *Choices*; sketch adaptation by Anirban Adhya, Urban Design Project.)



The diagrams above and below right show the desired relationship between the porch, front yard, sidewalk, and street.

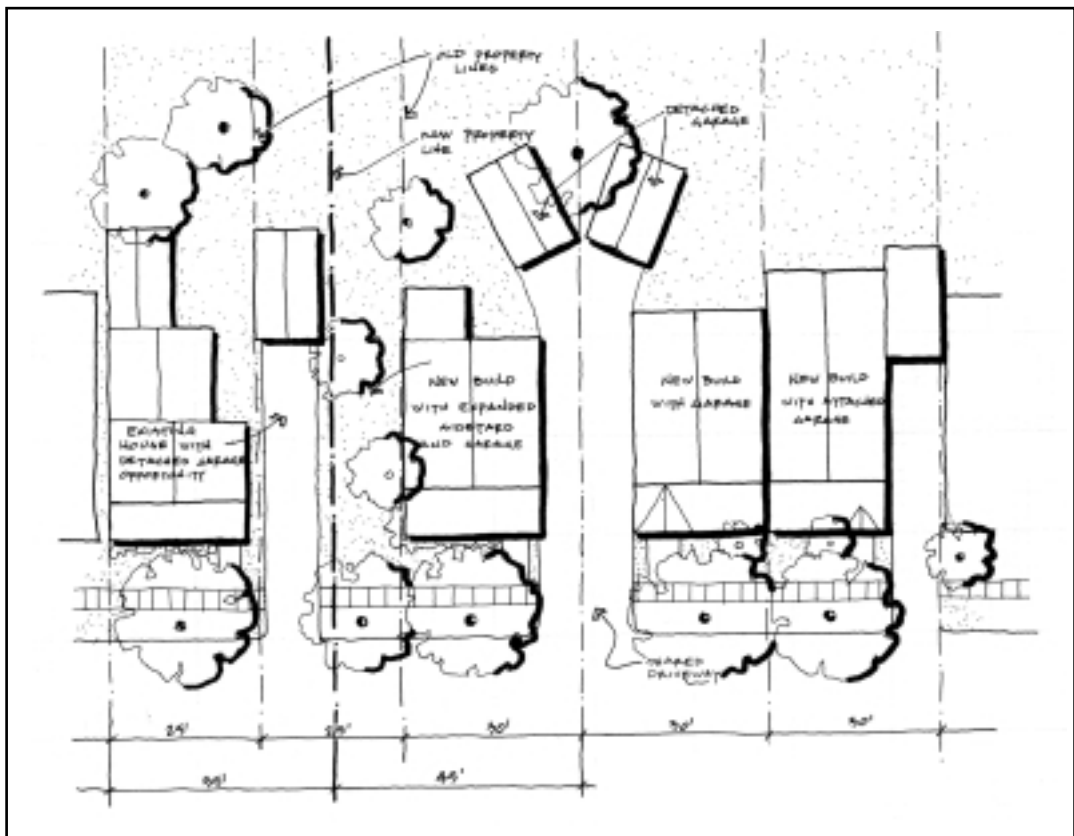




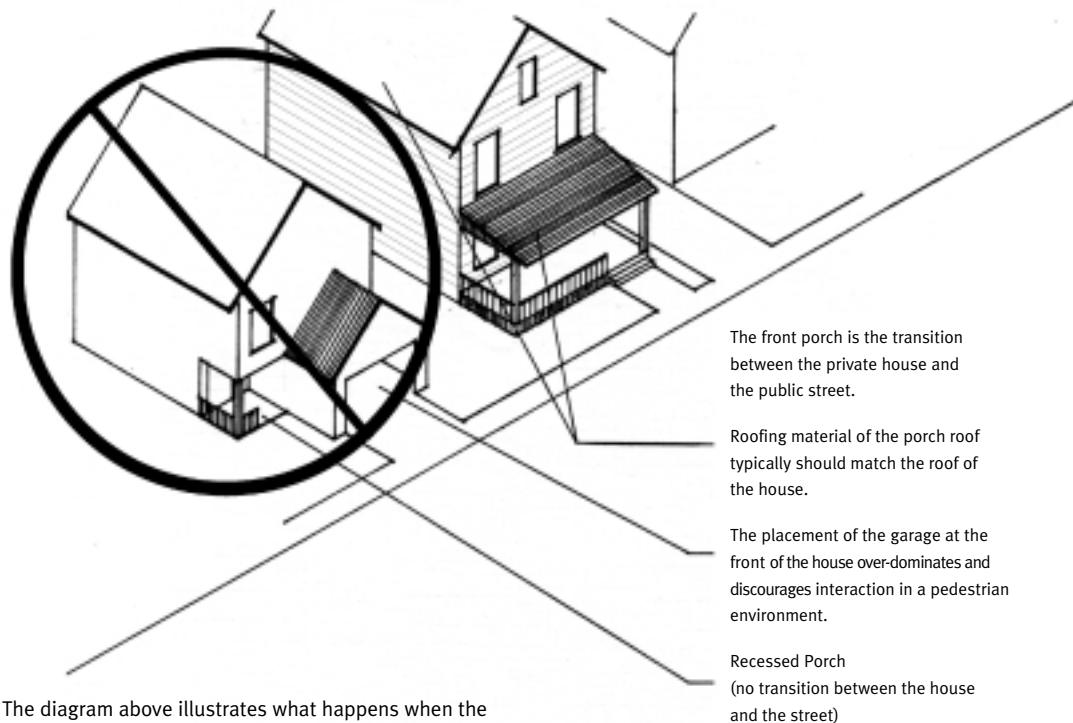
*Provide Garages With a Thirty-Foot  
Minimum Setback from the Sidewalk*

Relatively few houses in the Lower West Side provide a garage or off-street parking. In today's housing market, however, such features are seen as essential. But garages on the street front tend to dominate the landscape with blank garage door walls. This damages the pedestrian character of the street. Setting the garage back from the street at least thirty feet gives dominance to the line of porches and houses, improving the character of the area.

**Therefore, where possible, provide garages or off street parking for each home and set the garages back a minimum of thirty feet from the front property line.**



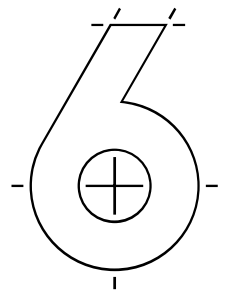
The parcels available for development on Prospect Avenue allow a variety of opportunities to create off street parking, providing garages for existing houses, new-builds with expanded side yards and detached garages, shared drive access to private detached garages, and new-builds with attached garages.

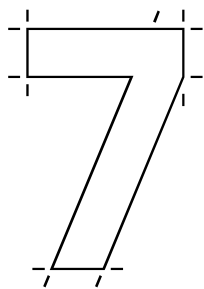


### *Wood and/or Brick Construction*

The majority of homes in the Lower West Side are made of brick or wood. Wood construction tends to involve wood siding with three and one-half-inch to five-inch boards laid horizontally. Consistency and quality home building require compatible choices. Brick or wood or combinations of brick and wood are the preferred materials. Vinyl, if used at all, should be used on the back and sides of the house.

**Therefore, build new in-fill homes out of brick and/or wood. Consider vinyl siding as a low cost alternative to wood and try to limit its use to the back and sides of the home.**

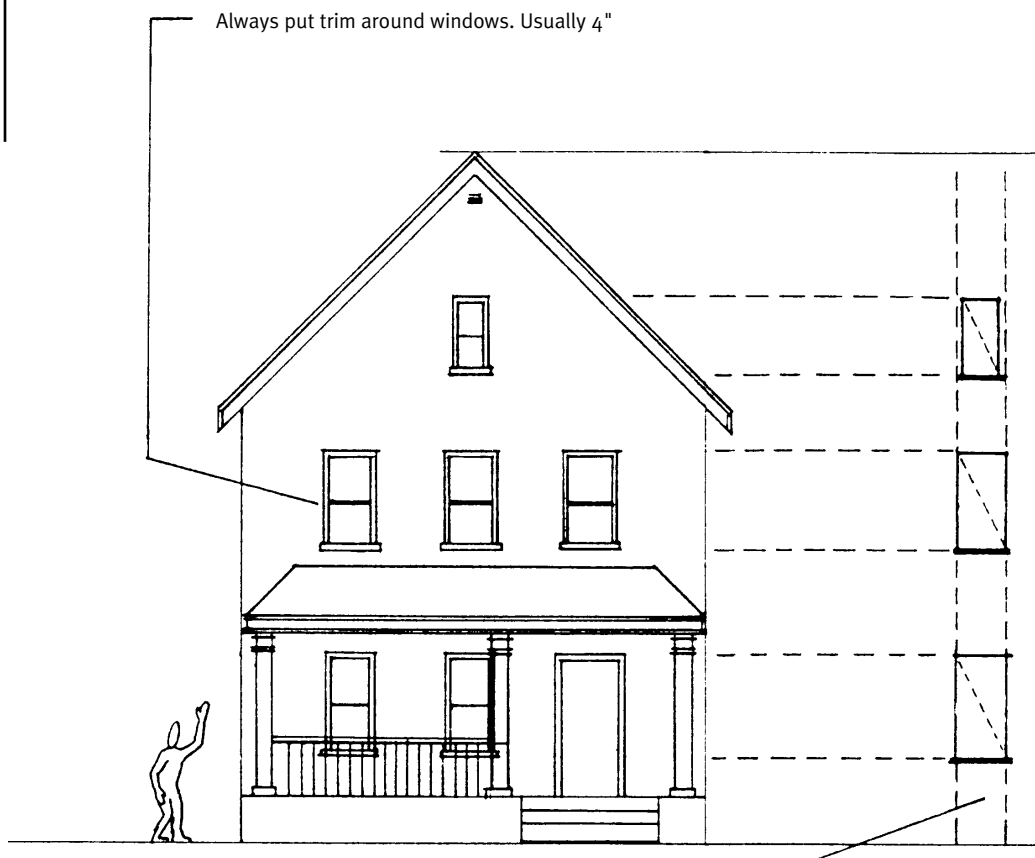




### *Vertical Windows*

Most houses in the neighborhood have windows placed vertically, aligned along the street face so that they create a consistent rhythm. The vertical proportion is 1:2 – for example, a window 18 inches wide is 36 inches tall. Alternative dimensions with comparable proportions can work, but horizontal orientations would break up the rhythm on the street and be inconsistent with the general character of the neighborhood.

**Therefore provide windows that are oriented vertically with approximately 1:2 proportions. Place the windows at an elevation consistent with the placement of windows elsewhere in the neighborhood.**



Window level, size, pattern, and location should relate from one house to the next. Similarly proportioned windows should be used all along the street.

### What is proportion?

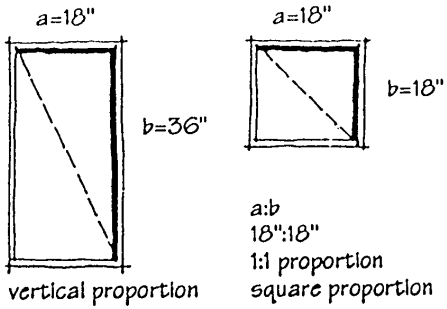
It is the ratio of the horizontal measurement (a) to the vertical measurement (b).

Example:  $a=18"$   $b=36"$

proportion is 1:2

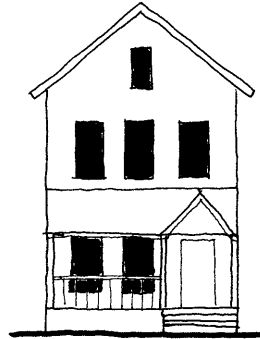
b is twice the distance of a

A comfortable and common proportion is 2:3

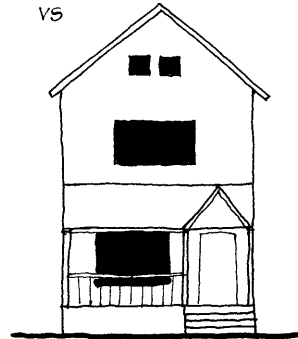


The human body proportion is vertical as well.

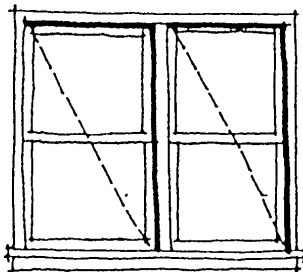
Repetitive vertically proportioned windows.



VS

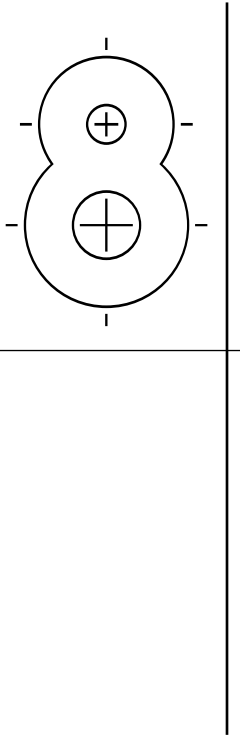


Broadly horizontally proportioned windows.



Grouping several vertical window together rather than installing a large "picture window" is the traditional pattern in North/Northeast neighborhoods.

A description of window proportion criteria based on *The Ten Essentials*.



### *Landscape the Front*

“Although the front yard may belong legally to the owner of a house, it exists above all as a part of the common space that makes up the center of the block or neighborhood. This “streetscape” still functions as a kind of shared living room in many of our neighborhoods just as it has in the most successful cities throughout history. It succeeds here because of the width of the streets and the closeness of the houses to the street and to each other. Opaque high fences or dense, high landscaping either parallel to the street or between lots tends to subdivide the block with losses to security, neighborhood character, and neighbors getting to know each other.”

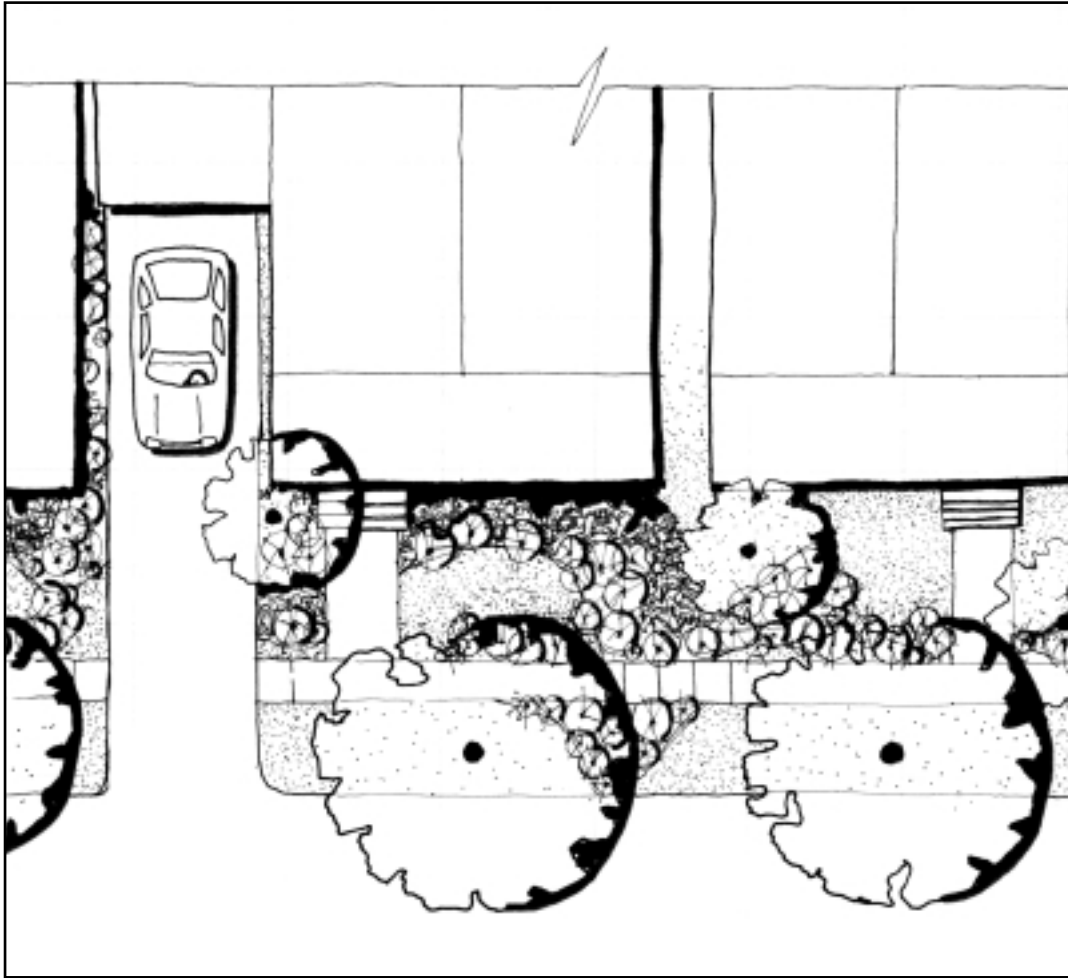
**FROM THE TEN ESSENTIALS**

The landscape, sidewalks, and front yards in the Lower West Side are essential, not supplemental, to the success of making a good neighborhood. Each front yard should have a tree in addition to the trees in the City-owned planting strip between sidewalks and street. The front should be unfenced or modestly fenced with low transparent detailing. Tall fences and opaque materials should be avoided because they add to the feeling of unsafety, creating places to hide and denying the potential for “eyes on the street.” Low growing bushes, however, can be used to good effect in defining the yard without creating places to hide. Planting will also help relate the house to the yard while it adds texture and variety to the experience of the pedestrian on the street and individuality to the residential environment.

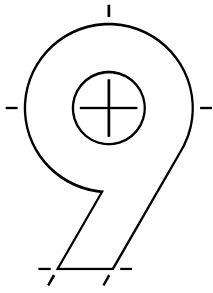
**Therefore, make landscaping a priority, especially in the front yard as it shapes the public streetscape of the neighborhood.**



Fences, if employed at all, need to be not more than four feet high and should have a transparent detailing that defines the front yard without obscuring it.



Landscape planning for the front of the home should strive to create an outdoor room between the sidewalk and the porch that is part of the rhythm of the street. The planting that makes this room should not be so dense as to create places to hide.



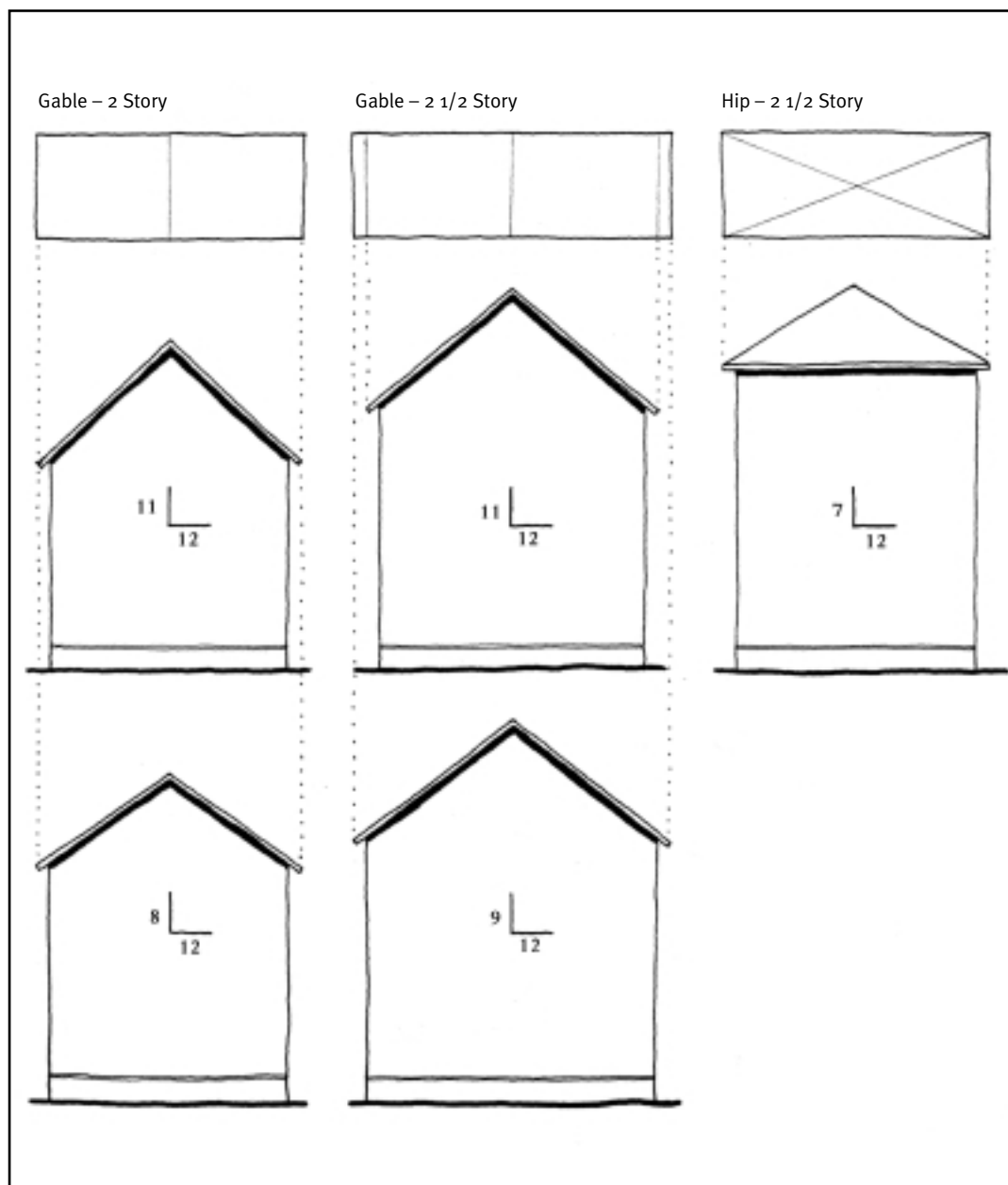
### *Consistent Roof Pitch and Elevation Element Locations*

There is a relatively narrow range of roof slopes in the housing of the Lower West Side. Most of the two-story homes have roof pitches that range from 8:12 to 11:12. The two and one-half story homes have roof pitches that range from 9:12 to 11:12. Hipped roofs tend to have a ratio of 7:12. Any radical departure from these ranges in roof pitch in new infill housing would conflict with the prevailing pattern and disrupt the visual continuity of the neighborhood. Existing homes in the Lower West Side also reflect a consistency of element locations including roofline, molding lines, porch lines, and first floor lines. It will be important to maintain consistency in these elevation element locations.

**Therefore, consider providing roof pitches consistent with the range of slopes in the current stock of homes. Provide elevation elements consistent with surrounding housing allowing for similar treatment in roof and molding lines. Porch, window, and first floor elevations should all be aligned.**



An analysis of elevations of homes in the immediate neighborhood reveals a pattern of alignment of roofline, molding line, porch line, and entrance lines. Analysis of window lines also reveals a consistent pattern that can help in providing a variety of housing designs while maintaining a consistent neighborhood character. (Adapted from *Choices*)

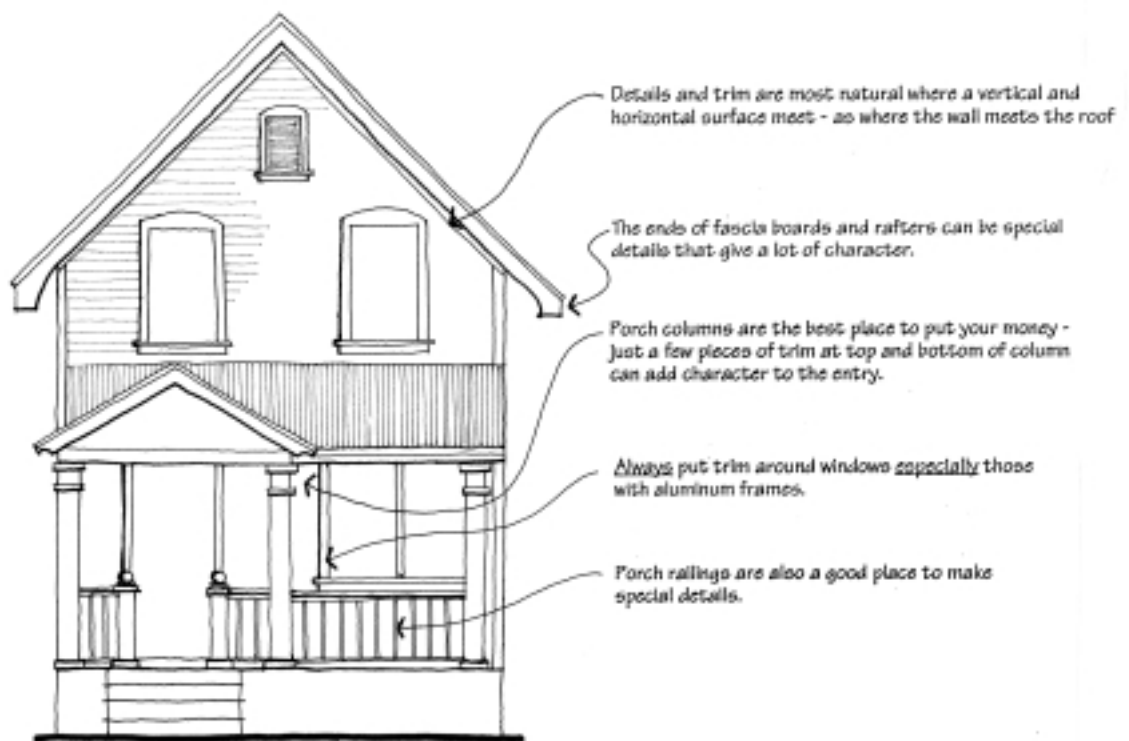


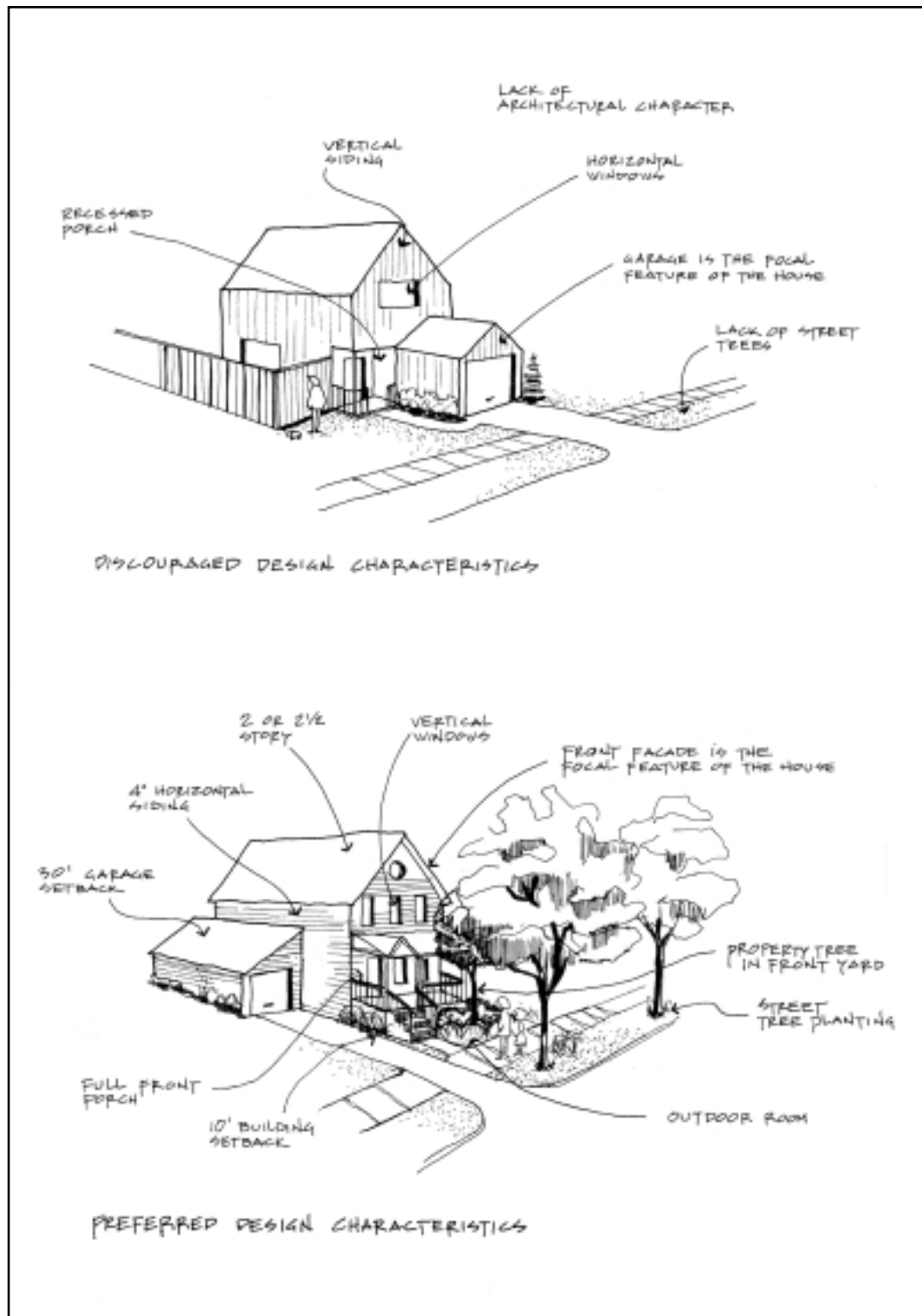
The roof slope analysis of housing in the area suggests there is a narrow range of slopes from which to choose. New infill housing should work within the ranges that already dominate the area.

### *Attend To The Details*

Details make the difference between “just another house” and a house with the “curb appeal” that can contribute to the creation of an attractive neighborhood. Designs should focus attention on places where vertical and horizontal elements meet – roof peaks, the ends of the fascia boards, column capitals and bases, porch railings, and window trim. The facade should have depth, avoiding the flush appearance of many suburban dwellings.

**Therefore, find ways to celebrate the details of the house, demonstrating the affection neighbors feel for their homes and their community.**





## AN EVALUATION

### *Of Design Guideline Application*

There were eleven new homes constructed on the 200 block of Prospect Avenue after the publication of these design guidelines. Other structures, meanwhile, were demolished in the years following development of the guidelines. The following is a qualitative evaluation of how consistently the guidelines were applied on a point-by-point basis. Although this is partially a matter of judgment, it is always in direct reference to the physical evidence on the street.

In general, the results were quite mixed. In a few cases, what the guidelines prescribed has been fully realized (e.g. usable front porches; wood and brick construction). In another few cases, the designs provide what the guidelines asked for only minimally (e.g. garages with 30-foot setbacks). Mainly, however, the design guidelines have been adhered to in some cases, neglected in others.

Overall, the combination of new housing construction, demolition of dilapidated structures, a scattering of rehabilitation work, and partial infrastructure replacement, has provided a significant improvement in the quality of this street. But the effect is incomplete. Gaps in the streetscape, inconsistencies in landscaping and infrastructure, and conflicts between design elements on adjacent homes still prevent the block from being truly whole.

The point-by-point evaluation follows:

#### **1. AN URBAN DENSITY.**

*Minimum 30-foot wide lots, maximum 55-foot lots, to maintain urban experience and pedestrian convenience while allowing marketable properties with off-street parking and some side yards.*

In most cases, the infill homes adhere to the 55-foot maximum frontage. The house at 230 Prospect, however, sprawls across what were once three lots, leaving a barren side yard. The homes at 217 and 219 Prospect have lots far larger than needed – a third house would have fit comfortably in the same space. The homes at 229 and



245 Prospect fit nicely with adjacent homes. Overall, however, the tendency is to build on lots of the maximum rather than the minimum size, and to leave side yards that are too big and open. The cumulative impact is to create something less than a truly “urban density.”

## **2. A MIX OF REHABILITATION AND NEW CONSTRUCTION.**

*Mix rehabilitation opportunities with new construction wherever possible, sustaining the neighborhood's urban density and connecting the neighborhood to its past, even while it looks forward.*

The good news is that investment in new homes seems to have spurred some investment in rehabilitation on the older homes. The overall impression is of a much more stable block. The bad news is that there are housing rehabilitation opportunities that are not being seized.

In several cases, structures appear to have reached the point where only demolition may be a feasible solution (e.g. 199 Prospect would be difficult to rehabilitate).

## **3. CONTINUOUS SIDEWALK/STREETScape AMENITIES.**

*Pay close attention to the pedestrian environment – sidewalks, street lamps, street trees, and crosswalks. Make it a central part of why people choose to live in the city.*

There are new sidewalks in front of the new houses, but old sidewalks elsewhere. There are very mature street trees in front of some homes, no trees at all in front of the rest. In some cases, the planting strips themselves have been paved. There are several high-level street lamps, better suited for an arterial highway than a residential street. Low-level street lamps would be a big improvement. There are no marked cross walks.

Below: **2002** – An ensemble of five new homes shows the uneven adherence to the ten design guidelines: vertical windows; usable full-size front porches; wood construction; nearly an urban density; some of the garages set back but not others; some gables facing the street, some not; some with landscaping, some without.



## AN EVALUATION

### *Of Design Guideline Application*

#### **4. USABLE FRONT PORCHES.**

*At least six feet deep and twelve feet wide – the full width of the house when possible, open to the street, and consistent in detail with the rest of the house.*

With only one exception, the new houses on Prospect Avenue have porches that extend the full front width of the structure. Not all are fully six-feet deep, but they satisfy the criterion of “usable”. One other house has a porch about halfway across the front of the house – perhaps the minimum 12 feet wide. All of the porches are open to the street and consistent in detail with the rest of their houses.

#### **5. PROVIDE GARAGES WITH A 30-FOOT MINIMUM SETBACK FROM THE SIDEWALK.**

*Garages are essential in the current housing market, but setting them back can give greater prominence to house fronts and porches, and improve the character of the streetscape.*

Only four of the eleven homes have garages set back at least 30 feet from the sidewalk line. Three others have no garage. Four homes have attached garages, flush with the front of the house and not set back 30 feet.

#### **6. WOOD AND/ OR BRICK CONSTRUCTION.**

*Brick or wood, or combinations of brick and wood, are preferred. Vinyl, if used at all, should be used on the back and the sides of the house.*

All eleven new homes on the 200 block of Prospect Avenue appear to have conventional clapboard siding, or perhaps some of the new composite siding materials, but no vinyl.

#### **7. VERTICAL WINDOWS.**

*Provide windows that are oriented vertically – like most in the neighborhood – at elevations consistent with other structures, and using trim around the windows.*

Ten of the eleven houses have windows that are vertical in orientation, but none have windows with the preferred 1:2 width to height ratio. None of the houses have the suggested four-inch window trim. Instead, ten of eleven have decorative shutters. One other has a decorative arch above each window. Windows are set at heights consistent with those in other new homes, but not always with pre-existing homes.

#### **8. LANDSCAPE THE FRONT.**

*Front yard landscaping defines the street environment. Landscape front yards, including at least one tree in addition to the tree in the City planting strip. Front yards should be unfenced, or with low fencing or low shrubbery that defines the yard without disguising it.*

While all of the homes had some landscaping – shrubs, flower gardens, etc. – and some were landscaped extensively, only two had trees planted on the property, and another two of the eleven had no tree on either the property or in the public planting strip. No house had both a tree in the yard and a tree in the planting strip as suggested.

1997



2002



The new house at center on the bottom should have a gable end facing the street and garage set back. The new house at right is built on a large lot that leaves too much vacant side yard to maintain an “urban density.”

#### **9. CONSISTENT ROOF PITCH AND ELEVATION ELEMENT LOCATIONS.**

*Provide roof pitches consistent with the range of slopes in the current stock of homes, and align elevation elements – roofline, molding line, porch line, and entrance line – with those of other houses.*

Application of this guideline was mixed. Six of the new homes on the block presented gabled ends to the street with roof-pitches in the appropriate range. In general, these fit well with their neighbors

and looked like Lower West Side houses. Four other new homes turned sideways to the street – that is, showing roof rather than gable. One other presented an off-center, compound gable to the street. These homes present a distinctly suburban image and don’t fit with their neighbors. The former houses, in general, have elevation elements aligned. The latter do not.

1997



2002



The three houses demolished and three new houses constructed made a great improvement on Prospect Avenue – despite that fact that the two houses at left were on too-big lots and the new house at right was oriented incorrectly to the street.

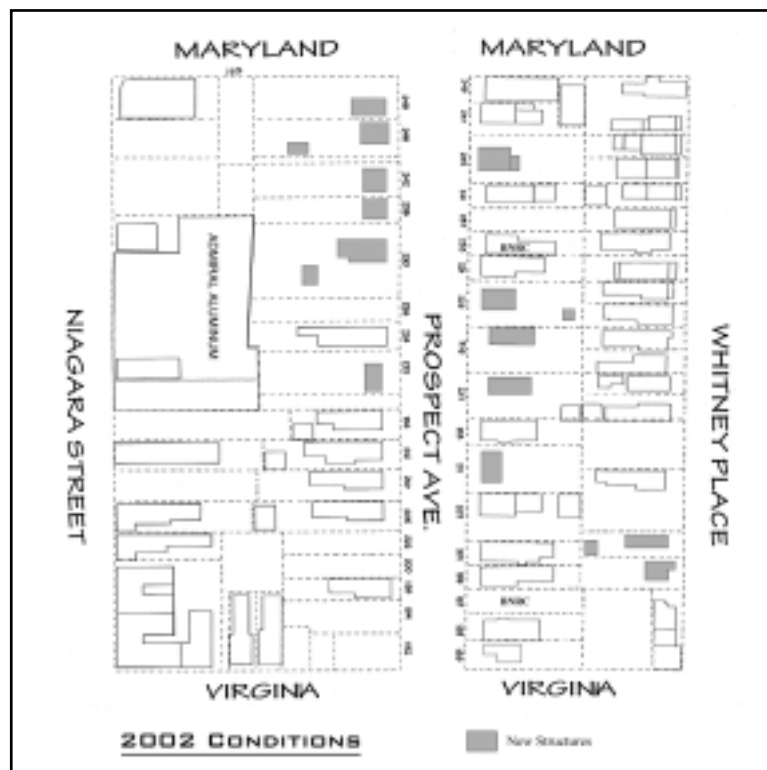
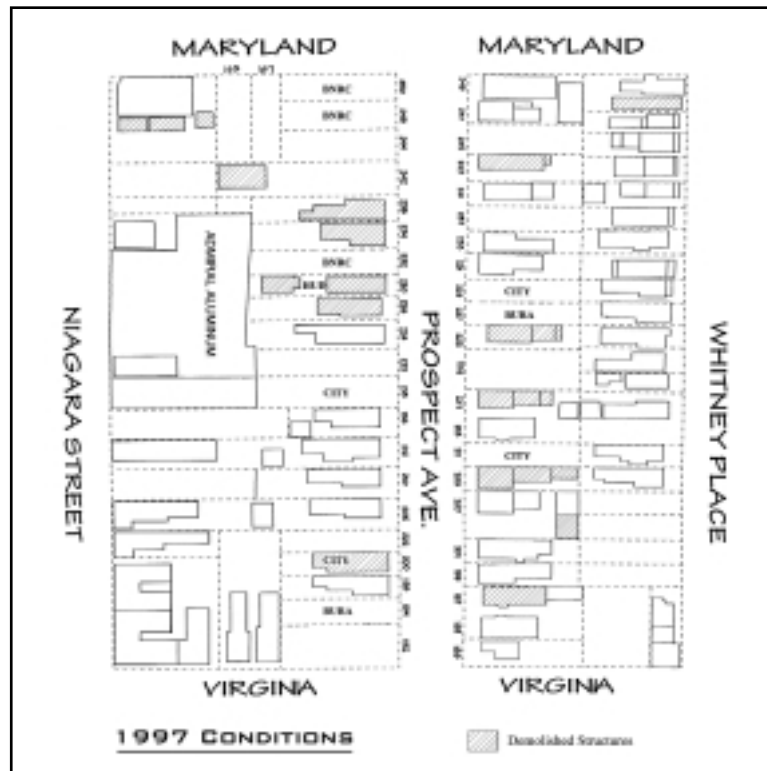
**10. ATTEND TO THE DETAILS.**

*Celebrate the details of a house – porch columns and railings, window trim, horizontal siding (3-1/2 to 5 inch), rusticated concrete foundation materials, and more.*

Although the overall look of the eleven homes tends to be more simple and clean than ornate, a certain care has been taken in the details. Porch columns and railing spindles are simple but in keeping with the overall design. Siding is horizontal

and nicely narrow. There are no rusticated concrete foundations – in fact, no foundations are significantly visible from the street at all. The first floor of each home is closer to grade level than in many of the older homes. The substitution of shutters for window trim was noted above.

A “before & after” map comparison shows ten houses demolished (cross-hatched on the top map) and eleven new ones constructed (shaded on the bottom map). Several sites remain that could provide space for additional new homes.



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