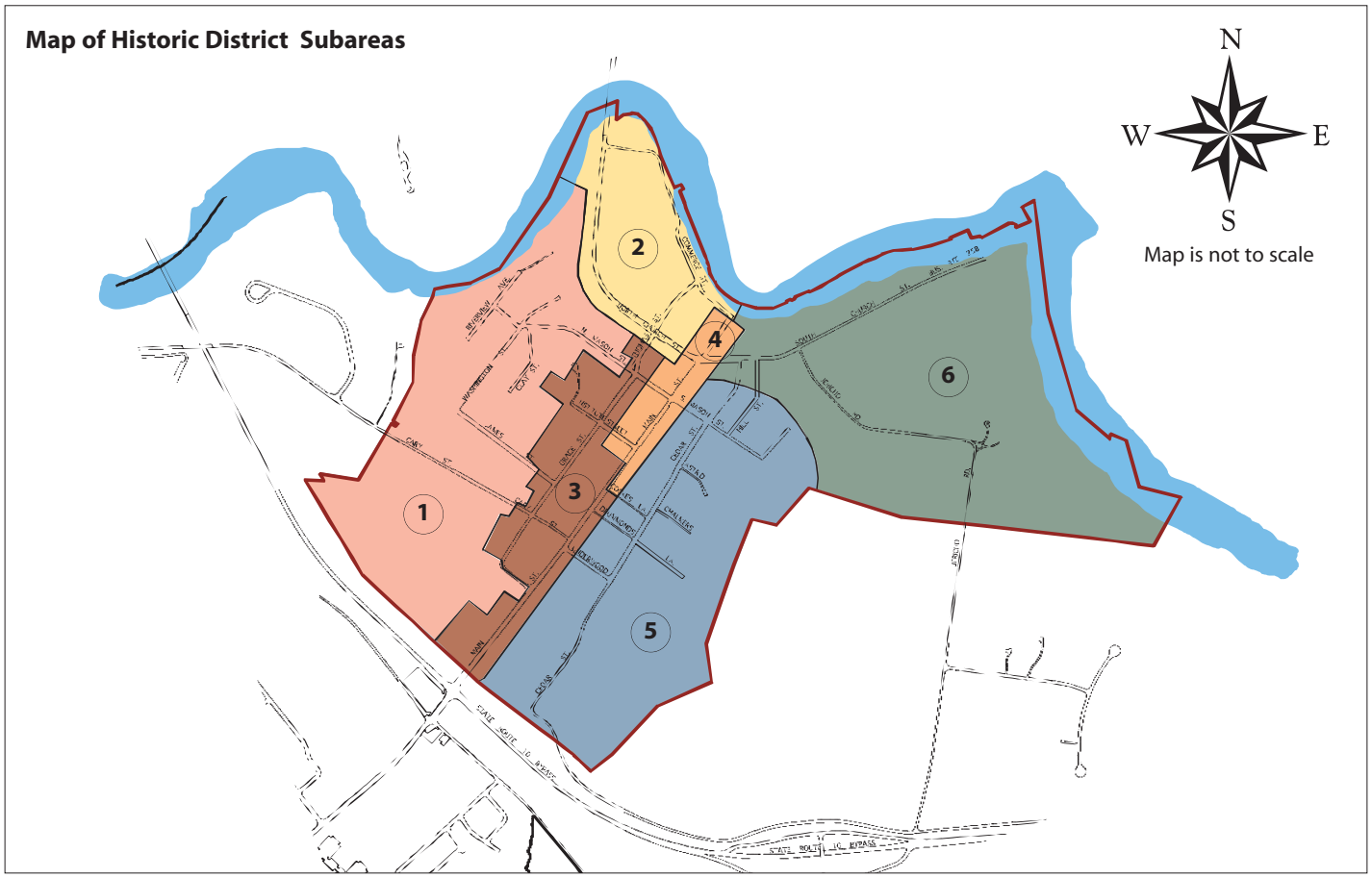
Understanding District Character II

A. Subareas



This map shows the boundaries of each subarea in the Smithfield Historic District.

Your first step in planning to make changes to your historic building or constructing a new structure should be to understand its context. Both character of the district as a whole and your building in particular are important.

Smithfield's historic district contains several distinct neighborhoods that represent certain styles or eras. Other neighborhoods or subareas are less distinct, exhibiting structures from several periods. The map on this page illustrates the subarea boundaries.

Subareas

1	Riverview
2	North Church Street
3	Main and Grace Streets
4	Commercial Main Street
5	Cedar Street
6	South Church Street

II Understanding District Character

A. Subareas

1. Riverview/James/Cary Streets Subarea contains Riverview Avenue and Washington Street and the north ends of James, Clay, North Mason, and Cary streets. Riverview Avenue and Washington Street have a number of one- or one-and-one-half-story dwellings that are set close to the road. Parts of this area have been paved recently and had curbs installed. Private landscaping is minimal, consisting mainly of a few mature trees and foundation plantings. The houses on James and Cary streets are larger and are set farther back from the road. Some of the buildings are Victorian-era houses with more decorative detail and excellently maintained yards. A variety of architectural styles of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were built in this subarea. A Child Day Care Center was built on James Street in 2003. In 2004, the YMCA completed a major addition that included an indoor swimming pool and additional recreational opportunities.

2. North Church Street Subarea contains North Church Street from the Pagan River to Main Street; Commerce Street; and Thomas Street from North Church Street to Commerce Street. The majority of this area is commercial. The areas where a strip mall and warehouse used to be located has been redeveloped. Smithfield Foods, Inc., a Fortune 500 company, has its corporate headquarters and an administration building on Commerce Street. The Smithfield Center,a town-owned and operated event/conference facility was built in November 2000. All town meetings are held at the Center. The Little Theatre was razed and a new Little Theatre was built adjacent to the Smithfield Center. At the intersection of Main and Commerce streets are five recently constructed townhouses that have attractive landscaping with foundation plantings and planters.

Understanding District Character II

A. Subareas

3. Main and Grace Streets Subarea has well-maintained, medium- to large-scale houses, many of which are a variation of Victorian styles. A number of the dwellings have a height of two stories and are set close to the road with large back yards. The lots are well landscaped with some foundation plantings. Grace Street has sidewalks on both sides of the road and mature trees in the area between the sidewalks and the street. On-street parking is allowed on both sides of Main Street Some of the houses have short driveways.

Several noncontributing commercial buildings are grouped at the west end of Main Street near Route 10. Most of them have parking lots in front of the buildings. Pierceville Farm is also in this subarea. The farm buildings sit very close to the bend in Grace Street, while the remainder of the land is open fields.

In 1999, the Town completed a decade long $2 million public improvement project in downtown Smithfield. The Main Street project concluded with the completion of landscaping. Public improvements included relocation of all overhead utilities underground, construction of brick sidewalks, installation of period street lights and street signage, landscaping, granite curbing, street resurfacing, water and sewer line replacements, drainage enhancements, additional parking as well as informational kiosks on local history and street art sculptures. Private investment resulted in many significant building renovations, reconstruction, and/or facade improvements. Below are just a few of the before/after pictures that epitomize downtown Smithfield. In April 1999, the Virginia Downtown Development Association (VDDA) awarded Smithfield for its Main Street Beautification Project.

4. Commercial Main Street Subarea is the traditional downtown area dating from around the turn of the century. Most of the contributing commercial buildings are two-story brick structures with little or no setback. The residences tend to have small front yards and most are well landscaped. A number of the lots have been converted to parking areas, especially beside the noncontributing buildings, many of which have a deep setback. There are sidewalks on both sides of Main Street and parallel parking is allowed on both sides as well. One notable public asset is Hayden's Lane, which provides an attractive walkway from Main to Grace streets.

II Understanding District Character

A. Subareas

5. South Church Street Subarea has some of the most magnificent homes in Smithfield. The town's best examples of Georgian and Federal architecture occur here, as do its showcase Victorian-era dwellings. The Church Street corridor on the south end is well defined by wetlands on either side, and the lots are deep, extending back to these conservation areas. The houses themselves are generally close to the road and to each other. The north side of the street has larger lots with larger-scaled houses.

Church Street is too narrow to support much on-street parking but the deep lots allow areas for private driveways. In some places, the area between the street and sidewalk has been paved and the curb obliterated so that cars can park on the sidewalk. In sections of this subarea the street is lined with mature trees that overhang the road. There is a great variety of styles and decorative detail in the architecture and in the site elements such as fences and walls. Landscape and building maintenance is good to excellent.

Windsor Castle, located on Jericho Road, is included in this subarea. This farm complex, one of two within the district limits, is also visible from South Church Street. It contains the main house and an extensive collection of outbuildings sited next to open fields.

Current plans include a South Church Street Beautification Project which will involve landscaping, the placement of utilities underground, and the installation of brick sidewalks, traditionally styled lighting and signage.

6. Cedar Street Subarea is a mixture of residential and institutional and business uses. A number of parking lots from the Main Street business area front on Cedar Street The east end contains several church parking lots, while the west end includes multi-family buildings.

Cedar Street has a narrow sidewalk on the south side of the street but there are no sidewalks on the side streets. These cross streets have small, two-story dwellings set on narrow lots with minimal landscaping. South Mason and Sykes streets also have small houses but the majority of them are one-story dwellings on well-maintained lots with foundation plantings.

In 2004, a new subdivision, Evergreen Acres, began construction on Cedar Street. It consists of a mixture of single family residences, townhouses and duplexes.

Understanding District Character II

A. Subareas

The character of the district is for the most part created by the architectural styles of the buildings. Each style has its own distinctive features, played out in materials, forms, and decorative details. Even within the same style, however, different budgets, tastes, and building sites result in a variety of appearances. Styles also vary according to the function of the building, such as between commercial or institutional and residential uses.

The following drawings illustrate the most common architectural styles in Smithfield's historic district. These drawings show the prototype of the style. Many of the buildings in the town actually are simplified, or vernacular, versions of these more ornate styles. Some buildings exhibit elements from several styles. As can be seen from the dates, styles coexist and overlap so that more than one style can be popular during the same period.

The stylistic features identified on these drawings are examples of the kinds of distinctive elements that should be preserved when you rehabilitate your house. The glossary provides more information on unfamiliar architectural terms.

Preservation Brief #17
Architectural Character - Identifying the Visual Aspects of Historic Buildings as an Aid to Preserving Their Character

available from:
www2.nps.gov/tps/briefs/presbhom.htm

Primarily residential, the character of South Church Street is defined by its rich variety of architectural styles.

Lower Main Street is commercial/retail oriented and its architectural styles reflect these uses.

II Understanding District Character

B. Residential Building Styles

1. Georgian and Federal (1780-1830)

These residences are two stories and usually have a gable roof and sometimes a raised brick basement. Cladding materials are often beaded weatherboards. Brick patterns are usually Flemish bond. Exterior end chimneys are generally shouldered and set in pairs. The facades are symmetrical, usually with a central entrance. In rowhouse designs, however, the doorway is placed off center. Windows have small panes and are frequently framed with operable shutters. Roof dormer windows are a common feature.

Decorative details may include a fanlight over the entrance and/or a small classically designed portico supported by columns. The cornice may be decorated with modillion blocks or dentils.

This Georgian one-and-a-half story Flemish bond brick dwelling sits on an English bond raised foundation. The gable ends are clad in weatherboard above the eave line.

Georgian

Understanding District Character II

B. Residential Building Styles

Georgian houses, built generally in the eighteenth century, are less ornate than the later Federal examples of the early nineteenth century.

The earlier Georgian, one-and-a-half story portion of this house was updated in the late-nineteenth century with two-over-two windows that give this structure a later appearance. The larger Federal addition retains its original windows.

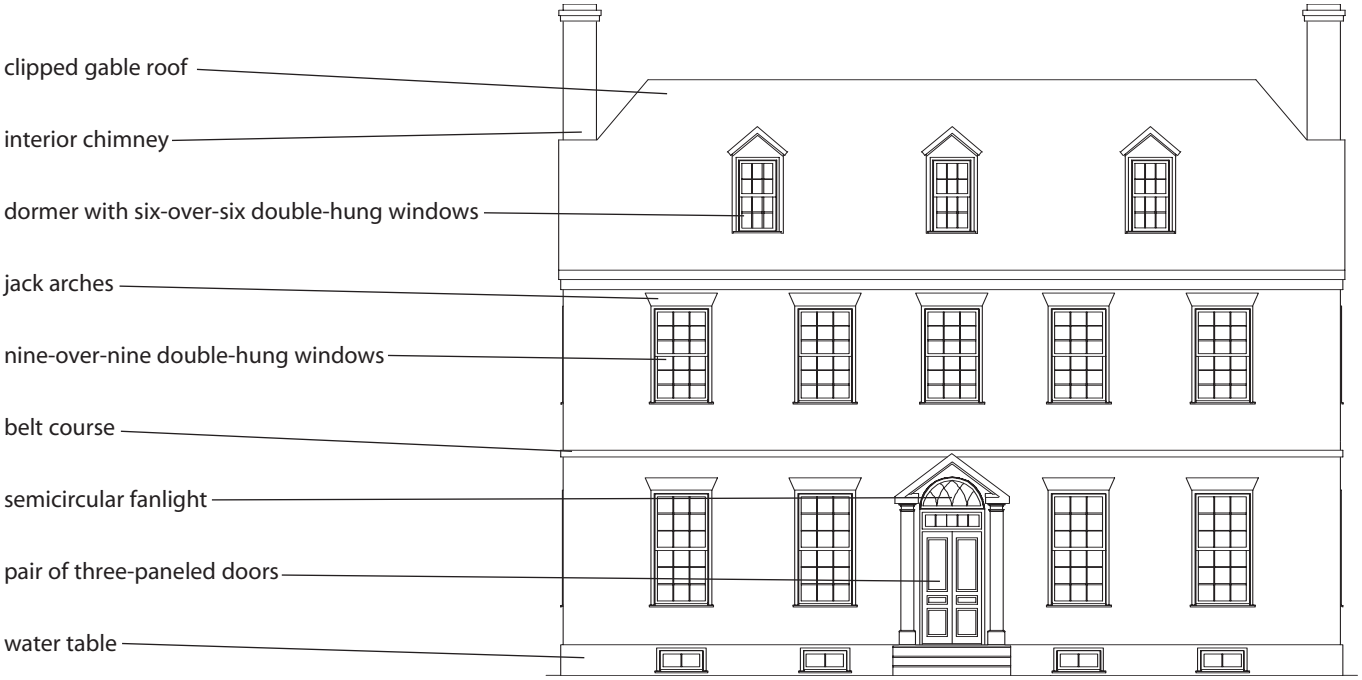
Georgian

II Understanding District Character

B. Residential Building Styles

This large dwelling exhibits a level of decorative detail associated with the Federal style including a fanlight over the front door, a highly carved entrance feature, and a dentilwork cornice. Its overall massing and roof form relate it to the earlier Georgian style.

Federal houses have lighter and more decorative details such as sidelights around the main entrance, narrower muntin bars in the windows, and more finely carved columns and cornices.

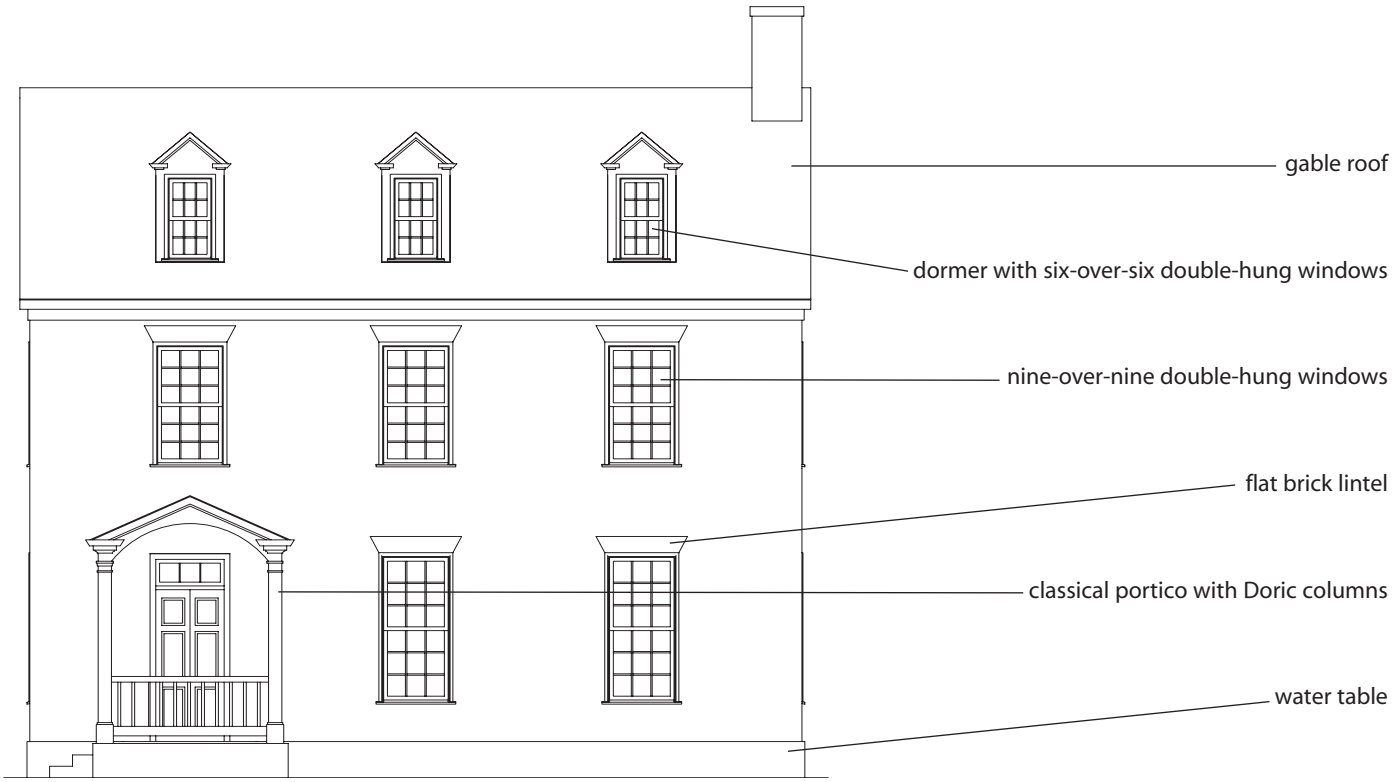


Georgian/Federal

Understanding District Character II

B. Residential Building Styles

In this classically detailed example of the Federal style, decorative details include porticos framing entries with fanlights or glazed transoms, a demi-lune fanlight in the gable-end and lintels with keystones over windows on both levels.



Federal

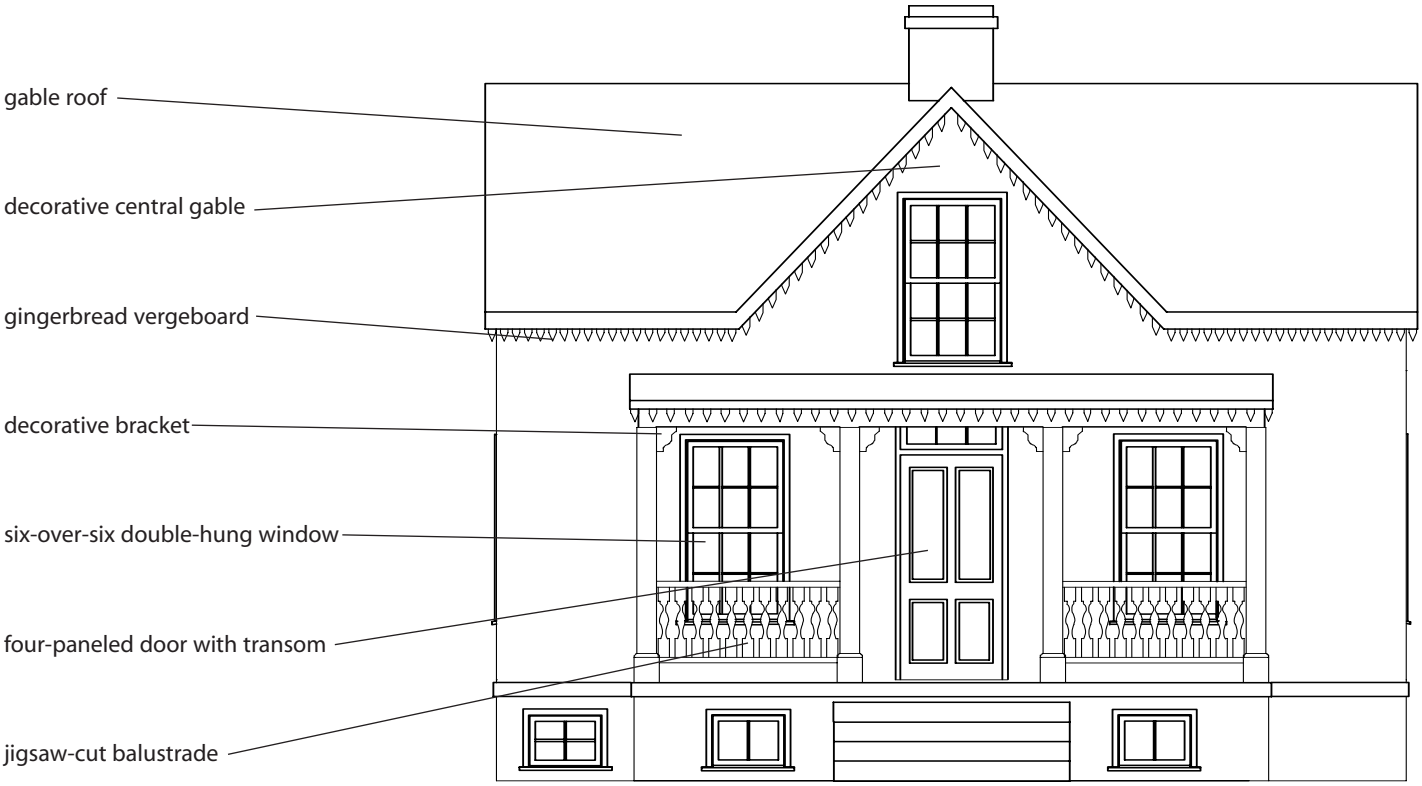
II Understanding District Character

B. Residential Building Styles

2. Vernacular Gothic Revival Cottage (1850-1880)

These romantically styled cottages reflected nineteenth-century America's growing interest in European periods of architecture. Smithfield's examples are frame construction with board-and-batten siding and vertical proportions. The steep gable roofs are metal, often with a central roof gable in the facade. The cornice is usually highly decorated with sawn millwork as is the elaborate front porch with its "gingerbread" carvings. While windows are tall, often extending to the floor, they have small panes.

The steeply pitched gable roof covered in fish-scale shingles and gingerbread trim are hallmarks of the Gothic Revival style.

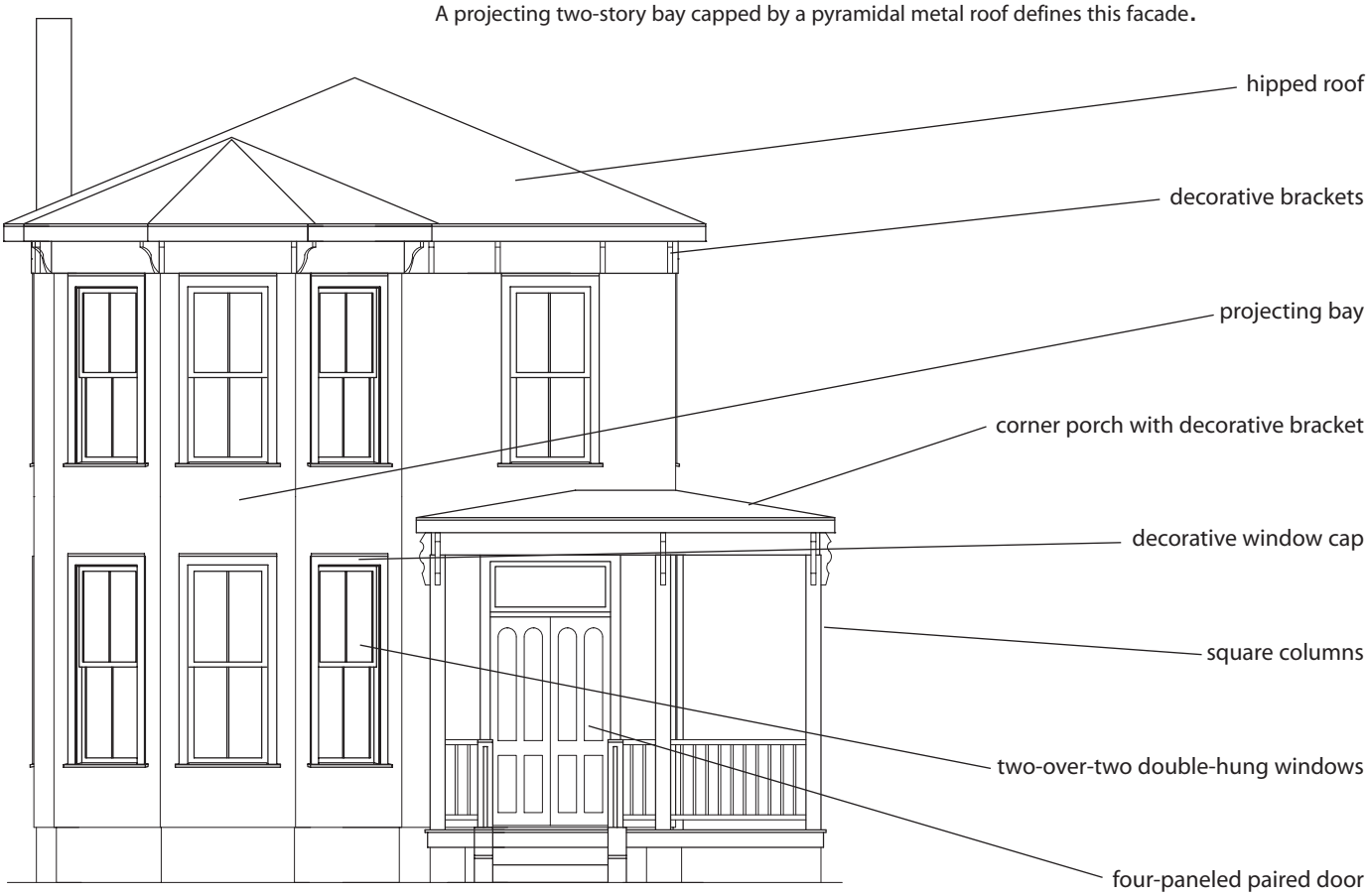


Gothic Revival Cottage

3. Italianate Vernacular (1860-1890)

These frame residences are generally two-story frame dwellings with hipped roofs and bracketed cornices. These large ornate brackets are often repeated on the front porch. Decorative caps over tall narrow windows are another feature of this style, which is based roughly on European models.

A projecting two-story bay capped by a pyramidal metal roof defines this facade.



Italianate Vernacular

II Understanding District Character

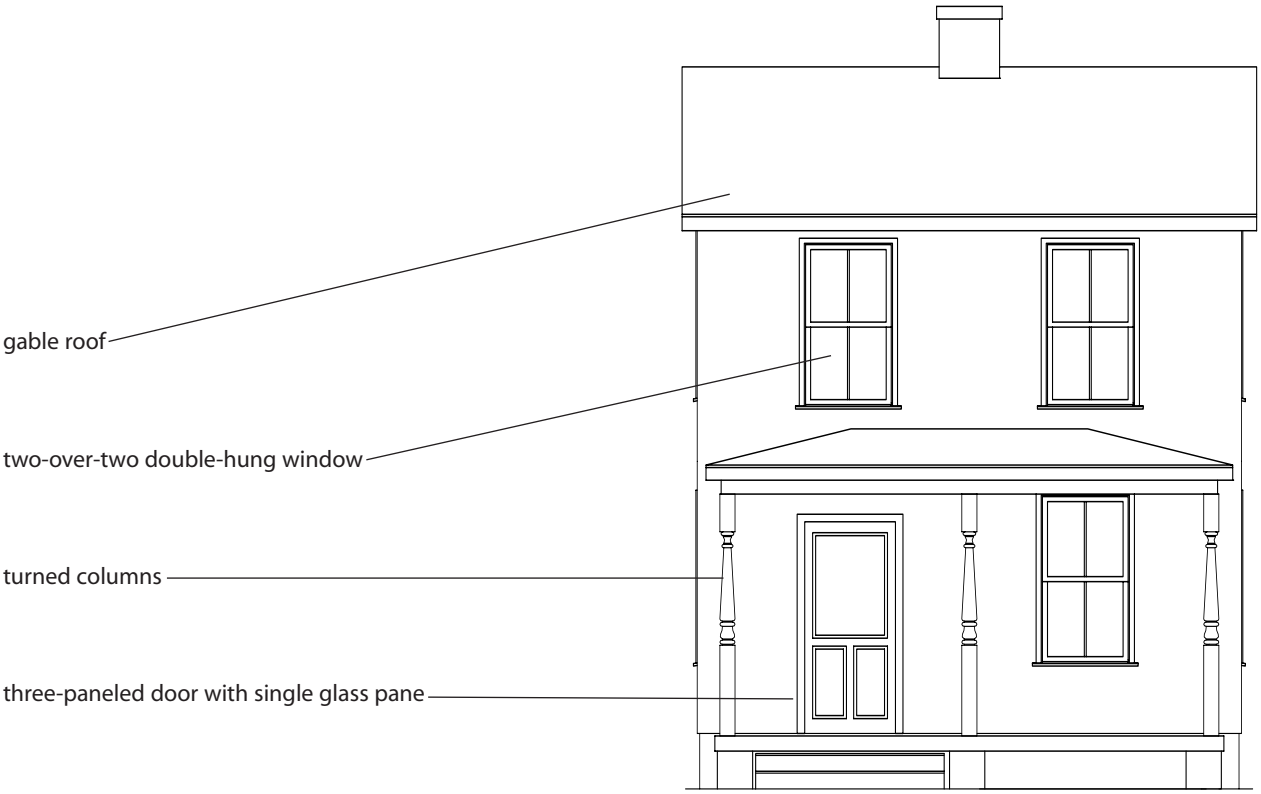
B. Residential Building Styles

4. Vernacular Victorian (1870-1920)

Built around the turn of the century, these frame houses all have simple Victorian details but can be in a variety of styles. The most commonly occurring variations in Smithfield are shown here.

The gable-roofed townhouse with its off-center entrance and a full-width porch can be found in both two-bay and three-bay forms in Smithfield.

In this two-bay example, squared columns spanned by a simple balustrade coupled with a decorative paint scheme call attention to this style's simple details.



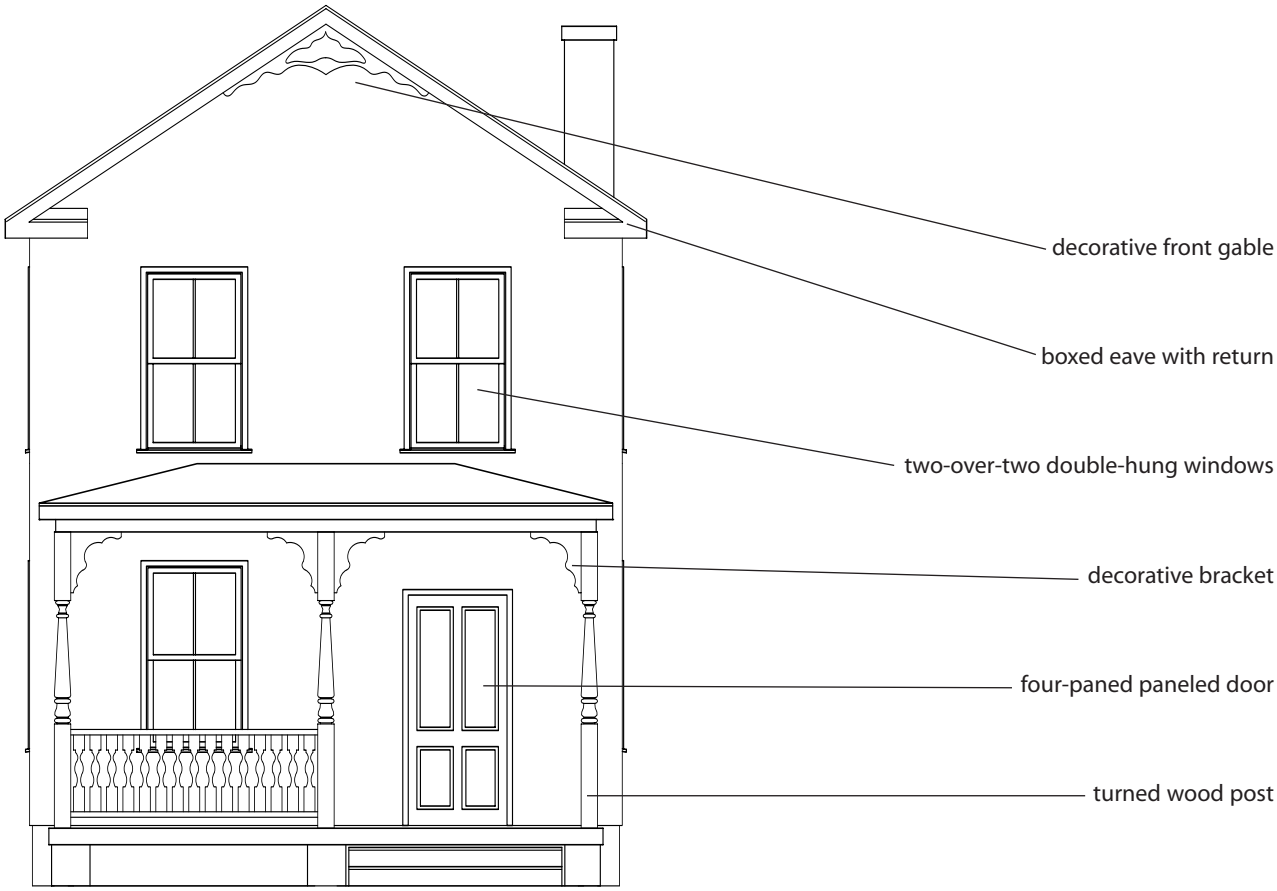
Vernacular Gable-roofed Townhouse

Understanding District Character II

B. Residential Building Styles

Turned balusters and scroll-sawn decorative elements, including corner brackets and balustrade, relate this facade to the Queen Anne style.

The front-gable house is a two-story structure but with vertical proportions and an asymmetrical facade. Decorative features can include patterned shingles in the gables and a front porch with sawn millwork.



Vernacular Front-gable Victorian

II Understanding District Character

B. Residential Building Styles

5. Queen Anne (1880-1910)

These dwellings are characterized by a complex roof, vertical proportions, asymmetrical facades, and a wrap-around porch. More elaborate examples are richly decorated with brackets, balusters, window surrounds, bargeboards, and other sawn millwork and use a variety of surface materials like shingles, wood siding, and brick. Roof turrets, decorative tall brick chimneys, and a variety of gable forms highlight the skylines of these large-scale residences.

The Gwaltney House is Smithfield's most recognizable Queen Anne structure and displays most of the character-defining features associated with this style.

Queen Anne

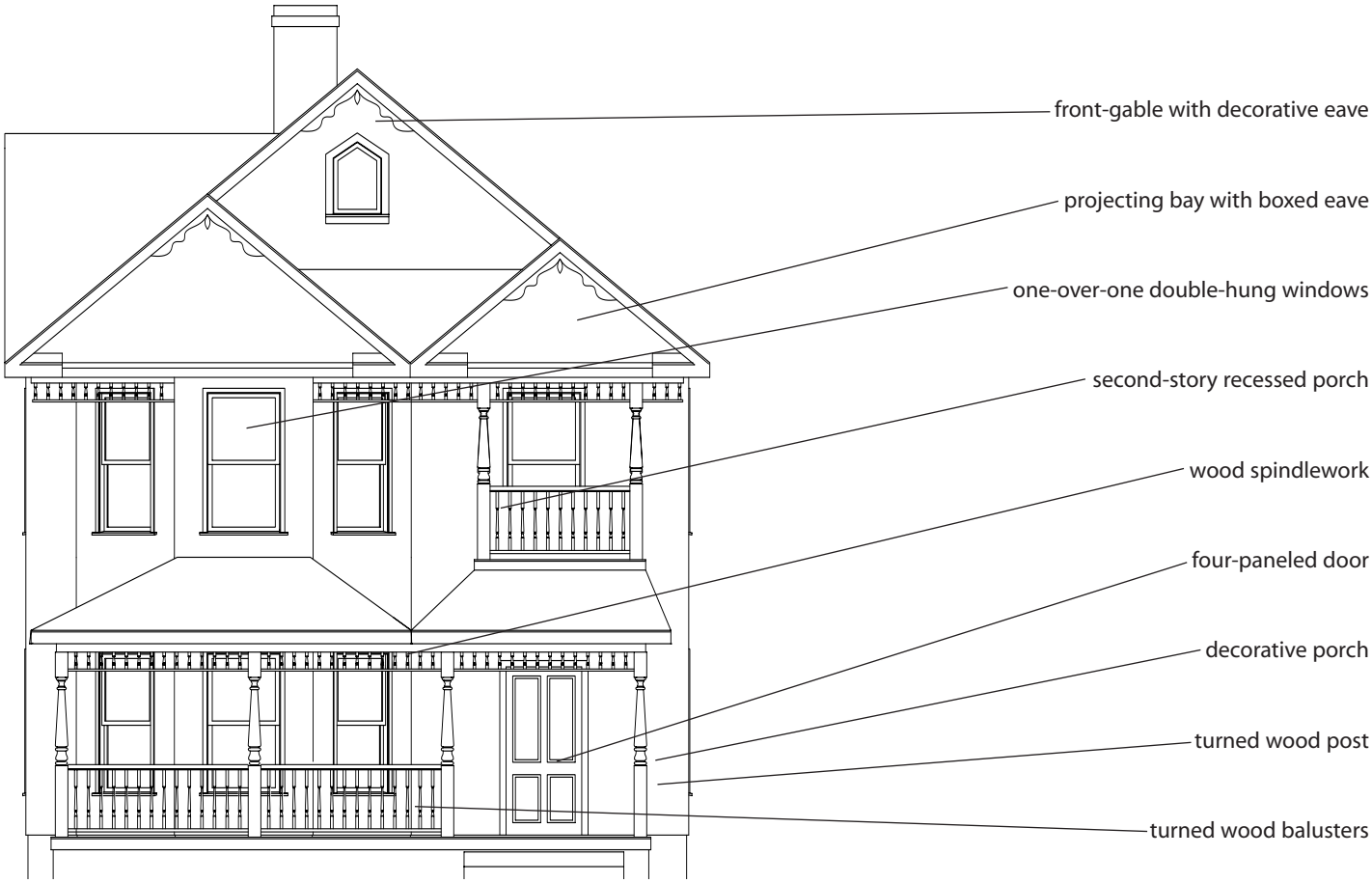
Understanding District Character II

B. Residential Building Styles

The simple form of this dwelling is marked by a projecting bay, complex roof form and high level of decorative millwork.

5. Queen Anne (1880-1910)

Simple Queen Anne houses have a simpler form and vertical proportions.



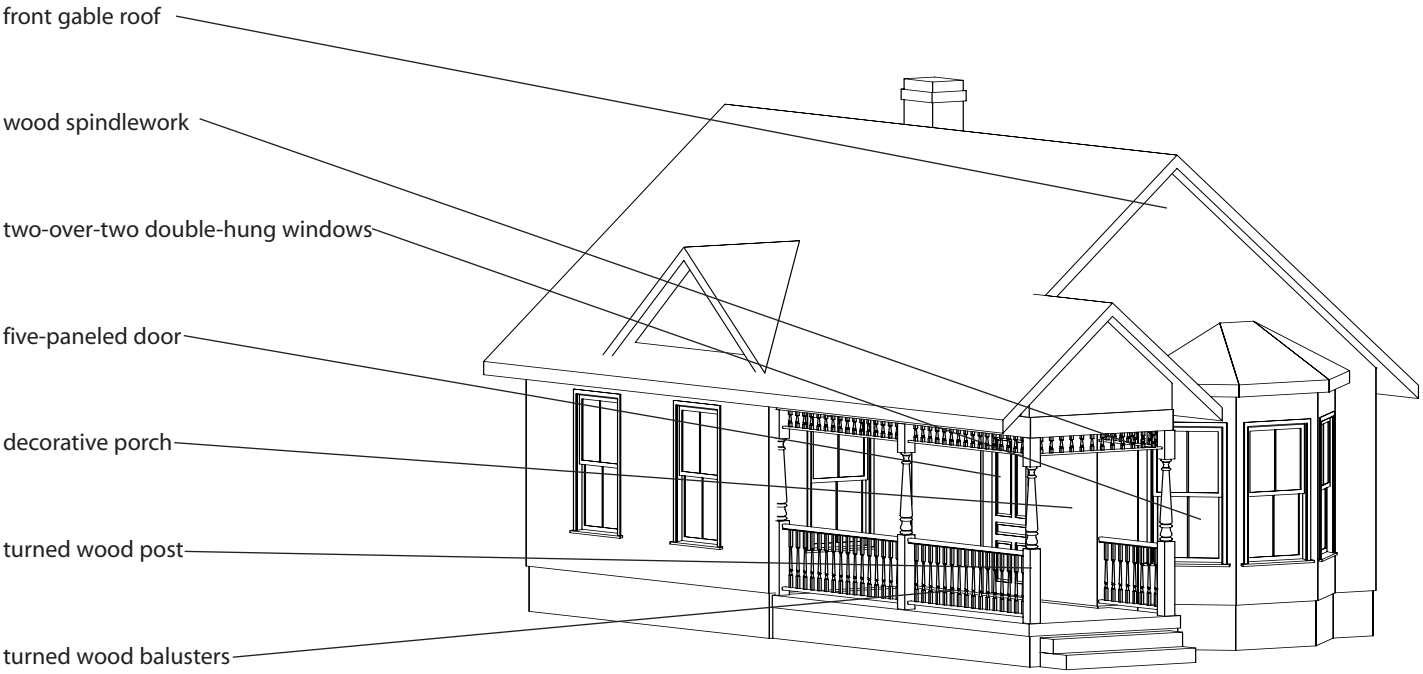
Simple Queen Anne

II Understanding District Character

B. Residential Building Styles

Vernacular Queen Anne cottages are small scale, usually only one-and-one-half stories, but retain the vertical proportions, asymmetrical facades with projecting bays, and decorative use of materials of the style.

A diamond pattern motif is repeated in the gable end shingles, leaded glass bay windows and porch elements of this cottage.



Queen Anne Cottage

6. Colonial Revival (1910-1940)

In a conscious return to elements of the earlier Georgian and Federal periods of American architectural history, these houses often have a rectangular plan and a symmetrical facade. Roofs may be gable or hipped and details are often classical. Porticos over the entrance are common. As in the styles from which Colonial Revival borrows, the windows have small panes; their proportions, however, are often more horizontal and the first floor sometimes contains paired or triple windows. Doorways can have various elements including sidelights, fanlights, pediments, and columns or pilasters.

Operable shutters frame small-paned windows on the symmetrically arranged facade of this wood siding clad example.

Two-story Colonial Revival

II Understanding District Character

B. Residential Building Styles

Often referred to as a Cape Cod, this smaller Colonial Revival dwelling displays many of the character defining features of the style including a symmetrical facade and small-paned windows.

A variation is the Vernacular Colonial Revival dwelling with its simpler details, frame construction, and smaller scale of one-and-a-half stories with dormer windows.

One-and-a-half-story Colonial Revival

7. Bungalow (1915-1940)

This one-and-one-half-story residential dwelling can be found in several variations in Smithfield's neighborhoods. The most common variation is the sweeping side-gable form with a massive roof that contains a large dormer and extends over a front porch. Roof overhangs are usually deep and contain large simple brackets and exposed rafter ends. Windows may be in pairs, and there are frequently side bays. Materials are often combinations of brick, shingles, stucco, and half-timber framing. Front porch supports usually have short, squat proportions.

A continuous shed dormer spans the width of this bungalow and echoes the grouped six-over-six windows on the first floor. Short wood columns rest on brick piers to support the full width front porch.

Bungalow

II Understanding District Character

C. Commercial Building Styles

Traditional retail/commercial buildings have one or two stories with a large transparent area for display of merchandise on the first floor. This display may be a traditional glass storefront with a recessed entry or a prominent entry flanked by very large windows. Additional light may enter the storefront through transom windows above the entryway and display windows. Upper stories originally were used for storage, office, or residences and generally have traditional windows in the upper facade. Cornices are the decorative element located at the roofline and often above the storefront as well.

More ornate versions are known as decorated retail/commercial buildings and may relate to a particular style depending on their design.

Large plate glass display windows are shaded by a fabric awning with decorative brick work above.

1. One-story Decorated

Understanding District Character II

C. Commercial Building Styles

2. Two-story Decorated

This corner building has large display windows facing both streets. The facade design employs decorative, multi-colored masonry and tile.

II Understanding District Character

C. Commercial Building Styles

3. One-story Vernacular

Simple versions of these structures are known as vernacular retail/commercial buildings.

A vertically laid band of brick above the awning provides a small degree of ornamentation to this facade.

Understanding District Character II

C. Commercial Building Styles

4. Two-story Vernacular

Bay divisions, stepped brick cornices over the storefronts and at the roofline, and arched details over the windows add interest to this facade.

II Understanding District Character

C. Commercial Building Styles

5. Classical Revival

This former bank building conveys the strength of the institution through its classical design elements and stone construction.

Interspersed with the retail structures are a number of office/institutional buildings that vary slightly in design. These buildings generally have a prominent central entrance flanked by windows. There are often vertical divisions in the facade to organize the openings and entrance. Because of their use they do not have display storefronts or large expanses of glass.

Simple versions are known as vernacular office/institutional buildings. More ornate versions are known as decorated office/institutional buildings. Their designs may incorporate elements from a particular style, such as the two examples on this page.

Understanding District Character II

C. Commercial Building Styles

6. Moderne

A variety of building materials and textures help to articulate this facade. Integral brick bands contribute to the buildings horizontal expression.