

# **THE ARCHER: DESIGN ANALYSIS**

**FOR PUBLIC HEARING  
NORTHFIELD HERITAGE PRESERVATION COMMISSION  
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## PROJECT INTRODUCTION

Rebound Real Estate proposes to construct a new four-story building—named The Archer—at the north end of the Northfield Historic District. The development site is the location of the former Archer House, which burned in 2020 and was demolished in 2021. The site is among the largest in the historic district and has approximately 160 feet of street frontage.

The project site is at the north end of the historic district. The Nutting Block to the south and the Northfield Carnegie Library to the east across Division Street are contributing resources in the district. The building immediately north of the site (200 Division Street) and the properties to the northeast and southeast (209, 301, 305, and 307 Division Street) are outside of the historic district. The location of the project site at the edge of the district and the low number of adjacent contributing structures will minimize the new building's potential impacts on the overall historic district.

## DESIGN ANALYSIS

A detailed analysis of the proposed new construction is below.

\* Denotes guidance from the National Park Service's *New Construction within the Boundaries of Historic Properties*.

° Denotes guidance from the *Northfield Historic District Design Guidelines*.

### Relationship to Contributing Buildings

- “The limitations on the size, scale, and design of new construction may be less critical the farther it is located from historic buildings.” \*
- “Protecting the historic setting and context of a property, including the degree of open space and building density, must always be considered when planning new construction on an historic site. This entails identifying the formal or informal arrangements of buildings on the site, and whether they have a distinctive urban, suburban, or rural character. For example, a historic building traditionally surrounded by open space must not be crowded with dense development.” \*
- “In properties with multiple historic buildings, the historic relationship between buildings must also be protected. Contributing buildings must not be isolated from one another by the insertion of new construction.” \*
- “The limitations on the size, scale, and design of new construction may be less critical the farther it is located from historic buildings.” \*

The development site is in a dense commercial district. Buildings typically abut one another, creating a nearly continual facade on Division Street. The former historic building on this site, the Archer House, did not follow this pattern and did not adjoin its neighbors. The proposed new construction will maintain that separation between buildings.

The development site is the northernmost parcel in the district on the west side of Division Street in the district. Because of this location, the new building will not isolate contributing resources. The project location at the north end of the historic district also minimizes its impact on individual contributing resources and on the district as a whole. There is historical precedent for a larger building with larger massing on this site. The Archer House was four stories tall above a

raised basement and occupied the full width of the site. The proposed new construction, also four stories tall, maintains this higher density at the north end of the historic district.

## **Massing**

Guidance:

- “The average height and width of the surrounding buildings determined a general set of proportions for an infill structure of the bays of a larger structure.” °
- “If the site is large, the mass of the facade can be broken into a number of smaller bays, to maintain a rhythm similar to the surrounding buildings.” °
- “As with new additions, the massing, size, scale, and architectural features of new construction on the site of a historic building must be compatible with those of the historic building. When visible and in close proximity to historic buildings, the new construction must be subordinate to these buildings. New construction should also be distinct from the old and must not attempt to replicate historic buildings elsewhere on site and to avoid creating a false sense of historic development.” \*

The development site is among the largest in the historic district. The proposed design breaks down the massing of the proposed building into four visual sections. A 60-foot section is at the south end of the building, adjacent to the Nutting Block. The fourth floor is recessed to reduce the massing of the new construction adjacent to a contributing resource, ensuring that the building is subordinate to the historic building. The recessed fourth floor will be clad in metal panels to further reduce its visual impact. The dark-gray panels will visually recede, allowing the 60-foot section to be viewed as a three-story structure.

The project team considered bringing the fourth floor flush with the rest of the facade to follow the letter of the historic district’s design guidelines. The result, however, was a monolithic and imposing structure that did not comply with the intent to create subordinate new construction with varying rooflines.

Two the north are two 40-foot sections separated by a 20-foot entrance bay, which is slightly recessed from the face of the building. The two 40-foot sections have four-story masonry facades. This reflects the vertical proportions of most contributing resources in the historic district. These taller masses are at the north end of the historic district, and are visually and physically separated from contributing buildings. Because of this separation, the four-story masses will not overwhelm or distract from individual historic building or the overall historic district.

## **Composition**

Guidance:

- “The composition of infill facades (that is, the organization of its parts) should be similar to that of surrounding facades.” °

The proposed design reflects the traditional composition of a commercial block: a tall first floor with storefronts and residential on the upper floors. There is a recessed entrance every 20 feet, maintaining the rhythm of the historic district at street level and providing a continuous experience for pedestrians. On the upper floors, bays of rectangular window openings are

regularly spaced across the facades. This is consistent with the composition of contributing buildings in the historic district and increases the compatibility of this new construction.

## **Setback**

Guidance:

- “The new facade should be flush with its neighbors.” °
- “The location of new construction should be considered carefully in order to follow the setbacks of historic buildings and to avoid blocking their primary elevations.” °
- “The location of new construction should be considered carefully in order to follow the setbacks of historic buildings and to avoid blocking their primary elevations. New construction should be placed away from or at the side or rear of historic buildings and must avoid obscuring, damaging, or destroying character-defining features of these buildings or the site.” \*

The facades of the three main section of the new building abut the sidewalk and are in the same plane as the facades of the district’s contributing buildings, including the neighboring Nutting Block. The building will maintain the continual facade on Division Street that is characteristic of the historic district.

The facade is recessed on all floors at the main building entrance (between the two 40-foot masses). The recess is deep enough to open the entrance doors, providing a safe place of refuge for visitors. The recesses on the upper floors are modest and will not detract from the character of the historic district. Recessed entrances are a common feature of contributing buildings in the historic district and the street-level experience of pedestrians will be maintained by the new construction.

The fourth floor of the 60-foot section is stepped back to reduce the overall massing of the building. This step back meets the intent of the design guidelines, to maintain a continual building face on Division Street. Recessing the fourth floor effectively breaks down the overall mass of the new building. Because of the large size of the site, bringing the fourth floor flush with rest of the facades would create a monolithic and imposing building that is incompatible with the scale of the contributing buildings in the historic district. The project team considered alternative methods of reducing the massing of the building, however, recessing the fourth floor is the most effective means of achieving a compatible massing while maintaining the unit count need to make the project economically viable.

Additionally, a characteristic feature of the historic district is the variety of building heights. The historic district does not have long stretches of buildings with the same roofline height. Recessing the fourth floor creates a varied roofline at the new building that is consistent with the historic district.

The proposed new building will not block or otherwise alter the primary elevations of any contributing buildings in the historic district. The new building will not engage with the adjacent Nutting Block and will not obscure, damage, or destroy any character-defining features of that property. The development property historically held a large building, the Archer House, and this

new construction is consistent with that use. The site does not have historically significant landscape features that would be obscured, damaged, or destroyed by the new construction.

## **Fenestration**

Guidance:

- “The size and proportion of window and door openings of an infill building should be similar to those on surrounding facades.” °
- “The same applies to the ratio of window area to solid wall for the facade as a whole.”
- “The infill building should fill the entire space and reflect the characteristic rhythm of facades along the street.” °

The proposed design maintains the proportions and scale of window openings and entrances seen on contributing resources in the historic district. The storefront and entrance bays on the first floor fill their bay. On the upper floors, the windows are vertically proportioned (taller than they are wide), which is reflective of the fenestration pattern seen throughout the district. The window openings are regularly spaced across the facades with two window bays above each storefront bay. This pattern is consistent with the contributing resources in the historic district and will maintain the visual rhythm of the district.

The majority of the window openings are rectangular, and arched window openings are proposed for the fourth floor of the two 40-foot sections. This combination of rectangular and arched window openings reflects the fenestration pattern of many contributing buildings in the historic district.

## **Details**

Guidance:

- “Infill architecture should reflect some of the detailing of surrounding buildings in window shapes, cornice lines, and brick work.” °

The design of the proposed new construction includes modern interpretations of historic details, resulting in a building that is compatible with the surrounding historic district while preventing the project from creating a false sense of history. The proposed design takes its cues from the contributing resources in the historic district and applies them to the proposed new building in a subtle and restrained manner to differentiate this building from historic resources.

On the 60-foot section, a subtle brick cornice projects slightly from the roofline. The headers of the third-floor windows are recessed brick, creating a restrained visual interest at these openings. Decorative brick spandrel panels are beneath the third-floor windows. The two 40-foot sections have more elaborate brick cornices above the decorative arched lintels at the fourth-floor windows. A brick and stone stringcourse runs under the fourth-floor windows.

## **Materials**

Guidance:

- “An infill facade should be composed of materials similar to adjacent facades. The new building should not stand out from the others.” °

Cream brick and red brick are the primary exterior materials, both of which are ubiquitous in the district. The adjacent Nutting Block and Northfield Carnegie Library are both red brick. Metal wall panels are proposed as a secondary material on the recessed portion of the fourth floor. The panels will be a matte gray, intended to visually recede and reduce the overall massing of the building.

A decorative metal screen will cover the second, third, and fourth floors of the 20-foot building section. Ornamental metal features were commonly included on late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century buildings, often seen in elaborate cornices, window hoods, storefront lintels, and applied details. Several contributing buildings in the historic district retain decorative metal features. The proposed screen is a modern expression of ornamental metal. While the decorative screen is concentrated on one section of the facade, the amount of metal is proportional to the scale of the new building and is secondary to the primary material (brick).

The inclusion of modern features is appropriate in a historic district to distinguish new construction as a product of its own time. The proposed metal screen uses a historically appropriate material in a modern application, resulting in a building that is compatible with its historic neighbors.

## **Colors**

### **Guidance:**

- “Colors utilized should relate to each other in a coherent and consistent design, and also be selected in response to the existing materials and colors of surrounding buildings. Color selections for each building will include all the visible elements in the exterior in order to achieve an integrated and coordinated design approach; and, this it will include such elements as: the wall materials, accessory items such as flashing and hardware, all the trim components around doors, windows, at cornices, and applied panels; the painted or pre-finished components such as windows and doors; and for awnings, signs, and exterior lighting fixtures.” °

The colors used on the proposed design are drawn from the palette of the historic district. The main colors are integral to the building materials—red and tan brick—which is consistent with the district. Dark neutral colors are proposed for the storefronts, windows, and entrance canopies. The fourth floor of the 60-foot section will be recessed and clad in gray metal panels. This color will reduce the visual impact of the fourth floor and minimize the overall massing of the building. Accent colors are at the two primary building entrances. A metal screen is planned for the north entrance. The final design of the screen will be subject for required City review. The current renderings show a dark bronze screen, which has a similar depth to its color as the adjacent red brick. This will allow viewers’ eyes to skim over the metal screen and limits its visual impact. Tile is proposed for the sidewalls of the recessed south entrance. This use of color will denote the entrance for visitors, but is subtle and will not detract attention from the overall design of the building or the character of the historic district.

## CONCLUSION

The proposed design for The Archer complies with the National Park Service's *New Construction with the Boundaries of Historic Properties* and the *Northfield Historic District Design Guidelines*.