

NEW HISTORY

MEMORANDUM

Date: May 15, 2026
To: City of Northfield
Attn: Scott Wopata, scott.wopata@northfieldmn.gov
CC: Mikayla Schmidt, Mikayla.Schmidt@northfieldmn.gov
Mathias Hughey, Mathias.Hughey@northfieldmn.gov
Project: Archer House Redevelopment
Division Street South, Northfield, MN
Regarding: Northfield Commercial Historic District Design Guidelines
New History Project No.: 2026-C40-387
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We understand that a redevelopment project has been proposed at the former location of the Archer House at South Division Street, within the locally-designated Northfield Commercial Historic District. The district is also listed in the National Register of Historic Places in the areas of Architecture, Commerce, Industry and Community Planning and Development, with a period of significance of 1856 – 1966. At your request, the purposes of this memorandum are 1) to evaluate the proposed and revised project against the *City of Northfield Downtown Historic Preservation Design Guidelines* (the “design guidelines”) and the Secretary of the Interior’s *Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties* (the “Standards”), which are used as development standards for buildings within the historic district (per Chapter 34, Article 3.2 of the Northfield City Code) and 2) to provide additional recommendations on changes to the design to meet the design guidelines and the Standards.

This memorandum is the third iteration of our evaluation and recommendations. Our initial memorandum, dated April 14, 2026, was based on concept renderings (undated, Amcon, Design Tree, Rebound) shared with our office on April 11, 2026. Subsequently, concepts were revised and presented to the Heritage Preservation Commission (HPC) Subcommittee on April 23, 2026. On May 4, 2026, we provided an updated memorandum with additional recommendations to meet the design guidelines and standards, based on these revised concepts. The revised concepts were shared with the full HPC on May 6, 2026. Following the HPC meeting, the project design was revised again. On May 13, 2026, representatives from the HPC Subcommittee, New History, Amcon, and Rebound met again to review this latest iteration of the design.

Based on our analysis of the current design presented at the May 13, 2026 meeting, New History finds that the proposed new construction meets the local design guidelines and the Standards. The purpose of this memorandum is to document our analysis of the current



design iteration against the design guidelines and Standards, and to document the additional recommendations of the HPC Subcommittee at the May 13, 2026 meeting.

Historic preservation is one of many factors that cities use to evaluate projects. This memo does not address other factors, such as economic development, social, or environmental benefits and impacts of the project, or compliance with the city zoning ordinance or building code. This evaluation is solely an assessment with respect to the design guidelines and Standards.

Evaluation of Proposed Project

Local Design Guidelines

Below, the project has been evaluated against each applicable guideline in the design guidelines for new downtown construction.

1. Proportions of the Façade: “The average height and width of the surrounding buildings determines a general set of proportions for an infill structure or the bays of a larger structure.” “The infill building should fill the entire space and reflect the characteristic rhythm of façades along the street. 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.”

Aspects of guideline met:

- The façade is split into three components, consisting of two primary brick facades flanking a central stone façade.
- Each of the three main building components is divided into visual bays with the rhythm and spacing of windows.
- The height of proposed building is similar to, but slightly taller than, the adjacent historic building to the south (the Nutting Block at 220 Division Street South). Based on information presented in the May 13, 2026 meeting, the building will be five feet taller than the Nutting Block.

2. Composition: “The composition of the infill facade (that is, the organization of its parts) should be similar to that of surrounding façades. Rhythms that carry throughout the block (such as window spacing) should be incorporated into the new facade.”

Aspects of guideline met:

- The symmetrical window spacing is compatible with surrounding façades.
- The building has a three-part design (bottom-middle-top) that is also compatible with surrounding façades.

3. Proportions of the Openings: “The size and proportion of window and door openings of an infill building should be similar to those on surrounding façades. The same applies to the ratio of window area to solid wall for the facade as a whole.”

Aspects of guideline met:

- The storefront openings and rhythm at the primary façade are compatible with surrounding buildings, including the recessed entries to all tenant spaces.
- Based on information presented at the May 13, 2026 meeting, windows within proposed openings have similar proportions to windows of buildings in the historic district, generally, between a 2:1 and 2.5:1 ratio.
- A ratio of window area to solid wall has not been provided, but appears similar to other buildings within the district.

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

Aspects of guideline met:

- The proposal includes arched windows at the upper level, which are found at other contributing buildings in the district.
- The central bay is articulated through subtle variations in the plane of the façade around the window openings, creating a vertical emphasis.
- The proposal includes brick detailing, including quoining at edges of front façade and cornice detailing at storefront, upper level, and parapets.

5. Materials. An infill facade should be composed of materials similar to adjacent facades. The new building should not stand out from the others.

Aspects of guideline met:

- The proposed brick and cast stone materials at the façade will allow the building to blend with others in the district.
- The building proposes variance in materials, similar to adjacent façades.

6. Color. “The colors chosen for an infill facade should relate to the building’s neighbors.”

Aspects of guideline met:

- The proposal uses red and neutral brick colors with a black aluminum storefront assembly, which are compatible with the adjacent contributing buildings.

7. Building Setback. “The new facade should be flush with its neighbors.”

Aspects of guideline met:

- The building appears to maintain the same approximate setback as adjoining buildings at the three main façade components.

Secretary of the Interior's Standards¹

Below, the project has been evaluated against each Standard that is applicable to new construction within a historic district.

Standard 9. “New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction will not destroy historic materials, features, and spatial relationships that characterize the property. The new work shall be differentiated from the old and will be compatible with the historic materials, features, size, scale and proportion, and massing to protect the integrity of the property and its environment.”

Aspects of Standard met:

- The proposed building does not destroy historical materials, features, or spatial relationships that characterize the historic district. It will not involve physical alteration to contributing buildings in the district, and it appears to be generally consistent with the approximate zero lot line setback of historical buildings in the district, thus maintaining the defining spatial relationship between the street-facing façades of contributing buildings and Division Street.
- The proposed design is differentiated from the historic buildings in the district in the following ways:
 - The amount of cast stone utilized at the center bay and the use of modern materials like aluminum storefronts
 - The square window openings at the center bay
 - The window openings appear to have shallower shadow lines, indicating more modern wall construction (as compared to traditional load-bearing masonry)
- These differences allow the building to read as recent construction and avoid creating a false sense of history.
- As noted in the sections above, the proposed design is compatible with the historic materials of contributing buildings in the district. It also appears to be compatible with district buildings in its size and scale.

Standard 10. New additions and adjacent or related new construction will 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.

Aspects of Standard met:

- Because the project does not involve alterations to contributing buildings in the district, it could be removed in the future without impact to the integrity of the historic district.

¹ National Park Service, Technical Preservation Services, “The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties,” accessed December 12, 2024, <https://www.nps.gov/orgs/1739/secretary-standards-treatment-historic-properties.htm>.

Additional HPC Subcommittee Recommendations

At the meeting on May 13, 2026, the HPC Subcommittee and City staff provided the following additional recommendations.

- Increase expression of separate bays at the first level, similar to the three bays that are expressed at the upper level. Specific recommendations included:
 - Carry the vertical bay emphasis established by the upper-level quoining down to the ground level through the use of brick detailing, variations in stone texture, or other vertical design elements.
 - Recess or otherwise differentiate the central bay at the first level in a manner generally consistent with setback depths found elsewhere in the historic district (approximately 1–2 feet).
 - Increase glazing between tenant entrances and associated storefronts to visually group storefront bays, reduce the amount of solid wall at the first level, and lessen the monolithic appearance of the ground-floor façade.
- The Subcommittee acknowledged prior city guidance encouraging the rear (riverfront) elevation to function as a primary façade. However, members also recommended that the rear façade reflect the generally simpler character of rear façades found on contributing buildings within the historic district, rather than directly replicating the design treatment of the primary street-facing elevation. Specific recommendations included:
 - Simplifying the upper-story window treatment by removing the arched detailing while retaining the cornice and horizontal banding.
 - Removing the herringbone brick panels at the central bay
- City staff recommended that the parapet extend continuously along the side elevations to fully screen rooftop mechanical equipment in accordance with code requirements. (This recommendation is beyond the scope of the historic design guidelines and Standards.)
- The subcommittee recommended additional detailing at the top of the central bay to further articulate the large wall expanse above the upper-level windows. Recommendations included incorporating rough-cut stone or similar masonry detailing.
- The Subcommittee recommended a tan color be utilized for brick panels beneath windows in the central bay at the primary façade.
- The Subcommittee and City staff recommended that no uplighting be installed.