

STONY CREEK

Village District



STONY CREEK VILLAGE DISTRICT DESIGN GUIDELINES

Introduction to the Stony Creek Village District Design Guidelines

Over two years ago, the Stony Creek Association matched a grant from the CT Trust for Historic Preservation to conduct a study of the buildings in the village of Stony Creek. The study was an initial step toward consideration of designating Stony Creek as a Village District to help maintain the character and charm of the village.

The study was conducted during a two week period in May 2012 by Robert Orr & Associates LLC of New Haven. The consultants toured Stony Creek observing, measuring, and photographing its buildings. The consultants and the committee members held several meetings with residents to garner their comments regarding the elements that contribute to the character of Stony Creek and to gather their feelings about life in the village. The Stony Creek Association Village District committee worked very closely with the consultants to produce this document.

The ***Stony Creek Village District Design Guidelines*** not only capture the essence of Stony Creek as reflected in the design, scale and rhythm of the buildings, but also the spirit of life in the village. This text is a companion document to the ***Stony Creek Village District Amendment*** to the Branford Zoning Regulations Section 5.7 and is intended to serve as a reference for the Stony Creek Village District Review Board.

Stony Creek Association Village District Committee

Greg Ames, Josh Brooks, Ted Ells, Linda Reed, Betsy Wieland, chair

Spring 2013

Stony Creek Village District Design Guidelines

The Village of Stony Creek is located in the southeastern corner of the Town of Branford; a Connecticut coastal community situated approximately five miles east of the City of New Haven. The proposed district is bounded per the Stony Creek Village District map which is illustrated in this document.

Public Input

A public workshop was held on May 5-6, 2012 to invite the Stony Creek residents to define the characteristics that best describe the village and are important in maintaining its context. The following is a summary of the generally agreed upon characteristics that came from the meetings:

General Characteristics

- There is much familiarity among residents that fosters friendly, neighborly relationships and promotes social gatherings.
- The off-shore Islands make residents feel like they are “living in a vacation spot.”
- Stony Creek is eclectic and its people are economically and demographically diverse.
- Residents have a strong sense of individuality.
- There is a strong sense of neighborhoods and volunteerism.
- The community has the ability to act together and to honor tradition; for example, the recently opened Stony Creek Museum.
- The Stony Creek Association is the community’s political forum.
- There are strong community traditions: Memorial Day Parade, Fife & Drum Corps, the Blessing of the Fleet, etc.
- Stony Creek is a “safe” place to live and raise kids.
- Children are free to roam.

Streets

- Sidewalks and the streets themselves are very walk-able.
- Streets are narrow.
- The closeness of houses creates a pleasant streetscape.
- There is life and vitality in the streets.
- Buildings are close together along streets that function as public domain, surrounded by nature -- no “sprawl.”

Built Environment

- Charming, a wonderful place to grow up, live, and retire.
- Evolving.
- Building forms are diverse and eclectic: the village is unique.
- Scale, mass and proportionality of buildings are consistent throughout village.
- Mixed-uses, presence of commercial, religious and civic buildings as well as residential.
- Sense of history as well as historic character.
- Views to and use of water and natural habitat including abundant public access.
- Stony Creek is NOT a subdivision.
- Mass & volume should not be excessive.
- No condominiums or bulky looking buildings.
- Size is “perfect”.

Context Sensitive Design: The whole is the sum of its part

Walking through Stony Creek one observes all the characteristics identified by citizens in the notes above. The streets are narrow. There's a lush canopy of mature native trees arching over the roadway, children play in the streets, adults stop in small groups to chat as they cross paths, and native materials dominate the landscape and buildings. As a rule, most structures are made of durable rather than disposable materials, such as weathered and painted wood, granite, and a handful of buildings feature brick or stucco, all of which reflect a shared sensibility aimed toward sustainability.



This is the context of Stony Creek. In fact, one notes a great deal of pride in the copious inventory of made-by-hand craftsmanship fashioned by the people who made this place over many generations. No one would dispute that Stony Creek has an easily identifiable soul.

Despite the architectural diversity that citizens are quick to point out, buildings in Stony Creek actually share an unusual consistency in their pleasing proportions and in many shared features, such as porches, balconies, and architectural embellishments that reward any walk through the village. New discoveries greet successive walks. Even though there is a breadth of architectural styles, some historic, some modern, some uncategorized, the consistent sensitivity to context seems to follow an unwritten code of mutual respect. One senses a distinct quality where the overall character of the village is more important than any individual statement, no matter how eccentric that statement might be. It seems as though every individual piece is fashioned as if to recognize it is but a part of the overall village.



The purpose of this study is to capture the character of the whole and to reflect and maintain that character through guidelines that describe the various elements that contribute to the overall context of the village. When design is sensitive to context, the character of the village remains intact, not, as an historic district, but as a “living tradition.” This is born out by the fact that diverse elements, whether they adhere to established principals of traditional design or a design that is a unique personal expression, have been and can be accommodated as long as they contribute sensitively to the context of the Village District as a whole, in keeping with the truly eclectic nature of the community.

Street Design Guidelines: A people centered community

The character of the Village District streets varies slightly from center to edge, but in all cases adheres to walk-ability (people-centric) rather than mobility (auto-centric) standards.

There are four distinct characters that define The Stony Creek Village District:

- 1) the Seaside character comprises all the properties along the seashore,
- 2) the Inland character comprises all the properties fronting Thimble Islands Road, except for the Village Center and properties fronting Watrous Avenue.

- 3) the Highland character comprises the remaining residential properties,
- 4) the Village Center character comprises all the properties fronting Indian Point Road and Thimble Islands Road in three principle areas surrounding the Stony Creek Marine, the Stony Creek Market, and the Willoughby Wallace Library.



Additional photos are located in the appendix.

Village Center Character (mixed-use: commercial, civic and residential)

In the Village Center, streets have two narrow travel lanes (approximately 10 – 11 feet wide), curbs, delineated parallel or head in parking (at 8 feet for parallel and 18 feet for head in) and sidewalks (5+ feet). Streets are defined by buildings that are one to three and one-half stories, including mixed-use, with a good deal of architectural character close to sidewalks. In several instances, buildings are grouped around small, well-tended greens of irregular shapes that divide traffic and feature civic monuments. Curbs are asphalt, granite, or concrete. Sidewalks are concrete and streets are asphalt.



There is a noticeable increase in pedestrian traffic at the Village Center as small groups congregate and engage in conversation. Children scuttle down streets on bikes and skateboards, and cars proceed cautiously. The scale of all elements, including streets, sidewalks, landscape, buildings and their compact relationship to one another, makes for an environment highly suitable to a wide array of human activity. Clearly, the current streets and physical environment of the village center are people-centric rather than auto-centric in their design, and use, and should continue in this regard.

Although the Village Center is thought of as a place, it is actually a long corridor threading along Thimble Island Road with three distinct areas of activity

- 1) The northern area has a cultural character and is home to the Stony Creek Museum, the Willoughby Wallace Memorial Library, the Puppet House and several art galleries.
- 2) The main gathering area is located in the middle of Thimble Island Road where Bayview Park, the Stony Creek Market, the Church of Christ and the post office bring people together on a daily and lingering basis.



- 3) The area farthest south in Stony Creek provides access to water related activities, including tourism, since it connects to the town dock. Visitors and residents can enjoy Madeira Park, the beach, the boat ramp, the boat slips, Thimbleberry Café, Stony Creek Marine, the summerhouse, the town dock and the tour boats. The water related uses at this end of the village provide unique opportunities for socializing.

The distinct characters of these three areas are entirely appropriate to their surroundings: the northern cultural area is in a quiet and sheltered place, the middle area is a meeting place near the beach, recreational park and bustling confluence of diverse activities, and the southern tourism area is nearest water related businesses and activities.

Most commercial activity is concentrated in these three areas of the village center, however, some commercial activities occur throughout the village in residential neighborhoods, just as some residential uses occur within the Village Center. Businesses in the residential neighborhoods are primarily small owner-operated live-work enterprises with limited or no public interaction.

Residential Neighborhood Character (Seashore, Inland and Highland



Surrounding the mixed-use Village Center are the Seashore, Inland and Highland residential neighborhoods. Residential neighborhood streets differ from the Village Center, generally conforming to a more rural character. Street widths are narrower than those along the Village Center, often barely one-lane wide. Paving edges disappear into the bordering vegetation with no curbs, sidewalks or controlled drainage. The predominantly two-way streets range from 16 to 20 feet in width, and are surfaced with asphalt or gravel. Even though there is no designated parking, cars park along shoulders, half into the vegetated areas, further narrowing the active driving lane. Such streets are called “yield streets” because vehicles must pull over and yield to approaching traffic. The unwieldiness of yield streets makes them great traffic calmers where pedestrians feel safe and comfortable strolling down the middle of streets, and parents feel little or no concern for their children playing. The compact proximity of the houses to the streets and to each other contributes further to walk ability and a sense of shared community. Street lighting is generally low level and is supplemented with light spilling from residential windows, porch lights, and door entry lights. Stony Creekers enjoy dark skies.

Building Design Guidelines: Little Things Mean a Lot

The features described below have resulted in the current architectural configurations that give rise to the scale, texture, and rhythm (and facilitate the social activity) that create the unique and desirable character of the village of Stony Creek.

Just as streets are context sensitive, new buildings must also demonstrate sensitivity to the Village District context. Building character throughout the Village District generally ranges from one to three and one half stories in height. Front yards are very shallow resulting in an intimacy of scale in the village. For the most part, building setbacks vary between 0 and 20 feet in the Village Center and for Inland

buildings along Thimble Island Road while Highland buildings have setbacks that range from 10 to 30 feet. Hedges and fences that are low or visually porous afford a measure of privacy without becoming solid walls divorcing our sidewalks and streets from the spaces and views beyond. On the main streets, sidewalks provide an amenity that should be considered for lots that do not already have them.

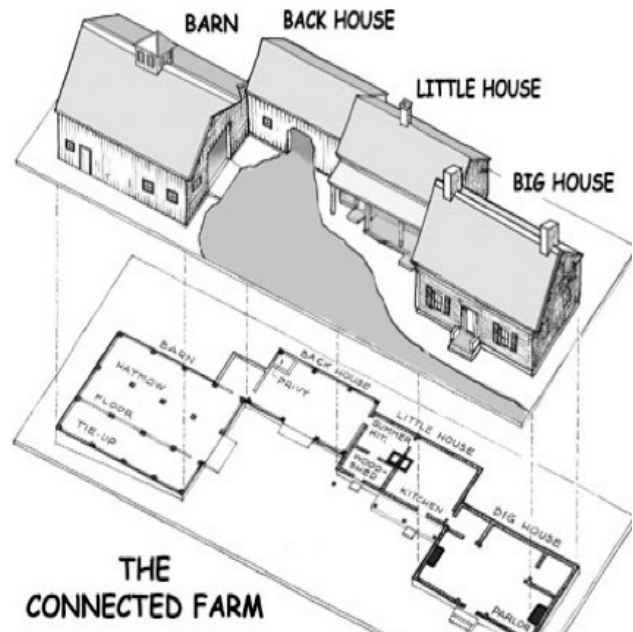


Street facades are generally not wide. This, combined with narrow side yards, results in the characteristic, modulating and, repetitive A/B/A/B (Building/Space/Building/Space) rhythm of the streets. Buildings in the Village Center and in the Inland along Thimble Island Road are spaced from 10 to 60 feet, while Highland buildings are spaced from 20 to 80 feet. In addition to providing space, the repetitive side yards give a depth to the street and a relief to the wall of building along the street, while providing view corridors between the houses.



Principal blocks of buildings, not including porches, bays, balconies, and other projections, follow very close proportional patterns throughout the Village District. These patterns tend to be 2 parts wide to 3 parts tall (to eave), and 4 parts deep, 2:3:4. Very long street facades are rare. Narrow gable ends facing the street, often with vertical proportions, predominate. This verticality is seen in the building masses and in the windows, doors, and other features of the façade.

Where people have need for more space, additions similarly proportioned but smaller in scale are set as perpendicular wings aligned with the rear of the house. If even more space is needed an additional projecting mass with the same proportions can be added to the connector



wing such that the projecting mass appears like another house facing the street. In this incremental additive process, buildings are, or look as though they are, enlarged over time, so that significant square footages are accommodated without compromising the small-scale character of the Village District.

Connected farms (see right) offer an example of massing that demonstrates how large functions can be achieved with small scale.

Embellishments

Larger houses, regardless of age, typically have projected bays or recessed side wings thus maintaining the small scale that characterizes the village.

- Garages, barns, boathouses, and sheds typically occur, at least halfway back along the side of principal buildings, or, as detached structures in the rear yard, or water's edge. Garages, barns, boathouses and sheds follow the barn-like appearance in massing and materials of farming and/or fishing related outbuildings, commensurate with a longstanding village devoted to such industries.



- Porches, balconies, decks, and terraces are very important features of the architecture of the village, giving depth and texture to the buildings while acting as a modulating, transitional space between the house interior and the yard and street. Even more importantly, they facilitate and engender the social activity that we value so highly in Stony Creek. Even when empty, they remind us of that neighborly interaction.

Wrap-around porches project beyond the fronts of the buildings described above and act as outdoor rooms close enough to streets that they actively engage life in the street. Porches are most common in houses along the shore, but occur throughout the village and should be encouraged along all street frontages for the social capital they impart to the street, commensurate with the social spirit of the village described by citizens.



Stony Creek porches are both useful and symbolic, with widths ranging from 6-10 feet to allow sitting, dining, and socializing. Porches are purposed to enlarge interior space when the warmer summer months stimulate increased social gatherings, with wide openings, such as French doors, leading to interior spaces.

Porches break forward of the building line, and in some cases abut sidewalks and thoroughfares. Porch posts range widely from classical (generally the simpler Tuscan or Doric Order), to Victorian with elaborate carpenter gothic detailing and brackets, to simple unembellished posts and beams. Openings between vertical members are vertical in proportion approximately 2:3. Porch railings also reflect a made-by-hand craftsman appearance, as generations of craftspeople seem to have taken special pride in expressing their trades. Porch columns, pilasters, bay windows, and other such features also modulate the rhythm and scale of the buildings, as do cornices, corner boards and other trim. Changes in materials, textures and colors also enhance the scale and visual interest of the buildings.

- Roofs have gable, low hip, flat, or shed pitches in both residential and commercial areas. Pitches are generally 8:12 to 11:12 with outliers reaching up to 14:12 or flat with porch roofs and hips being 3:12 to 5:12. Some tower roofs are 24:12. Roof materials include a wide variety of products from asphalt to wood shingle to slate, but all observe a generally New England character, natural in appearance with earthy colors established when roofs by necessity were covered with locally available native materials. Roofs address the street frontage with both gable ends and eave sides, adding variety to the street texture. Roof overhangs at eaves are generally 1 to 3 feet.



- Bay windows and balconies are common throughout the Village District, and like porches, are useful rather than symbolic with depths ranging from 4 to 6 feet to allow sitting.



Windows in bays are typically double hung. They fill the space between

corner posts, and between the eaves and the top of inside window seat backs providing a glassy appearance. Balconies are protected with open wood railings that once again reflect the skills of Stony Creek craftsmanship.

- As architectural elements, towers occur with some frequency on Stony Creek houses within the Village District. These towers add considerable character to the Village District.



Historic Context Guidelines: A living tradition

In 1988, approximately 71% of Stony Creek buildings were identified as contributing structures of historic merit and represented a good deal of the character that makes up the context of the Village District. Sadly, many of these structures no longer exist. Therefore, NPS Form, OMB No. 1024-0018, 1988, Stony Creek/Thimble Islands Historic District, Dated Nov 14, 1988, is included by reference into these Village District guidelines as they pertain to properties within the Village District boundary

The NPS Form identifies dates, and other available information related to specific structures and describes in further detail the characteristics of the various periods of building in Stony Creek. Like the rest of these Village District Guidelines, the NPS Form shall be used as supplemental information to help define the overall character of the Village District. Once again, their inclusion is not meant to lock new development in the past, but rather to join with other parts and facets of the Village District itemized above to establish the context to which new construction must demonstrate its respect in carrying forward a “living tradition”.

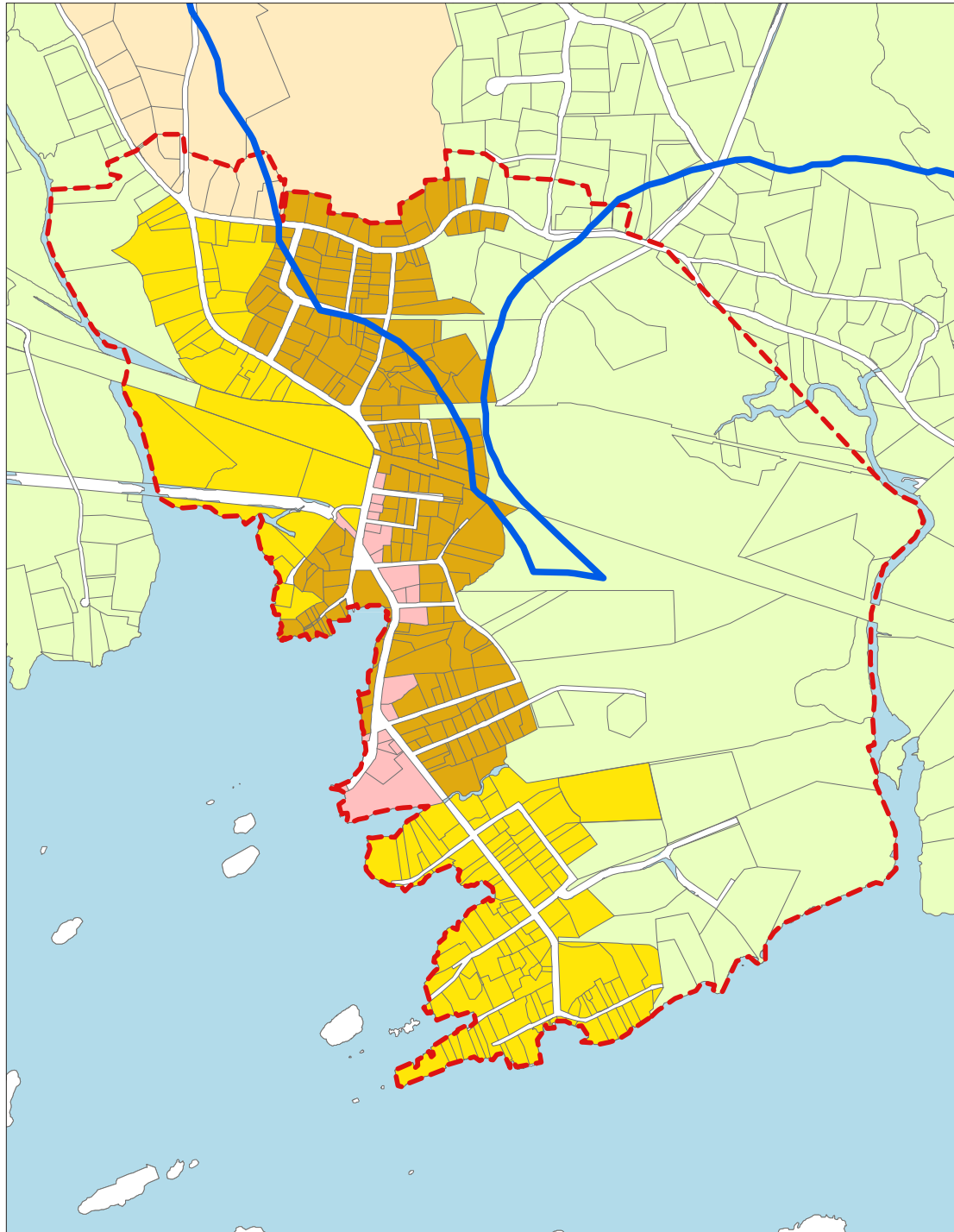
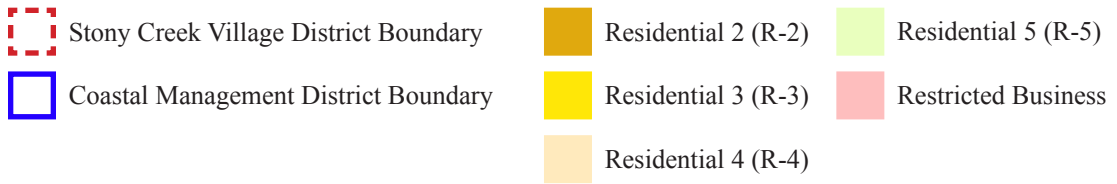
Summary

The residents of Stony Creek appreciate the uniqueness, charm and character of their village. It is therefore important to ensure that new buildings, additions and improvements, whether large or small, sensitively contribute to the context of the Village as a whole through adherence to the design standards outlined in the proposed ***Stony Creek Village District Amendment*** to the Branford Zoning Regulations to ensure that Stony Creek's uniqueness, charm and character is enhanced and can be enjoyed by future generations.

Part I: Appendix

- Page 1: Map identifying the Seaside, Inland, Highland, and Village Center of Stony Creek
- Page 2: Pictures of the buildings in Seaside
- Page 10: Pictures of buildings in Inland
- Page 21: Pictures of buildings in Highland
- Page 27: Pictures of buildings in the Village Center

Stony Creek Village District Map



STONY CREEK

Village District

Guideline Photo Appendix – *Photo Inventory of Character Areas*

The following photographs taken March 4, 2012 illustrate the character of the four Village District areas identified on the Village District Map: Seaside, Inland, Highland and Village Center.

SEASIDE CHARACTER AREA



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Village District

Guideline Photo Appendix – *Photo Inventory of Character Areas*

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INLAND CHARACTER AREA



INLAND CHARACTER AREA



INLAND CHARACTER AREA



INLAND CHARACTER AREA



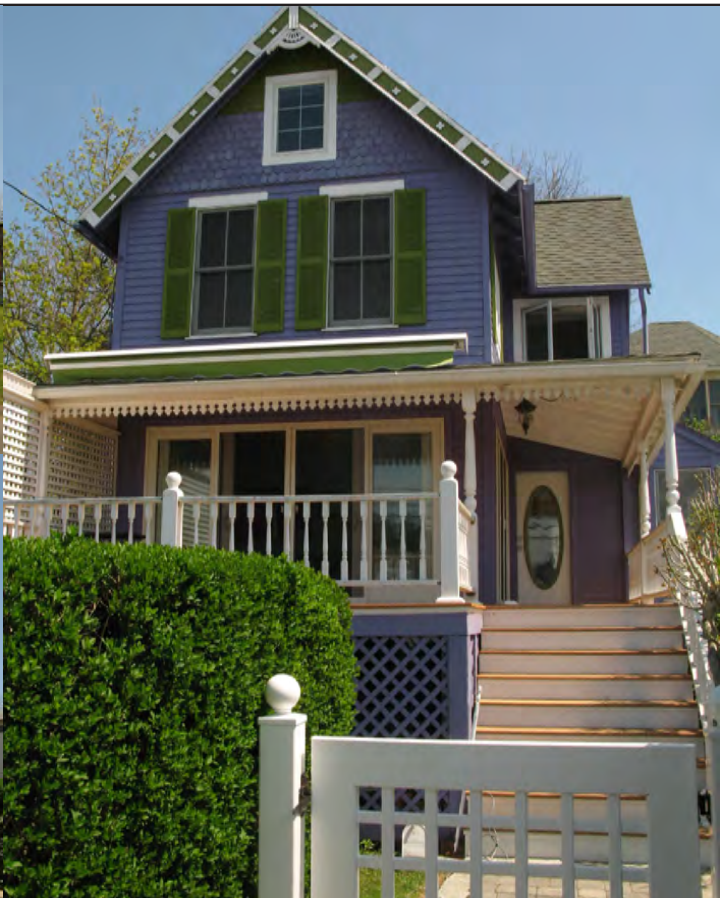
INLAND CHARACTER AREA



INLAND CHARACTER AREA



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INLAND CHARACTER AREA



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Village District

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HIGHLAND CHARACTER AREA



HIGHLAND CHARACTER AREA



HIGHLAND CHARACTER AREA



HIGHLAND CHARACTER AREA



HIGHLAND CHARACTER AREA



HIGHLAND CHARACTER AREA



STONY CREEK

Village District

Guideline Photo Appendix – *Photo Inventory of Character Areas*

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VILLAGE CENTER CHARACTER AREA



VILLAGE CENTER CHARACTER AREA



VILLAGE CENTER (CIVIC SPACES) CHARACTER

