

Historic Windows Preservation Treatment

The City of Sacramento has adopted the *Secretary of Interior's Standards for Treatment of Historic Properties* as the basis of its review of preservation project applications involving designated historic properties— individual Landmarks and Contributing Resources in Historic Districts listed in the Sacramento Register. According to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation of Historic Buildings, Standard #6 states:

“Deteriorated historic features will be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature will match the old in design, color, texture, and, where possible, materials. Replacement of missing features will be substantiated by documentary and physical evidence.”

While this standard applies to all features of historic properties, questions are asked most about this standard in relation to historic windows, often in instances where replacement of all the windows in a structure is being contemplated. This handout will discuss two issues relative to the Preservation application review involving historic windows –

1. Deciding on repair or replacement, and
2. If replacement is warranted, the appropriate “replacement.”

1. Deciding on Repair or Replacement

In the case of historic windows that have not been properly maintained, it is not uncommon to find parts of a window – usually horizontal surfaces such as sills – so deteriorated that these individual pieces must be replaced. And, though much less common, there are situations where entire windows are so severely deteriorated that replacement may be warranted. Rarer is the structure where all the windows warrant replacement. Since retention and repair of original historic fabric is the standard, for Staff to support replacement of that material, documentation that supports the replacement must be provided in a Preservation Project application.

A written report prepared by a licensed contractor who is not affiliated with a replacement window supplier can provide the information that would assist in making this decision. The report should identify each window's location on the building façade and document the condition of each component of that window, (sash, sill, upper rail, muntin, etc.), and finally whether each individual piece is repairable or requires replacement. Preservation staff can provide a matrix to assist in this report. The matrix is a sample and can be modified to include aspects of the windows that are particular to a project. When using the matrix, please provide a key plan to locate each window and assign it a number to identify the window on the matrix.

When considering repair options, please refer to the attached National Park Service Reservation Brief on “The Repair of Historic Wooden Windows.” Preservation Briefs on other topics are available on-line at: <http://www.nps.gov/tps/how-to-preserve/briefs/9-wooden-windows.htm>

Once the conditions matrix has been completed, the “rule of thumb” that is generally used to warrant consideration of replacement instead of repair, is if over 50% of a component is so severely deteriorated that it cannot be reasonably repaired, replacement may be acceptable. For an entire window, the same 50% rule would apply – if over 50% of its components are so severely deteriorated that they cannot be reasonably repaired, replacement of the entire window unit may be acceptable. However, in this situation, it is also preferable to retain and reuse the historic components that are in good condition.

There may be original building components, however, which are either so significant or that are not easily replaced, where this 50% “rule of thumb” would not be applicable and repair may be determined to be the appropriate treatment.

2. Appropriate Replacement

When replacement of components of historic properties is warranted, then the replacement feature shall match the original, in-kind. Matching “in-kind” means matching the historic: materials, design, dimensions, profile, placement and finishes.

Certain variances in dimension and profile in windows may be considered to accommodate dual/triple pane glazing. If a historic material is no longer available, then an alternative material that achieves the same visual qualities may be considered.