

Residential Windows

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Standard

Windows should be retained and repaired whenever possible. Windows which are repaired and properly maintained will continue to contribute to the historic character of the building. Should replacement be required, all features of the new window must duplicate the appearance of the original as required under SRC 230.025(b).

Repair & Maintenance

Window repairs can be labor intensive, but are typically not too complicated. If you are considering window replacement, the money will be better spent on repairs to existing windows. Routine repair normally includes five steps: 1) removal of excess paint, 2) removal and repair of the sash (including reglazing if necessary), 3) repairs to the frame, 4) weather-stripping and reinstallation of the sash, and 5) repainting.



CORRECT WINDOW RESTORATION

Even badly deteriorated windows can be restored. Wood which is split, checked, or rotting can be stabilized by applying consolidants or wood putties. For windows that cannot be stabilized, replacing parts of the original window may be necessary.



INCORRECT WINDOW RESTORATION OR REPLACEMENT

Energy Efficiency

Most heat is lost between the window sash and the frame. Appropriate weather-stripping should be an integral part of the repair process. The use of insulation in the window frame cavity and the installation of sash locks will also reduce air infiltration.

Exterior storm windows should be considered because they are thermally efficient, cost-effective, reversible, and allow the retention of original windows. Although interior storm windows appear an attractive option for achieving double glazing with minimal visual impact, there is potential for condensation damage.

When Should Replacement Be Considered?

Replacement of original windows should be a last resort after all repair possibilities have been explored. If the condition of the windows is so poor that replacement is the only option, match replacement windows to existing windows as closely as possible in terms of size, materials, and configuration of window panes. Vinyl windows are not an approved material in historic homes, and

replacing windows with muntins requires either an external muntin, or a true divided light window. Internal or “between the glass” muntins are not approved.

Despite widespread misconceptions, replacing old windows with new, double-glazed windows will not save money, will not significantly increase the energy efficiency of a house, and will probably cost more in the long term. New windows are very expensive, and it takes many years – often longer than the life of the window – to recover the costs in energy savings. A repaired wood window with new weather-stripping and a storm window will cost less, and last much longer than a new window.

History

Windows are one of the primary character-defining elements of a building. They come in many sizes, shapes and types, which differ depending on the style of the building. For example, Queen Anne style buildings can have tall, narrow, arched windows set in pairs, while Craftsman style buildings have wider windows set in groups of three or more.

Historically, large sheets of glass were expensive to produce, so the earliest windows had small panes. As glass production improved, cost went down and larger panes were used. Ultimately, the number and arrangement of the panes, such as one-over-one or nine-over-nine sash, became the overriding design component.

Additional Reading

Preservation Brief #9: *The Repair of Historic Wooden Windows*. Washington D.C.: Technical Preservation Services (TPS), Heritage Preservation Services Division, National Park Service. US Department of the Interior. Rev. 1981.

Preservation Brief #3: *Conserving Energy in Historic Buildings*. Washington D.C.: Technical Preservation Services (TPS), Heritage Preservation Services Division, National Park Service. US Department of the Interior. Rev. 1978.

The Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation and Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings. Washington, D.C.: Preservation Assistance Division. National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, rev. 1983.

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