

section

four

Historic Preservation Principles and Approaches

Before any preservation project is begun, a number of fundamental decisions need to be made. How will the property be used? Will the property be restored to its original condition or rehabilitated for contemporary use? How can the significant architectural and historical features of the building be preserved? What steps need to be taken?

Presented in this section are some of the most widely accepted and essential principles of historic preservation. A review of this material will provide the prospective Certificate of Appropriateness applicant with a better understanding of the concerns of the Historic Preservation Commission and why it is important to use a carefully thought-out approach when working with historic resources.

An excellent source of information on architectural rehabilitation and maintenance is the Preservation Briefs Series available from the National Park Service. [See *Sources For Maintenance and Resource Rehabilitation* found in Section 10 of this document for a more complete reference.]

Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation

The U.S. Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Historic Preservation Projects were initially developed for use in evaluating the appropriateness of work proposed for properties listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Revised in 1990, the U.S. Secretary's Standards for Rehabilitation are considered the basis of sound preservation practices. They allow buildings to be changed to meet contemporary needs while ensuring that those features that make buildings historically and architecturally distinctive are preserved. They have meaningful application to virtually every type of project involving historic resources.

The Secretary's Standards for Rehabilitation provide the framework for these design guidelines and will be used by the Historic Preservation Commission in reviewing applications for Certificates of Appropriateness. These standards are :

1 A property shall be used for its historic purpose or be placed in a new use that requires minimal change to the defining characteristics of the building and its site and environment.

2 The historic character of a property shall be retained and preserved. The removal of historic materials or alteration of features and spaces that characterize a property shall be avoided.

3 Each property shall be recognized as a physical record of its time, place, and use. Changes that create a false sense of historical development, such as adding conjectural features or architectural elements from other buildings, shall not be undertaken.

4 Most properties change over time; those changes that have acquired historic significance in their own right shall be retained and preserved.

5 Distinctive features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a historic property shall be preserved.

6 Deteriorated historic features shall be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature shall match the old in design, color, texture, and other visual qualities and, where possible, materials. Replacement of missing features shall be substantiated by documentary, physical, or pictorial evidence.

7 Chemical or physical treatments, such as sandblasting, that cause damage to historic materials shall not be used. The surface cleaning of structures, if appropriate, shall be undertaken using the gentlest means possible.

8 Significant archaeological resources affected by a project shall be protected and preserved. If such resources must be disturbed, mitigation measures shall be undertaken.

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

10 New additions and adjacent or related new construction shall 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.

Preservation Methods

Preservation is defined as the taking of steps to retain a building, district, object or site as it exists at the present time. This often includes an initial stabilization effort necessary to prevent further deterioration as well as more general maintenance work. But “preservation” has become the term most often used when referring to a wide range of conservation practices.

Following is a list and definition of the four principle preservation methods. The condition of the property, degree of authenticity desired, and the amount of funding available usually dictate the method used to preserve a historic property. Although “rehabilitation” and “restoration” might sound alike, the end result is quite different.

Stabilization entails making a building weather resistant and structurally safe, enabling it to be rehabilitated or restored in the future.

Stabilization techniques include covering the roof and windows so that rainwater cannot penetrate, removing overgrown vegetation, exterminating, carrying out basic structural repairs, securing the property from vandalism, and other steps to prevent additional deterioration of the property. This approach is usually taken on a building not currently in use to “mothball” it until a suitable use is found.

Rehabilitation involves undertaking repairs, alterations, and changes to make a building suitable for contemporary use, while retaining its significant architectural and historical features.

Rehabilitation often includes undertaking structural repairs, updating the mechanical systems (heating and air conditioning, electrical system, and plumbing), putting on additions for bathrooms, repairing damaged materials such as woodwork and roofing, and painting.

Rehabilitation can accommodate the adaptive use of a building from residential to office or commercial use. Physical changes, such as additions for offices, parking lots, and signage, may result.

If a rehabilitation is sensitive, those changes are made in a way that does not detract from the historic character and architectural significance of the building and its setting.

Restoration includes returning a building to its appearance during a specific time in its history by removing later additions and changes, replacing original elements that have been removed, and carefully repairing parts of the building damaged by time.

Restoration is a more accurate and often more costly means of preserving a building. It entails detailed research into the history, development, and physical form of the property; skilled craftsmanship; and attention to detail.

Reconstruction entails reproducing, by new construction, the exact form and detail of a vanished building, or part of a building, as it appeared at a specific time in its history.

Eight Steps to Complete a Preservation Project

Following is an outline of an accepted approach to planning and implementing preservation projects. Property owners should review these points carefully and consider their importance. The first three steps of the planning phase should be completed prior to the submission of a Certificate of Appropriateness application. These steps are explained in recommended order.

STEP 1

Inspect the Property and Make a Wish List

A thorough inspection of the structure or site will allow for an understanding of specific problems that may exist as well as special conditions and features that need to be considered. This inspection should also take into account the character of the surrounding area (area of influence), with special attention given to how the property in question relates to nearby buildings and sites. Develop a wish list of what needs to be done and what improvements and/or changes are desirable but not necessary to the physical soundness of a property.

Existing conditions should be documented, through photographs, before any work is undertaken. This is especially true when tax credits are being sought for the rehabilitation of an income-producing property. Property owners should consult with the State Historic Preservation Office if they anticipate applying for federal tax credits.

STEP 2

Define the Project and Develop a Preliminary Concept

At this stage the property owner must determine the type (stabilization, rehabilitation, restoration, or reconstruction) and extent of the project to be undertaken. Cost will likely be an issue and therefore it is advisable to consult with an architect, landscape architect, interior designer, or preservation planner. These professionals can assist the owner in defining the basic components of the project. At this stage, the preliminary concept should be presented to the Historic Preservation Commission for initial comments.

STEP 3

Refine Preliminary Concept and Develop a Master Plan

This is the final step of the planning process - the end result of which is often called a Master Plan. The Master Plan should outline the principal goals of the project and the efforts needed to complete Steps 4 through 8. At this point, the property owner should apply for a Certificate of Appropriateness.

STEP 4

Stabilize the Building

Before any new work is undertaken, the property must be in a stable condition with all deterioration halted. An example would be the repair of a leaking roof so that further moisture will not enter the structure after new work has been completed.

STEP 5

Carry Out Structural Repairs

Once deterioration has been halted, any structural damage must be corrected. This type of work needs to be completed as one step rather than in phases. If the approved project involves an addition to the building, it should be made only after all structural repair work has been completed.

STEP 6

Carry Out Infrastructure Repairs

Repairs and improvements to mechanical systems (i.e., cooling and heating systems, electrical systems and plumbing) are essential to achieving the highest degree of comfort and economy in any building. Attend to this type of work fairly early in the overall project rather than delaying or even neglecting to complete it. Infrastructure improvements can be costly, which is yet another reason for placing this work early in the project schedule.

STEP 7

Carry Out Energy Conservation Improvements

Most steps to improve energy efficiency are generally quite straightforward and sometimes surprisingly inexpensive. This type of work can, therefore, usually be put off until more complicated and expensive tasks have been completed.

STEP 8

Carry Out Cosmetic Work

Finishing work, such as exterior painting, minor siding repairs and porch reconstruction, should be the final stage of a preservation or rehabilitation project. This is the work that will generally create the greatest visual impact, and it is essential that all preliminary work (stabilization, structural repairs, infrastructure improvements) be completed beforehand so that nothing will have to be done twice.

