

PREPARING A PROJECT FOR DESIGN REVIEW

Technical Paper No. 21



King County

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This paper explains the purpose of design review and offers suggestions for planning a restoration or rehabilitation project. Contact Historic Preservation Program staff early in project planning, since they can help identify resources and provide technical information.

Purpose of Design Review

A King County Landmark must exhibit physical “integrity.” This means that the property retains physical features and design characteristics that contribute to and reflect its historic significance. These features, which are called the "character-defining features," are unique to each property and may include the overall scale and massing of the building, design elements such as front porches or windows, or even planting materials and open space on the building site. The purpose of design review is to ensure that any project involving a Landmark property is carefully planned to maximize and protect the integrity--or historic character--of the property.

Design Guidelines

Any major restoration work or project involving alterations to a significant feature of a designated King County Landmark requires a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA), which is obtained through an established design review process. The King County Landmarks Commission uses *The Secretary of Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties* and companion guidelines to guide the COA design review process. Because these *Standards* are used to review a project, it is best to consult them well before you begin to seriously plan a project. Copies are available via the Internet or can be obtained from the King County Historic Preservation Program.

Every project involving an historic property is unique, so the *Standards* distinguish between four basic approaches (preservation, restoration, rehabilitation, and reconstruction) and the accompanying guidelines provide further specific guidance. Recommended general guidance is summarized below:

1. Identify, Retain and Preserve

Identify historic building materials and design features that define the character of the property and should be retained in the process of rehabilitation work. These character-defining features are usually noted in the final designation report.

2. Protect and Maintain

Extending the life of the historic building materials through timely and appropriate maintenance is always a priority. Protecting the historic materials typically helps reduce the need for more extensive repairs in the future. It is also important to consider the protection of historic features during a rehabilitation project. For example, if your project involves

cleaning a roof, choose a gentle cleaning method that does not damage the historic roofing material or adjacent siding and roof details.

3. *Repair*

When character-defining features and materials are deteriorated, repair is the first option to consider. Repair also includes the limited replacement of deteriorated or missing parts when there are surviving prototypes. For example, if shingles are missing from a roof, new shingles that match the originals should be installed to fill the gaps.

4. *Replacement*

When a character-defining feature is too deteriorated or damaged to repair, "in-kind" replacement (using the same design and materials) is the preferred option. If replacement in-kind is not technically or economically feasible, use of a compatible substitute material may be considered. For example, a roof originally clad with large cedar shingles might be re-roofed with a product of similar appearance since high quality cedar products are no longer readily available.

5. *Design for Missing Historic Features*

When an important architectural feature is missing, reconstruction of the element (based on sound documentation of the original design) is preferred. However, if documentation is unavailable, a second option for the replacement feature is a new design, which is compatible with the remaining historic features of the property.

6. *Alterations/Additions to Historic Buildings*

Construction of a new addition to a landmark building or within the boundaries of a landmark site should be undertaken only after carefully considering how best to accommodate the need for additional space. If an addition or new construction adjacent to an historic building is required, it should be designed to minimize alterations and/or visual impacts to the primary elevations and features of significance.

Preparing a Project for Design Review

To prepare an application for design review, the applicant must clearly describe and explain the scope of the project, the present condition of the feature(s) involved, the original appearance of the feature(s), and the design standards and guidelines which apply to the project. The following section outlines questions the applicant should consider and information the applicant should gather when preparing a project for design review.

1. *Define the Scope of the Project*

What parts of the building or site does the project involve? How do those elements relate to the other parts of the landmark property? For example, will the project involve features of the Landmark that are visible from the roadway? Current photographs or design drawings (including a site plan) are usually essential to illustrate the scope of most projects.

2. *Document the Present Condition*

What is the present condition of the element that will be affected by the proposed project? Are the building features in good repair, deteriorated, or missing? Photographs of the features and/or inspection reports serve to clearly document the present condition.

3. *Describe the Historic Appearance*

What did the property (building and site) look like historically? What changes have been made? Use historic photographs or archival materials to understand the historic appearance of the property and any alterations that may have occurred over time.

The Landmark Registration Form, prepared prior to the designation of the property, may describe the property's historic appearance. Also, consult the King County Historic Preservation Program to find out if there are historic photographs of your property on file or where photographs might be located. Plans, maps, and interviews may also help document the original appearance.

Close physical examination of the historic property can also yield useful important information. Take a good look at other local buildings of a similar construction date, function, building materials or architectural style. They may provide insight about the original appearance of the subject building. Architectural style guides and/or historic architectural plan books may be another useful source of information.

4. *Evaluate Alternatives and Determine Most Appropriate Action*

Once the above steps are completed; the applicant should evaluate alternatives recommended in the *Standards*. For example, if the goal is to restore a porch that had been previously removed, the applicant will be deciding how to replace a missing feature (See Note #5 above). The applicant will need to use a combination of sources (historic photos, original plans - if they exist – and physical examination) to determine the original appearance of the porch and obtain sufficient information to design the replacement porch. If historic documentation is not available, the design of the new porch should not be based on conjecture but should be compatible with the historic character of the building.

Considerations in the Design Review Process

While retaining or restoring a Landmark's historic appearance is always a priority, the design review process acknowledges that changes are often needed to extend the life of the property. In evaluating proposed alterations to historic properties, the Landmarks Commission also considers a number of factors. These include:

- the extent of impact on the historic property;
- the reasonableness of the alteration in light of other alternatives available;
- the extent alteration is necessary to meet the requirements of law; and
- the extent alteration is necessary to achieve a reasonable economic return.

Gathering information that helps answer these questions will enable the applicant to work expeditiously with the Design Review Committee to develop a restoration or rehabilitation strategy which preserves the historic character of the property while allowing for its continued use.

For more information about preparing a project for design review or obtaining a Certificate of Appropriateness, please contact the Design Review Coordinator at 206-477-4545.