

ACCESSIBILITY, UTILITIES AND AUXILIARY EQUIPMENT

The Least You Need to Know:

- The installation of modern elements on historic buildings still require review by HARB.
- This review is not intended to prohibit these additions, only to ensure they are installed in a compatible manner.

Introduction

Better and more widely distributed information has made us aware of the needs and requirements of persons with disabilities, and of their right to participate more fully in the experience of historic structures. This presents us with the challenge of making our historic resources accessible without destroying the character that makes them special.

Improvements in telecommunications, electric, gas, and water service; and in heating and air-conditioning have made living spaces much more comfortable year-round. However, these conveniences visually and physically alter structures and streetscapes with wiring and equipment.

Accessibility

Historically, buildings and landscapes were not designed to be readily accessible for people with disabilities. With the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990, access to properties open to the public is now a civil right. The goal is to provide barrier free access that promotes independence for disabled persons to the highest degree practicable, while preserving significant features of the historic resource. Building accessibility for individuals with disabilities should be achieved without compromise to historic materials or to character-defining elements of historic buildings and sites. Each case is individual, but the guidelines below should be followed.

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Process for Implementing Accessibility Modifications

Review the historical significance of the property and identify character defining features. Alteration of these features should be avoided when making changes or additions for accessibility.

Assess the existing and required levels of accessibility. Identify all barriers in the structure and on the site. Review all local codes and state and federal laws.

Evaluate accessibility options within a preservation context. The goal is to provide a high level of accessibility with minimal impact on the historic property.

Note: Seek the assistance of preservation professionals, code officials, and persons with disabilities. The expertise of each will be critical in determining the full range of options for accessibility.

Guidelines for Accessibility

Seek to provide barrier free access that promotes independence for disabled persons to the highest degree practicable while preserving historic features.

The design of new ramps should be compatible with the original structure and the overall site.

Compatibility can be achieved through appropriate location. Ramps and elevators should be located on rear or secondary walls.

Increase the compatibility of new ramps by constructing them of materials equal to or similar to the materials of adjacent stairs and walks.

Consider providing barrier-free access through removable or portable ramps if installing permanent ramps would damage distinctive historic features.

Utilize landscaping elements to shield ramps and elevators. For more information on accessibility, see “Where Can I Learn More?” at the end of this manual.

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Utilities

Because utility meter boxes, air handling units, and other service equipment are so common, the appropriate placement of these objects on historic buildings is often overlooked. Historically, service equipment was placed near the service entrance, which was located at the rear or side of the building. This placement on unobtrusive walls of buildings should be continued. There are three options for the placement of service equipment:

- Attached to wall
- Placed on a roof
- Located on the ground

Appropriate placement depends to a great extent on the type of equipment being installed; however, in all locations, the key to compatibility with historic resources is concealment.

- Locate equipment on rear or inconspicuous side walls.
- Plant vegetation to hide equipment on the ground or on the wall. Coordinate new vegetation with old.
- Erect appropriate fencing to shield equipment on the ground. Coordinate all fencing on the property.
- Paint wall-mounted equipment to blend with the wall.
- Set rooftop equipment back from the edge of the roof to reduce visibility from the street.

Meter Boxes

Utility meters, wires, piping, boxes, and related equipment should be installed in unobtrusive locations on rear or secondary walls.

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Satellite Dishes and Antennas

- Satellite dishes should be minimal in size.
- Satellite dishes should be attached to rear or inconspicuous side walls of buildings. Locations that are not visible from the street are preferred.
- Satellite dishes should be attached to buildings using methods that do not cause damage to building materials or to historic features.
- Antennas that are no longer functional should be removed.

Window Air Conditioners

- Window air conditioners should be installed on rear or secondary walls, rather than primary walls.
- The use of window air conditioners should not result in the removal or replacement of window sash or in the alteration or damage of any window materials.
- Through-wall air conditioners are inappropriate for historic buildings. Avoid cutting through walls or removing other historic materials to add mechanical equipment.