

**GENEVA HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION**  
**Policy Guide for Window Repair or Replacement Requests**

1. **Contributing (or higher rated) buildings.** Residential and Commercial.

Thoroughly assess the condition of the window sash and frame. Repair first, assuming windows are original or historic. *If the evaluation of the assessment determines that repair is not feasible*, replacements should be of detailing, proportions, operation/function, and styling that are consistent with that of the original or existing historic windows; replacement window material shall either replicate historic materials (wood or metal) or be fabricated of a contemporary, alternate material (*e.g.* aluminum clad, wood windows). Where muntins existed, historically, replacement windows shall incorporate true or simulated divided lites; muntins at simulated divided lites must include muntins applied to the exterior and interior of the window glazing and, where insulated glass is installed, non-specular (*i.e.* black, gray, bronze, or white) metal spacer bars shall be installed between the panes of glass. At interior side yards, “prominently viewed from the street” shall apply only to those side wall windows located towards the street and forward of a significant change in building plane.
2. **Non-contributing buildings.**

Thoroughly assess the condition of the window sash and frame. Repair first. If the assessment determines that repair is not feasible, the style, detailing, operation/function, and proportions of replacements should be consistent with building style, however more flexibility should be allowed in the window material.
3. **Existing additions to contributing (or higher rated) buildings prominent and easily viewed from the street.**

Thoroughly assess the condition of the window sash and frame. Repair first, assuming windows are original or historic. *If the evaluation of the assessment determines that repair is not feasible*, replacement should be of detailing, proportions, operation/function, and styling that are consistent with that of the original or existing historic windows; replacement window material may replicate historic materials (wood or metal) or be fabricated of a contemporary, alternate material (*e.g.* aluminum clad, wood windows). Where muntins existed, historically, replacement windows shall incorporate true or simulated divided lites; muntins at simulated divided lites must include muntins applied to the exterior and interior of the window glazing and, where insulated glass is installed, bronze-colored spacer bars between the panes of glass. At interior side yards, “prominently viewed from the street” shall apply only to those side wall windows located towards the street and forward of a significant change in building plane.
4. **Existing additions to contributing (or higher rated) buildings not prominent or easily viewed from the street.**

Thoroughly assess the condition of the window sash and frame. Repair first. *If the evaluation of the assessment determines that repair is not feasible*, the style, detailing, operation/function, and proportions of replacements should be consistent

with building style, however more flexibility should be allowed in the window material. Original historic portion will always be addressed by #1.

5. **New additions to contributing (or higher rated) buildings.**

Windows should match the style, detailing, operation/function, and proportions of existing windows, if on a prominent facade, but alternate materials may be considered acceptable. Original, historic portions of a building shall always be addressed by #1.

6. **New additions to non-contributing buildings.**

Windows should match the style, detailing, operation/function, and proportions of existing windows, if on a prominent facade, but alternate materials may be considered acceptable if an addition is not prominent or readily visible from the street.

7. **New residential or commercial construction.**

Flexibility should be allowed in material, however styling, detailing, spacing and proportions should be appropriate to the suggested architecture or styling of the new structure. Interior snap-in or false, between-pane grids, are not appropriate or acceptable.

**Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation**

The Geneva Historic Preservation Commission uses the Standards when reviewing specific rehabilitation projects in the Historic District. The following standards should be considered when dealing with historic windows.

**Standard #2.** The original distinguishing qualities or character of a building, structure or site and its environment shall not be destroyed. The removal or alteration of any historic material or distinctive architectural features should be avoided when possible.

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

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

**Standard #6.** Deteriorated architectural features shall be repaired rather than replaced, whenever possible. In the event replacement is necessary, the new material should match the material being replaced in composition, design, color, texture and other visual qualities.

For additional information, see Preservation Brief # 9: The Repair of Historic Wooden Windows ( <https://www.nps.gov/tps/how-to-preserve/briefs/9-wooden-windows.htm> ), summarized below:

### **Window Significance**

Not all windows are equally significant. Factors determining significance include:

- age of window
- design of window
- physical integrity
- street facing façade
- architectural and historical significance

Windows should be considered significant if they:

1. are original or historic.
2. reflect the original design intent for the building.
3. reflect period or regional styles or building practices.
4. reflect changes to the building resulting from major periods or events.
5. are examples of exceptional craftsmanship or design.

### **Window Facts**

- Windows convey building character.
- Most often, historic windows are made of irreplaceable materials.
- Windows need periodic maintenance.
- Renovation of windows is realistic and affordable.

### **Storm Windows**

The use of storm windows should be considered whenever feasible because exterior or interior storm windows are:

1. thermally efficient
2. cost-effective
3. reversible
4. allow the retention of original windows

Storm windows, in combination with historic windows, can provide equal or better energy performance than many modern windows, which utilize insulating glass. Wood storm windows are preferred because wood has a better insulating value than metal. However, aluminum clad storm windows may be allowed provided they do not cover the trim. Storm windows can also provide significant protection from the weather to your historic windows. If old or historic storm windows exist, consider continuing to use them. Storm windows can also be placed on the inside of a window.

Weatherstripping is the single most cost-effective way to improve the energy performance of your windows.

Energy conservation is no excuse for the wholesale destruction of historic windows which can be made thermally efficient by historically and aesthetically acceptable means.

### **What is the Condition of Your Window?**

When evaluating the physical condition of windows, look at the following:

1. window location
2. condition of paint
3. condition of frame and sill
4. condition of sash (rails, stiles and muntins)
5. glazing problems
6. hardware
7. overall condition (excellent, good, fair, poor, etc.)

Moisture is the primary contributing factor in wooden window decay.

*Failure of the paint finish should not be mistakenly interpreted as a sign that the wood is in poor condition and hence, irreparable.* Wood is frequently in sound condition beneath unsightly paint.

### **Window Repair**

Routine Maintenance needed to upgrade a window to "like new" condition normally includes the following:

1. some degree of interior and exterior paint removal.
2. removal and repair of sash (including re-glazing and replacement of sash cords and chains, where necessary).
3. repairs to the frame.
4. weatherstripping or jamb liners and reinstallation of sash.
5. re-painting.

### **Window Replacement**

Replacement windows should match historic windows in:

- style and operation
- dimensions
- true-divided or simulated divided lite(s)
- appropriate alternate materials (*i.e.* avoid bronze anodized aluminum window frames and sash unless historic precedence exists)

Investigate and document the following when replacing windows:

1. pattern and size of the openings
2. proportions of the frame and sash
3. configuration of window panes
4. muntin profiles
5. type of wood
6. paint color
7. characteristics of the glass
8. other details (*e.g.* arched hoods, decorative elements, etc.)

## Resources

- "Fixing Double-Hung Windows." *Old House Journal* (no. 12, 1979): 135.
- Look, David W. "Preservation Brief #10: Paint Removal from Historic Woodwork." Washington, D.C.: Technical Preservation Services, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1982.
- Phillips, Morgan and Selwyn, Judith. **Epoxies for Wood Repairs in Historic Buildings.** Washington, D.C.: Technical Preservation Services, U.S. Dept. of the Interior (Government Printing Office, Stock No. 024-016-00095-1), 1978.
- "Sealing Leaky Windows." *Old House Journal* (no. 1, 1973): 5.
- Smith, Baird M. "Preservation Brief #3: Conserving Energy in Historic Buildings." Washington, D.C.: Technical Preservation Services, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1978.
- Myers, John H. "Preservation Brief #9: The Repair of Historic Wooden Windows." Washington, D.C.: Technical Preservation Services, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1981.
- Park, Sharon C. "Preservation Brief #13: The Repair and Thermal Upgrading of Historic Steel Windows." Washington, D.C.: Technical Preservation Services, U.S. Dept. of the Interior.
- See the following web page to view the Preservation Briefs:  
<http://www.nps.gov/tps/how-to-preserve/briefs.htm>
- **Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation & Illustrated Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings**, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, National Park Service, 1983.
- NPS Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings:  
<http://www.nps.gov/tps/standards/rehabilitation/rehab/>
- Carmody, John, Heschong, Lisa and Selkowitz, Stephen. **Residential Windows: A Guide to New Technologies and Energy Performance.** New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1996.
- **Caring for Your Historic House.** Heritage Preservation and National Park Service. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1998.
- McAlester, Virginia and McAlester, Lee. **A Field Guide to American Houses.** New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997.
- **The Window Handbook: Successful Strategies for Rehabilitating Windows in Historic Buildings** (16 different NPS Tech Notes on Windows).
- **The Window Workbook for Historic Buildings** (Companion to the Handbook, contains technical papers and listings for windows and restoration products).
- See the following web page to view the Preservation Tech Notes:  
<http://www.nps.gov/tps/how-to-preserve/tech-notes.htm>
- New York Landmarks Conservancy, "Repairing Old and Historic Windows: A Manual for Architects and Homeowners." Washington, D.C.: The Preservation Press, 1992.
- Federal Historic Preservation Tax Credits: <http://www.nps.gov/tps/tax-incentives.htm>

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**NOTE:** All webpage links were verified at the time of re-publication; however, webpage links may change from time-to-time.

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