



STATE OF RHODE ISLAND AND PROVIDENCE PLANTATIONS

HISTORICAL PRESERVATION & HERITAGE COMMISSION

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Policy on Window Replacement for Historic Houses

RIHPHC frequently is asked to consider window replacement as part of historic building rehabilitation projects subject to RIHPHC review. RIHPHC review includes projects subject to regulatory review in accordance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act or in accordance with provisions of the RI Historic Preservation Act. RIHPHC review also includes projects that apply for federal or state historic preservation investment tax credits or the RI Historic Homeownership tax credit. Therefore, RIHPHC's policy on window replacement takes into account varying requirements of these separate programs, and RIHPHC's policy

Historic windows are an important character-defining feature for historic houses, and therefore preserving and maintaining historic window sash is the RIHPHC's goal in every case. Historic window details all contribute to the overall character and quality of the windows and the historic house as a whole: the original configuration of sash lights, the original material (wood in most cases), the original structure (generally single-glazed double hung sash with individual lights set in true divided muntins), the original profiles (putty bevel on the exterior muntins, stiles and rails and molded interior profiles), and the original finish material (generally a painted surface).

In many cases, historic windows can be successfully preserved through repair and maintenance. Common problems that lead to consideration of replacing window sash include:

- the historic windows are missing
- replacement of non-historic later windows to restore the historic appearance
- replacement of damaged or deteriorated historic windows
- dealing with the hazard of lead paint
- thermal efficiency
- maintenance and easy operation

Cost is usually an important consideration whatever the problem that window replacement is intended to solve. Affordable housing grants and historic preservation tax credits are intended to off-set the cost of solutions that meet approval criteria.

1) When the historic windows no longer exist or if the historic windows were replaced in the past by non-historic and inappropriate windows, RIHPHC will approve a new replacement. The replacement should match the historic window as closely as possible.

2) When the historic windows have become too damaged or deteriorated to repair, RIHPHC may approve replacement "in-kind." Replacement "in-kind" means that the original configuration of sash lights, the original material (wood in most cases), the original structure (generally single-glazed double hung sash with individual lights set in true divided muntins), the original profiles (putty bevel on the exterior muntins, stiles and rails and molded interior profiles), and the original finish material (generally a painted surface) will be replicated in the new windows. This replacement alternative will only be approved if convincing evidence is presented to RIHPHC that repair and maintenance cannot address the window problems.

(In the case of the Historic Homeownership tax credit, applications usually are submitted after the work has been completed. If the homeowner presents documentation that the historic sash were missing or were so damaged and deteriorated that they could not be repaired, RIHPHC will approve a tax credit for replacement in-kind. If the homeowner is not able to document that the historic sash were missing or so damaged and deteriorated that they could not be repaired, RIHPHC will not approve a tax credit for the replacement windows. However, if the replacement windows are appropriate to the historical architecture of the house, RIHPHC may approve a tax credit for other historic rehabilitation work completed.)

3) RIHPHC recognizes the need to remediate the hazard of lead paint on windows. Generally RIHPHC recommends that historic window sash be stripped of all paint and repainted in a non-lead latex paint. Painted surfaces on the window frame may also be stripped of all paint and be repainted using latex paint. New jamb liners can be installed in the window frame to protect friction surfaces. In unusual cases, the build-up of many layers of lead paint (and sometimes severe deterioration of the sash) may justify RIHPHC approval for replacement of some or all sash. When the historic sash are to be replaced, they should be replaced "in-kind." When non-historic sash are to be replaced, they should match the historic window as closely as possible.

4) Good windows block cold air from entering the house and conserve heat. Historic windows that are drafty or loose generally can be improved by adding weather stripping (sometimes incorporated into new jamb liners) and by adding storm windows. The thermal efficiency of a well-maintained historic window with a storm window is often better than for a new window. RIHPHC generally does not consider thermal efficiency to be a sufficient reason to replace historic windows.

5) Some new windows on the market today offer the promise of easy maintenance through use of vinyl coatings and easy operation by tilting open for cleaning. Unfortunately, new windows that offer these features rarely are designed to match the appearance of historic windows. Tax incentives and grants approved by the RIHPHC give highest priority to preserving the features that give historic buildings their special architectural character, and new replacement windows that cannot meet historic preservation criteria are not approved. Solid vinyl and vinyl clad windows are not an "in-kind" replacement for historic windows, and they generally do not preserve the historic character of a historic house. So called "tilt-pack" windows are not allowable because of the heavy visible jamb liner, and the narrowing of the sash width.

6) The cost of the different repair and replacement options can vary significantly between different contractors and manufacturers and in different buildings and window types. RIHPHC can provide information from projects that have been approved in the past. However, procedures, products, and contractors constantly change. Affordable housing grants and historic preservation tax credits are intended to off-set the cost of solutions that meet approval criteria. Property owners who choose not to apply for grants or tax credits are not required to receive RIHPHC approval for their project. In exceptional cases, federal regulations allow the RIHPHC to make an exception to the usual approval criteria for a subsidized affordable housing project with a very limited budget. However, a project that receives such an exception will not be approved for historic preservation tax credits.