

# HISTORIC WINDOW REVIEW CHEAT SHEET

## WHY SAVE HISTORIC WINDOWS

Windows are a significant character-defining feature of any historic building, understood at both national and local levels to be worthy of protection and preservation. There are many reasons for preserving historic windows:

- **Saving windows preserves a building’s character.**
- **Historic windows were built with high-quality materials.**
- **Preserving historic windows is sustainable and ecofriendly.**
- **Historic windows were made to be repaired and can last indefinitely.**
- **Maintaining historic windows allows historic buildings to remain eligible for tax credits and local tax abatement.**
- **Historic windows can be retrofit for comparable energy efficiency to new windows.**
- **Historic window retrofits and repairs can offer a greater return on investment at a fraction of the cost of replacement windows.**

## WINDOW REVIEW

When considering changes to your windows, the first step is to contact preservation staff. Staff will first establish if window review is required. If window review is required staff will then conduct research and a site visit to determine the existing condition of the windows and will make recommendations based on findings. Please note that preservation staff’s purview includes any portion of the property visible from the public right-of-way; site visits may also be required for preservation staff to establish visibility of windows.

**1. In areas where window review is required, staff will recommend repair of windows if the building is a local historic resource, the windows are original and/or historic, and the windows are in repairable condition.**

**2. In areas where window review is required, replacement of windows is allowed if the building is considered non-contributing to its historic district, if the windows are not original and/or historic, or if the windows are determined to be beyond repair by preservation staff.**

**3. If window replacement is permitted by preservation staff, review of the replacement window design and/or materials will also typically be required per district guidelines.**

## WINDOW REVIEW BY DISTRICT

While scope of overall review varies by district, all Architectural Conservation Districts require window review. Several Protection Areas have also opted for window review requirements. If replacement is permitted by preservation staff, review of the replacement windows is also typically required.

### WINDOW REPLACEMENT PERMITTED

- Earlewood PA
- Old Shandon/Lower Waverly PA\*
- Seminary Ridge PA
- West Gervais PA\*
- non-contributing houses in all districts\*

*\* review of replacement window material and/or design may be required per district design guidelines*

### WINDOW REVIEW REQUIRED

- Cottontown/Bellevue ACD
- Elmwood ACD
- Governor’s Mansion PA
- Granby ACD
- Individual Landmarks
- Landmark District
- Melrose Heights/Oak Lawn ACD
- Oakwood Court ACD
- University ACD
- Wales Garden ACD
- Waverly PA
- West Gervais Historic Commercial District
- Whaley PA
- all Bailey Bill properties

## REPAIRING AND RETROFITTING HISTORIC WINDOWS

From the local to the national level, it is a fundamental preservation principle to **repair rather than replace**. Original windows were constructed so that individual components could be repaired, instead of requiring an entire new unit if one piece breaks or rots. Common window issues that can be repaired:

- **paint buildup**
- **missing or aging glazing compound/putty**
- **inoperability**
- **rotted, damaged, or weathered wood**

If the desire to replace a historic window is based on energy concerns, studies show that retrofits to historic windows (many of them DIY) can produce a comparable level of energy efficiency to new windows with a much better return on investment and at a fraction of the cost of replacement windows; these retrofits can include:

- **interior and/or exterior storms**
- **cellular or insulating shades**
- **weather-stripping**

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## REPLACEMENT WINDOWS

Replacement of historic windows should always be a last resort. If after careful evaluation, a window is deemed beyond repair or found to be not historic, thoughtful consideration should be given to the window chosen for replacement. Small differences between replacement and historic windows can make big differences in appearance. When choosing replacements, qualities of historic windows should be used as criteria. Consider the following features of historic windows:

- **trim detail**
- **size, shape of frame, sash**
- **location of meeting rail**
- **recess of window from wall plane**
- **materials, reflective qualities of glass**
- **muntin, mullion profiles, configuration**

Before you invest in replacement windows, consider the following factors:

- Most locally protected historic buildings require retention of window openings meaning replacement windows should be sized to fit the original opening- which may not be considered a "standard size" by modern standards.
- Vinyl is not an appropriate material for replacement windows in most historic districts. Replacement windows are typically required to be either wood or aluminum clad wood with exterior muntins.
- Modern windows have a life expectancy of anywhere from 10 to 40 years before they require replacement. Also, most modern windows cannot be repaired, meaning if one part of the window breaks/fails then the entire window unit must be replaced.

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## RESOURCES FOR HISTORIC WINDOWS

- **Preservation Brief 9: The Repair of Historic Wooden Windows**, <https://www.nps.gov/tps/how-to-protect/briefs/9-wooden-windows.htm>
- **13 Things You Should Know About Retrofitting Historic Windows**, <https://savingplaces.org/stories/preservation-tips-tools-retrofitting-historic-windows>
- **Saving Windows, Saving Money: Evaluating the Energy Performance of Window Retrofit and Replacement** by the Preservation Green Lab, <https://www.ncptt.nps.gov/blog/saving-windows-saving-money/>
- **Resources collected by the Window Preservation Alliance**, <https://www.windowpreservation-alliance.org/Library>

**If you have any questions about a specific historic property please contact City of Columbia preservation staff. Contact information can be found on the City of Columbia website: <https://www.columbiasc.net/planning-preservation/planning-staff>**