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Revising

Preservation Brief 14: New Exterior Additions to Historic Buildings: Preservation Concerns

The topic of new additions, including rooftop additions, to historic buildings comes up frequently, especially as it relates to rehabilitation projects. It is often discussed and it is the subject of concern, consternation, considerable disagreement and confusion. Accordingly, the National Park Service (NPS) published *Preservation Brief 14: New Exterior Additions to Historic Buildings: Preservation Concerns* in 1986 to address this issue. Of course, many aspects of rehabilitation have changed since then, more than thirty years after the 1976 Historic Preservation Tax Incentives program was initiated and more than twenty years after Preservation Brief 14 was first developed. The first years of the tax incentives program were a learning experience for all preservationists, including the NPS. After all — “adaptive use,” “adaptive reuse” or “rehabilitation”— regardless of what it is called, was a relatively new kind of preservation treatment in terms of applying to standards, and, quite different from restoration, the more familiar treatment at that time. In the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties, restoration is defined as “the act or process of accurately depicting the form, features, and character of a property as it appeared at a particular period of time by means of the removal of features from other periods in its history and reconstruction of missing features from the restoration period.” Whereas rehabilitation is defined as “the act or process of making possible a compatible use for a property through repair, alterations, and *additions* (emphasis added) while preserving those portions or features which convey its historical, cultural, or architectural values.”

Although the wording of the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation, which govern the administration of the Historic Preservation Tax Incentives program, has been revised somewhat over the years, the actual policy espoused by the Standards has remained the same. Thus, the Standards continue to be applied in the same way to all proposed rehabilitation treatments, including proposed new additions to historic buildings. Standards 9 and 10 specifically address new additions. Standard 9 states: “New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction shall not destroy historic materials that characterize the property. The new work shall be differentiated from the old and shall be compatible with the massing, size, scale, and architectural features to protect the historic integrity of the property and its environment;” and Standard 10 states: “New additions and adjacent or related new construction shall be undertaken in such a manner that if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment would be unimpaired.”

Reviewing a Proposed Rooftop Addition



The building as it appeared prior to the proposed rehabilitation: Originally constructed in the 19th century, it housed an undertaker's establishment, livery stables and, most recently, a coffee warehouse.



Historical photograph.



The rehabilitation proposal is to recreate the historic appearance, while adding a two-story rooftop penthouse. This did not meet Standards 3 & 9. It would have given the building a false sense of history and adding a two-story rooftop addition to a low-rise building is generally not a compatible treatment.



The NPS conditional approval required that the rooftop addition be reduced to one story and minimally visible from the public right of way. The architect demonstrated that a one-story addition would have minimal visibility by using "animation prints" (on a CD and print outs) showing the building with the proposed rooftop addition from various locations, starting one block away and gradually moving closer until directly in front of the building. Because it is a corner building views were provided from two intersecting streets.



The revised proposal with a one-story rooftop addition that was conditionally approved by the National Park Service.

The Historic Preservation Tax Incentives program has always emphasized that a new exterior addition to a historic building should be considered in a rehabilitation project only after determining that requirements for the new or adaptive use cannot be successfully met by altering non-significant interior spaces. If the new use cannot be accommodated in this way, then an exterior addition may be an acceptable alternative, but it must preserve the character of the historic building. However, what the NPS has learned from thirty years of experience, despite its best efforts to convey what an appropriate new addition to a historic building is, is that it has not always been successful in conveying this to many users of the program.

In September 2006, the Committee on the Federal Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit Program issued a report to the National Park System Advisory Board, entitled *Federal Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit Program: Recommendations for Making a Good Program Better*. The report consisted of a number of recommendations to the NPS that it take certain steps to enhance and strengthen the program. One of the recommendations was that the NPS, in consultation with its historic preservation partners, reexamine several, often problematic, issues that are commonly encountered in rehabilitation projects. Not surprisingly, new additions (and related new construction) to historic buildings was one of the issues; the others being windows, interior treatments and modern requirements, and new technologies and materials.

Long aware that it was time to update *Preservation Brief 14* on new additions, the need to follow up on the committee's recommendation prompted the NPS to begin this process. Accordingly, the NPS, as directed, initiated a consultation process with its preservation partners and professionals to seek input on the topic of new additions. Based on

comments and suggestions received through this process, the NPS began to work on developing expanded guidance. The resultant guidance was presented to the public in December 2007, when it was posted on the Technical Preservation Services' website with the heading "Planning Successful Rehabilitation Projects: Applying the Standards to Common Rehabilitation Concerns" as part of the information on the Historic Preservation Tax Incentives program.¹

The development of this expanded guidance was followed by the revision and publication of *Preservation Brief 14* itself. Although more "how-to" advice has been added to the revised brief, such as evaluating proposed rooftop additions (see sidebar), the NPS policy on new additions presented in the original brief is essentially the same as the revised brief published in 2010. Most of the photographs in the original publication are still good examples in that new additions should be clearly distinguishable from the historic building. However, some of the new additions illustrated in the original brief may not be considered as compatible today; for instance, they may be overly large or perhaps *too* differentiated. Some of the illustrations in the original brief may reflect architectural styles, or other trends, such as greenhouse additions, that have now gone out of fashion but were popular twenty years ago. This is an inevitable result of changing times and tastes and the reason why most publications are updated or revised.

One of the objectives in selecting illustrations for the new brief was to include a representative sample of building types, from single-family and multifamily residential to small, as well as larger-scale commercial, institutional and religious structures, and as many as possible different geographical regions of the country (Figure 2). And, thanks to reduced printing costs, it was now possible to print Preservation Briefs in color! Aside from the obvious fact that a

¹ On the NPS website at: www.nps.gov/tps/standards/applying-rehabilitation/successful-rehab.htm

color publication is more attractive, color enhances the reader's awareness and ability to understand the point being made by the photograph. The intent in selecting illustrations was also to show new additions that reflected a variety of styles, from more differentiated to more referential to the historic building. An added challenge was to find enough "good" examples of new additions to illustrate. The NPS relies on tax incentives project files, which all too often do not provide good quality photographs for the majority of the illustrations it uses for its educational programs, from publications and web features to professional presentations at conferences.

commercial areas the addition should not be set back from the façade of the historic building.”

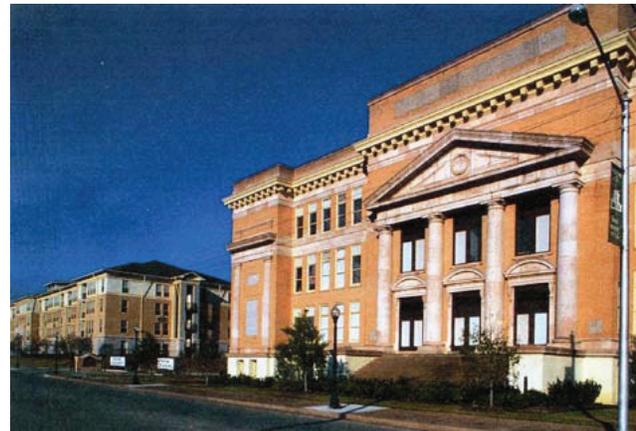
Another topic that is not included in the brief because it is not an addition is new construction on the site of a historic building or adjacent to a historic property. New construction as it relates to historic buildings may sometimes also be considered infill. It is reviewed in rehabilitation projects from the standpoint of how it impacts the character of the historic building and, when applicable, the historic district in which it is located. The historic property must remain predominant and its historic character must be retained. Generally the same



A tight urban setting may sometimes accommodate a larger addition if the primary elevation is designed to give the appearance of being several buildings by breaking up the facade into elements that are consistent with the scale of the historic building and adjacent buildings.



This new addition, which features a drive-through teller window, to a historic Classical Revival-style bank was designed to appear as a compatible infill structure, rather than an addition to the bank.



Historic school buildings are commonly rehabilitated for multi-family housing. This often requires more space and, consequently, new construction, such as the building shown here, which is compatible with the historic school and its site.

Although often asked about "infill" construction, the NPS does not have specific guidance because this is technically not a rehabilitation issue. However, the revised *Preservation Brief 14* does include a section on new additions in densely built urban environments, which is much the same as infill construction: "A densely-built neighborhood such as a downtown commercial core offers a particular opportunity to design an addition that will have a minimal impact on the historic building. Treating the addition as a separate or infill building may be the best approach when designing an addition that will have the least impact on the historic building and the district. In these instances there may be no need for a direct visual link to the historic building. Height and setback from the street should generally be consistent with those of the historic building and other surrounding buildings in the district. Thus, in most urban

recommendations for compatible new additions apply equally to new construction.

Almost two years have passed since the revised preservation brief was published. All too soon it may be time to update again, but only to refresh the illustrations. The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation were crafted to stand the test of time. So far they have, and the guidance they provide has not changed. Thus, *Preservation Brief 14* should continue to serve its purpose by providing valuable insight regarding compatible new additions to historic buildings in rehabilitation projects.

Editor's Note: *Preservation Brief 14: New Exterior Additions to Historic Building: Preservation Concerns* is available in PDF format online at <http://www.nps.gov/tps/how-to-preserve/briefs.htm>. See <http://www.nps.gov/tps/education/sale-pubs.htm> for information on how to obtain printed copies of the brief.