



# Treatment of Historic Properties

The City of Bismarck has a rich and unique historic heritage, full of sites, structures, spaces, and objects that contribute to its overall identity and character. In order to protect this character and enhance this identity, it's important members of Bismarck's community are aware of some key factors regarding preservation and rehabilitation of Bismarck's historic resources.

*Note: The majority of the information provided below is based on information found on the National Park Service's Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties online guides and website. This guide is only meant to condense this information as it relates to this community.*

## Definitions

**Preservation** focuses on protecting and stabilizing the property, including maintenance and repairs of historic elements rather than replacement or new construction. New exterior additions are not within the scope of this treatment. This involves retaining the greatest amount of historic materials along with the structure's historic form.

**Rehabilitation** retains and preserves elements of the structure which convey its historical, cultural, and architectural character while still enabling repairs, alterations, and additions to meet continuing and changing uses.

**Restoration** involves depicting a structure at a particular period of time in its history by removing inconsistent elements from other periods or reconstructing missing elements from the restoration period. This may include functional or code-required upgrades.

**Reconstruction** replicates the appearance of missing or non-surviving elements from a

specific period or location by means of new construction. This involves new materials and is primarily for interpretive purposes.

## Benefits of Historic Preservation and Rehabilitation

Preserving and/or rehabilitating historic structures, districts or landscapes has many benefits for the community.

- It reflects a community's strong desire to protect them from unsuitable changes.
- It can protect and enhance the quality of the neighborhoods where they are located.
- It highlights the unique character and identity of that community.
- It can become of a focal point for community pride and community endeavors.
- It can create new higher paying jobs.
- It can be an asset to the heritage tourism and travel industries and boost the local economy.
- It can stabilize and enhance property values.
- Some old structures were made with higher-quality materials or were built by different standards, meaning they might last longer than newer structures or materials.
- It can create an avenue for affordable housing in a community through compatible adaptive reuse initiatives.
- It's an environmentally friendly way to revitalize a structure and neighborhood by limiting the need for new tools and materials and reducing the waste of viable materials.

## Basic Principles for the Treatment of Historic Properties

1. Aim to use the structure for its original purpose, if possible.
2. Keep original, distinctive features.
3. Recognize that all structures are physical records of their time, place, and use.
4. Respect that changes to the structure have taken place over time.
5. Carefully treat and preserve the historic character of the structure including distinctive features, finishes, construction techniques, or examples of craftsmanship.
6. Repair rather than replace any deteriorated historic elements, wherever possible.
7. Clean structures using gentle methods that will not damage the materials.
8. Preserve and protect archaeological resources when they are present.
9. New additions or alterations are acceptable if the historic character of the structure is not destroyed.
10. Build new additions or make alterations that could be removed without damaging the form or integrity of the underlying historic structure.

## Successfully Rehabilitating Historic Structures

The following items provide some guidance for some common areas and concerns identified during these projects. Additional information can be found in the Additional Resources section below.

### Windows and/or Doors

Historic windows and doors should be repaired where possible and may include incremental replacement of individual elements that match the original character of the historic windows. Lead abatement or thermal performance can be achieved without replacement. Storm windows have traditionally been a means of improving thermal efficiency and are still a means to protect

the historic window and minimizing the visual impact.

Replacement window and door matches are primarily evaluated on their visual qualities. Some factors to consider include:

- Window and door unit placement in evaluating the match of replacements.
- Frame size and shape.
- Size and divisions of key materials like glass for windows.
- Sash elements width and depth.
- Materials and finish.
- Characteristics of materials, i.e., glass reflectivity or clarity



**DO.** This deteriorated historic wood window was repaired and retained ([Secretary of the Interior's Rehabilitation Standards](#), p. 108).



**DO.** The owner of this house in Bismarck's Cathedral District restored the windows on this front door which included scraping, chipping out the old glazing, replacing broken panes, and then re-glazing and re-installing.



**DO.** The owner of this house in Bismarck's Cathedral District restored the windows in the back as well as rehabilitating this front door.

### Interior Treatments

Different buildings tend to have different interior plans, spaces, features, and finishes. It's important

when undergoing these projects in historic structures to ensure that the interior still retains signs of its history. Both historic interior and exterior elements are important for maintaining the structure's historic significance. The following elements should be considered and retained, if possible:

- General floor plan of the building.
- Features and details that are characteristic of the architectural style of the house.
- Entertaining and living spaces, such as entry halls and dining rooms.
- Primary staircase.
- Floor-to-ceiling height in primary rooms, i.e., entrance areas.
- Fireplaces, mantelpieces, and finishes on chimney breasts.
- Architectural detailing, i.e., door trim and baseboards.
- Historic floors.
- Doors and windows.
- Historic hardware and fixtures, sometimes including lighting, radiators, knobs, or hinges.



**DO.** After considering other options that would have damaged or obscured the ornamental plaster crown molding, the owners decided to paint and leave the ducts exposed while still making sure it was as compatible as possible ([Secretary of the Interior's Rehabilitation Standards](#), p. 132).



**DON'T.** This has fragments of deteriorated or “sculpted” plaster that is not a compatible treatment for either finished or unfinished interior spaces ([Secretary of the Interior’s Rehabilitation Standards](#), p. 135).

### New Additions

New additions are sometimes necessary for functional purposes or to avoid modifications to character-defining historic elements. However, the original form, significant materials, and features must be preserved. In order to maintain the historic structure’s character and identify the original building version, new additions must maintain a balance between compatibility and differentiation. The following should be considered:

- Placement or location of the new addition on the site.
- Size, scale, and massing of the new addition.
- Differentiating the new addition from the historic building.
- New additions in densely built environments, especially as a separate or infill building, could have the least impact on an historic building.
- New additions in historic districts may be a potential option as long as they are not only compatible with historic character of the building and setting where it is located.



**DO.** Based on the materials, design, and placement at the rear of the house, this is a compatible new addition to the historic structure ([Secretary of the Interior’s Rehabilitation Standards](#), p. 157).

### Modern Requirements

Rehabilitation often involves updating elements in the historic structure to comply with code and regulation requirements. This may include compliance with federal, state, and local codes and all may impact the historic structure in different ways. There are too many codes and regulations to address here, so the following items are a broad overview of these items that should be considered:

- Accessibility and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)
- Fire and Life-safety
- Hazardous Materials



**DO.** This kitchen in an historic building was rehabilitated to meet accessibility requirements ([Secretary of the Interior’s Rehabilitation Standards](#), p. 147).



**DO.** This access ramp is on the side and blends into the stone façade so as not to impact the historic character of the building ([Secretary of the Interior's Rehabilitation Standards](#), p. 148).

### Other Treatments

There are a multitude of other minor treatments that should be considered, depending on the historic building's character and identity. The following items should be considered:

- Atria, lightwells, courtyards
- Awnings
- Coatings for Porches and Decks
- Protection of Archaeological Resources

This list is only a small number of additional treatment areas that should be evaluated when considering a rehabilitation project.



**DON'T.** Installing a screened enclosure is never recommended on a front entrance area ([Secretary of the Interior's Rehabilitation Standards](#), p. 112).



**DO.** The owner of this house in Bismarck's Cathedral District restored the original columns and capitals on the porch which included scraping, painting, and straightening them using the original materials.

### Deteriorated, Damaged, or Previously Altered Structures

Repair is always preferred over replacement. Demolition should be a last resort for historic structures that have evidence of deterioration, damage, or previous alterations. Stabilizing and/or reinforcing the structure or otherwise preserving and rehabilitating the building's existing historic and physical characteristics should be explored first. When it is determined that repair is not viable, reasonable replacement of damaged, deteriorated, or missing material is fine, as long as the

replacement material is the same and compatible with the character of the structure.



**DO.** The character-defining features, including the doors, were retained and repaired in this previously deteriorated historic school corridor ([Secretary of the Interior's Rehabilitation Standards](#), p. 129).



**DO.** This project replaced only the termite-damaged wood in order to retain as much of the historic wood sill plate ([Secretary of the Interior's Rehabilitation Standards](#), p. 121).

## Additional Resources

The following additional hyperlinked resources are available online:

- [The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties](#)
- [Illustrated Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings](#)
- [Helpful guidance for complex issues](#)
- [How-to guides on specific rehabilitation topics](#)
- [Evaluating Substitute Materials in Historic Buildings](#)
- [Planning Successful Rehabilitation Projects](#)
- [SHSND Historic Preservation Topics](#)

For additional information, contact the Community Development Department - Planning Division at 355-1840 or [planning@bismarcknd.gov](mailto:planning@bismarcknd.gov).