



# EXTERIORS

*in Historic Downtown Montpelier*

## Exteriors

The City of Montpelier believes that ongoing maintenance of historic buildings, such as reasonable repairs and use of quality materials, extends the life of these structures and contributes to the vitality of downtown Montpelier.

In providing this document to local citizens, the Department of Planning and Community Development seeks to encourage the proper maintenance of historic buildings in the City and make information available to property owners well before the final design of a project, thereby saving both the owners and the City valuable time and money.

### *The Value of Exteriors*

Exteriors are the public view of a building. The wood or brick siding commonly found in Montpelier's Historic District plays an important role in both the appearance and overall operation of a building. These materials protect the home or business from the elements. Exteriors also enhance the character of a building and its neighborhood by often tying it to a specific time and place, since most building materials were once extracted, created, and used locally.

### *Design and Construction Concerns*

Due to its susceptibility to wear and tear, the purpose of repairing or replacing the exterior of a building is often to fix a problem relating to disrepair. However, the resolution of one issue can often lead to the discovery of others. The following are a few problems commonly encountered during the modification of exteriors.

1. Historic exteriors have withstood the test of time, and with proper maintenance and repair, they can last much longer. If they have been damaged by excessive moisture penetration, ultraviolet degradation, or thermal expansion and contraction, simple repairs can be problematic. In these cases, replacement may be suitable if new materials of similar composition, wood species, durability, and surface characteristics are used.
2. Newer, synthetic materials are often not as permeable as original exteriors. Newer buildings typically have

ventilation systems to help mitigate this issue, but most historic structures do not. As a result, by applying synthetic materials to the exterior of a historic structure without a new ventilation system, a property owner can easily impair the building's natural ability to "breathe." This change can trigger a buildup of moisture and potentially cause rapid and severe damage.

3. In choosing to replace an exterior, you may frequently find that you have not solved the actual problem. For example, replacing wood siding to address peeling paint may be futile if the deterioration is actually caused by a leaky roof that had caused the buildup of moisture in the walls. Before embarking on a replacement project, first take the time to determine the true cause of the issue. Carefully calculating your actions will save time and money by prompting the repair of the underlying issue, rather than one of its symptoms.
4. People often assume that synthetic materials will improve the energy efficiency of their structure and decrease the need for maintenance. Neither of these assumptions is correct. Even if less maintenance is needed for synthetic siding, when repairs are required, they are substantially more expensive. Vinyl or synthetic siding must be replaced in full if chipped or cracked. Similarly, the thin insulation associated with vinyl siding plays a negligible role in insulating a building. It is typically riddled with holes created during installation of the siding. Considering that most energy is actually lost through doors, windows, and roofs, replacing a historic exterior with vinyl siding does not guarantee improvement in a building's insulation.
5. In repairing or replacing a building's exterior, important architectural details can be covered up or removed. Such actions can significantly compromise the integrity and character of the historic structure.

## Making Plans

### *Considerations Along the Way*

Due to the factors discussed above, please consider the following guidelines when preparing to work on the exterior of your building:

#### **Appropriate Actions:**

1. Using traditional materials, that match the original, to repair or replace historic siding.
2. Maintaining and preserving architectural details on the structure exterior.
3. Exploring all options thoroughly before using substitute materials, or avoiding use of artificial materials entirely.

#### **Inappropriate Actions:**

1. Covering up exterior architectural details with new siding that alters the appearance, proportions, and details of the building or conceals future deterioration.
2. Replacing exterior materials with artificial stone or brick, rough sawn wood, stucco, or flat sheet metal that has no link or compatibility with a building's historic design.
3. Constructing new façades whose materials and design are not in keeping with the building's historic character.



## "Green" it Up

Avoiding the use of synthetic materials is not only recommended by the Design Review Guidelines, but it is also a "green" strategy. The use of wood products has an extremely low overall environmental impact, particularly in cases where the products are sustainably harvested. In contrast, materials like vinyl have the potential to create and contribute to environmental problems like air and water pollution during manufacturing and installation.



### FOR MORE INFORMATION

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