

Program Guidelines

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The Warren Voluntary Historic District Committee (WVHDC) was established by the Warren Town Council:

“To develop a program to encourage the voluntary preservation, restoration, and protection of the architectural heritage of the Town of Warren’s Historic District and other properties for future generations.”

As a result, a residential and commercial real estate tax credit program is available to its residents and business owners. This legislation provides an incentive for owners of historic properties to preserve the exterior appearance of their site and its accessories. Eligible town properties are located within the Voluntary Historic District or are at least 100 years old.

This document attempts to provide a guide to the inevitable changes to the exteriors of structures and sites of the Town’s historic properties. The most important features of historic buildings are roofs, exterior walls, windows and their openings and trim, doors and entries, porches, steps, stairs, railings and foundations. The following guidelines attempt to address the most common issues regarding the preservation of historic properties and are provided here as an aid to the property owner. However, as each historic structure and site are unique, each is considered by the committee on its own merits.

2. Eligible Projects:

- Residential and commercial historic structures in the Warren Voluntary Historic District, as well as Town of Warren properties that are at least 100 years old
- The maintenance and repair of existing or historically significant materials and exterior features of a structure or site
- Replacement of removed or missing features based on historical, documentary, physical, pictorial or other evidence
- Changes to a building or site, which have taken place over time, that are evidence of its history and development
- The preservation and protection of significant archaeological resources

3. Program Purpose:

The primary purpose of the Voluntary Historic District ordinance is to promote preservation of buildings, sites and appurtenances with historic and architectural significance. It is important to identify character-defining features such as height, setback from the street, shape, roof form, wall cladding, trim and ornamentation, windows and doors, porches, stairs and site details. Alterations, which recognize, maintain and preserve distinctive features, materials, finishes, construction techniques, and examples of craftsmanship, will help to protect the integrity of the historic property and district.

In reviewing a proposed project, the WVHDC shall consider:

- The historic and architectural significance of the structure and its appurtenances
- The way the structure and its appurtenances contribute to the historical and architectural significance of the district and/or town
- The appropriateness of the proposed design, texture, and materials of the project

The culmination of the review process, and eligibility of the project for the property tax credit is granted in the issuance of a Certificate of Appropriateness (C of A) prior to the commencement of the project.

4. Application Process:

The WVHDC is here to help town residents apply for the property tax credit, use us for guidance; visit our Website, speak with a committee member, attend a regular monthly meeting.

Does the project fit the criteria for tax credit eligibility?

The work has not begun

The building is in the district or is greater than 100 years old

Fill out an Application

- Get estimates for the work
- Take pictures of planned work areas

Bring your project to the WVHDC committee for review

- Schedule with WVHDC Secretary
- Present your estimates and pictures
- Receive your Certificate of Appropriateness

Get started

- Get your permits, if required, and begin the work
- Apprise the WVHDC of cost increases
- Make copies of your receipts
- Take pictures of the completed project
- Create a summary of your project documents

Return to the VHDC to reconcile your project

- Present your summary and documentation to the committee
- Get final tax credit approval
- Meet with the Town Assessor to review your property tax credit

5. Construction Permits:

Many projects will not require the issuance of a building permit, but remember, to qualify for the property tax credit, the project must receive a C of A. Please note, that projects that do require a building permit, but receive a C of A, are exempt from Town of Warren permit fees; State of Rhode Island permit fees, however, are not exempt.

- Door and window hardware, buzzers, mailboxes, small louvers, registers, can generally be replaced without the need for a construction permit.
- Windows, storm windows, doors, storm doors and screen doors
- All general maintenance and repair of any of the existing features of a structure or building.
- Removal of deteriorated, damaged or dangerous building features including porches, stairs, shutters, porticos, car parks, fences and walls.
- Non-structural reconstruction in the same design of exterior architectural features damaged, deteriorated or destroyed by fire, storm or other disaster, provided such reconstruction is begun within one year and is continued to completion.

6. New Construction:

The WVHDC's responsibility regarding new construction is to promote high-quality new design, often contemporary in nature that fits within the context of the historic district. Additions may be designed in the spirit of the existing architectural style, or be clearly differentiated from the historic structure but compatible with it and with the surrounding

historic district. It is not necessary to replicate historic architectural styles. Designs should be contextual but should not seek to create a false sense of historical development.

For the purpose of these guidelines, "new construction" refers to new secondary structures including garages as well as substantial additions to existing structures and as such, are not eligible for a real estate tax credit.

It is strongly recommended, that the applicant retain the services of an architect, design professional, or engineer for the design and construction of any new structure or addition.

7. Commercial Considerations:

Changes to meet other codes, including installation or removal of fire escapes, construction of accessibility ramps, etc., are not currently eligible to receive a tax credit.

Conversion of double hung windows to casement windows for egress and enlargement of window openings to accommodate fire doors are discouraged on primary elevations. Avoid installing fire doors in door openings on primary elevations. In many historic buildings, upper floor double-hung windows are tall enough to permit egress to a fire escape through a raised lower sash.

II. Restoration & Maintenance Guidelines

1. Cleaning, Paint Removal and Painting:

Cleaning methods can damage historic materials and remove the irreplaceable patina of age. Buildings should be cleaned only to halt deterioration or to remove heavy soils. It is recommended to use the gentlest method possible; usually detergent and low pressure water wash (less than 600 pounds per square inch) and scrubbing with natural bristle brushes.

Cleaning methods should be tested in an inconspicuous location on the building to make sure no damage will ensue. Chemical cleaners should be used with care. Determine the weakest possible solution that will do the job without damaging historic materials. Be sure to use a neutralizer after chemical treatments.

Abrasive mechanical cleaners, such as sandblasting, rotary sanding disks and rotary wire strippers will revoke the C of A, because they can erode the surface, leaving pits and scars; actually increasing the chance of water penetration and eventual damage. Check with the RI Department of Environmental Management's Division of Air Resources (401-222-2808) about requirements for containing residues and airborne particles resulting from cleaning methods.

The removal of paint from a historic structure and the subsequent repainting, are maintenance projects that require the use of proper care in order to qualify for the tax credit. Stripping paint can damage wood and masonry materials and remove evidence of

early paint schemes; resulting in a loss of important information about the history of the structure. Although Painted surfaces do require periodic maintenance, the stripping of all the paint from a historic structure is often unnecessary. Removing trouble spots, priming and repainting with a thin layer of a quality paint will often suffice.

From the perspective of environmental safety and historic preservation, the least damaging method of preparing a painted surface for repainting is to wet the surface with water and then to hand-scrape and hand-sand failing paint layers, down to a sound layer. Other acceptable methods of paint removal include heat guns or heat plates that do not exceed 1000°F. Dry scraping and sanding will revoke the Certificate of Appropriateness and remove the project from tax credit applicability.

Paint removal can contribute to lead contamination. Compliance with the Department of Environmental Management's Regulation No. 24's requirements for notification, site preparation, approved removal techniques, and site clean up are required of all persons conducting any lead-based paint removal. Contact the Department of Environmental Management's, Division of Air Resources (401-222-2808) for more information.

The protective coatings, the paint you chose, can

Penetrating stains will generally side-step some of the maintenance requirement of paints; although, it is recommended that such a stain should be applied only to new wood.

2. Exterior Cladding and Trim

The decorative patterns, spacing, beaded edges, and visual textures of wood shingles and clapboards are character-defining features of historic buildings. As such, they should be retained, preserved and repaired wherever possible. Changes in ornamentation, installation or removal of trim, brackets, cornices, belt courses, corner boards and other decorative elements is discouraged. If the replacement of shingles and/or clapboards is necessary, then they should be replaced in kind.

Wood trim elements such as corner boards, belt courses, window and door surrounds, brackets, moldings and other decorative features should likewise be repaired or replaced in kind. New or replaced trim should be consistent with the architectural style and material of the building. Historically painted wood features, should not be stripped of paint and left bare wood; paint's opacity protects the surface from light as well as moisture.

Chemical preservatives may be applied to those features that are prone to decay and/or are traditionally unpainted. Pressure-treated pine can be used for structural elements but should be avoided in the replacement of wood railings, trim elements and decorative details, due to its tendency to shrink and warp.

The removal of existing non-traditional sidings and the restoration of the historic siding materials and details is encouraged. This project alone, can qualify as a tax credit-qualifying project.

The installation of through wall vents, air conditioners, and the addition or

removal of projections and recesses are generally discouraged, even more so on primary elevations. Inconspicuous inclusion on secondary elevations is a topic for discussion during the project review process.

3. Porches, Railing & Stairs

The retention of existing materials, configurations, designs and dimensions of porches and their details is encouraged. Original porch decking materials include? Traditional railings will have a molded handrail cap with balusters inserted between a top and bottom rail. The nosing profiles on original stair treads are considered historically significant.

Pressure treated wood is appropriate for substructures, porch decking, and steps; but keep in mind their propensity to shrink, split, warp and twist, especially in thin sections as in balusters or lattice work. Weather exposed elements should be painted or stained as soon as possible.

Changes to porches, stairs and entryways, including enclosure and the alteration or removal of railings, steps, handrails, door hoods, transoms, and sidelights are generally discouraged, but may be addressed during the project review process. To minimize visual impact, porch enclosures, glazed or screened, should be located inside the railings and columns.

4. Roof & Gutter Systems

A weather-tight roof with a functioning water run-off system is essential to the preservation of the entire structure. As such, their maintenance, repair and replacement are essential. Existing historic materials, shapes, colors, patterns and textures are encouraged.

Existing roof materials should be retained, repaired and preserved wherever possible. Replacement in kind is encouraged where replacement is necessary; Roof colors should be medium to dark in tone and should complement the building's color and define the outline of the roof against the sky. Asphalt roof shingles are not encouraged as a replacement material for slate. Rolled rubber roofing is an acceptable substitute for tar and gravel roofs.

Built-in gutters should be retained wherever possible, as they are character-defining features of certain architectural styles such as Greek Revival, Italianate and Mansard. Existing materials such as wood, copper or galvanized steel should be maintained and preserved or replaced in kind. Regular maintenance of gutter systems is encouraged. New copper may be allowed to weather naturally. Unfortunately, vinyl, aluminum and PVC materials do not qualify for a tax credit.

Changes in roof form or elements including the construction or removal of dormers, monitors, cupolas, skylights, cresting rails and balustrades, and decks must be reviewed by the WVHDC to determine their suitability with the historic character of the structure.

Consider locating new roof top elements so that they will be out of view from the street level. Avoid locating new skylights on the front roof slopes, and flat profiles are preferable to domed or rounded profiles.

5. Windows & Doors

The layout of your windows and doors: number, location, size and glazing patterns, as well as unique features of; curved, bent, or leaded glass and unusual shapes, are character defining features and should be retained and preserved wherever possible. Many windows and doors are better repaired rather than replaced; even if they are badly deteriorated, it is seldom necessary to replace all the openings in a building. Historic wood windows and doors that are properly repaired, caulked and weather-stripped, and provided with well-fitted storms, can be as energy efficient as newer units.

Where sash, stile and rail replacement is necessary due to deterioration, new units should match the existing in materials, design, dimensions, configuration, profile and number of panes. Please keep in mind that wood, painted with a coordinating trim color, is the traditional window and door material and that most sashes and lights have true divided lights, muntins penetrating the glass.

Where complete replacement is necessary, new units should match the original in materials, design, dimensions, configuration, profile and number of panes or lights. Avoid modifying the original openings in the structure and strive for a matching size casing or jamb. On "architectural series" window replacements; interior and exterior applied muntins and the muntins sandwiched between panes of glass, should match the width, profile and pattern of each other as well as the original. Window glass or door lights should be clear, not tinted or frosted. Correcting the size of an existing ill-replaced window or door to its original configuration is encouraged. Street side windows and doors, are considered the most important historically.

Original or historic bay windows and oriels should be retained and preserved. Doors provide not only a means of entering or existing a building, but a real architectural connection to the style and period of the structure. In the case of glazed doors, a visual connection is made between the interior and the exterior of the building that is considered significant.

6. Shutters and Blinds

Exterior shutters (solid panels) and blinds (louvers) were traditionally used to control light, ventilation, and to improve privacy and window protection. Again, wood is considered the traditional shutter and blind material.

Traditional shutters or blinds will match the height, and one-half the width of the window opening they cover. Shutters are generally inappropriate on windows that are wider than they are tall, such as picture windows. For arched windows, they should follow the shape of the window opening.

Shutter and blind hardware and its placement are important. Shutters and blinds can be hung from a variety of hinges, slide bolts, pintels and shutter dogs; this historic hardware is generally still available. Because these features are operable, simply tacking shutters and blinds onto the face of the building is not considered appropriate. Louvered blinds in the open position are traditionally hung so that the louvers angle upward. When closed on the window, the louvers will allow the viewing of the ground from the inside of the building.

7. Fences & Gates

While complete privacy is often not possible in densely built urban areas, a fence can mark the boundary line between one property and another, or distinguish public spaces (streets and sidewalks) from semi-public spaces (front yards). Fences are often character-defining features and should be treated sensitively.

Fences and gates, however, are reviewed by WVHDC on a case-by-case basis if it is determined that the maintenance or extension of an existing fence and/or gate is of historical significance.

Historically significant materials generally include: fences and gates that are made of cast iron, wrought iron, wood pickets and solid, vertical board wood with a flat cap. Gates should be compatible with any existing fencing, walls or landscaping, and be designed to swing onto the private walkway or driveway and not onto the public sidewalk.

8. Masonry, Foundations & Grade

Brick, stone, stucco and concrete should be repaired with materials that match the existing in color, texture and dimensions; patching materials should have integral color.

The use of masonry sealers, waterproofing and the painting of traditionally unfinished materials are discouraged, as they can lead to further deterioration by trapping moisture as well as inappropriate color and finish changes. Test patches or material samples may be submitted as evidence during committee review.

Re-pointing should preserve the original mortar colors and joint profiles; again samples may be helpful. Old mortar should be removed by hand to avoid damaging the surrounding masonry. Note that the soft brick on historic buildings can be damaged by mortars with high proportions of portland cement. As such, re-pointing mixes should be higher in lime content.

Grade changes and the permanent raising or lowering of a structure is discouraged. The cladding of a traditionally exposed foundations original material is also discouraged.

III References

The documents referenced below provide a general technical background for historic preservation and restoration work. The WVHDC and individuals planning work on eligible historic residential properties should consult these documents when guidance on specific topics is required

“The Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation and Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings,” revised 1990

<http://www.nps.gov/history/hps/tps/standguide/index.htm>

<http://www.nps.gov/history/hps/tps/tax/rhb/index.htm>

“Easy Guide to Rehab Standards,” Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission, dated 1992

http://www.rihphc.state.ri.us/resources/ezguide_rehab.php

“Fixing-Up; Bilingual Handbook for Older Homes,” Massasoit Historical Association, Warren, Rhode Island, dated 1979

http://www.massasoithistorical.org/fixing_up.htm

Preservation Directory.com

Reference:

<http://www.preservationdirectory.com/HistoricalPreservation/Home.aspx>

Services:

<http://www.preservationdirectory.com/PreservationBusinessesProducts/Services/BusinessCategories.aspx>

State Tax Credits

<http://www.preservation.ri.gov/credits/commstate.php>

Federal Tax Credits

<http://www.nps.gov/history/hps/tps/tax/>