

INSPECTION CHECKLIST

Some things to think about when you are inspecting a building

MASONRY

The common materials of masonry construction are brick, building stone such as marble, granite, and limestone, cast stone, concrete block, glass block, and adobe. Masonry is generally a highly durable form of construction. However, the materials used, the quality of the mortar and workmanship, and the pattern in which the units are assembled can substantially affect the durability of the overall masonry construction.

Moisture

Masonry should be checked regularly for moisture penetration. Moisture can enter masonry through leaky roofs, gutters and down spouts, poor drainage, or a condition known as rising damp. Rising damp occurs when moisture is drawn up from the ground through brick by capillary action.

Tuckpointing

Repair masonry walls and other masonry features by repointing the mortar joints where there is evidence of deterioration, such as disintegrating mortar, cracks in mortar joints, loose bricks, or damaged plaster work. Please research and/or consult a professional before beginning work.

Cleaning

Although cleaning masonry can have a dramatic impact on the appearance of a building, it should nevertheless only be done to halt deterioration, and not merely to attain a "new" façade. Cleaning and removing paint generally requires knowledgeable contractors. The Minnesota State Historic Preservation Office keeps a list of qualified cleaning contractors who operate in the State.

Sandblasting

Sandblasting is never an appropriate cleaning method for historic masonry. Sandblasting is especially harmful to brick surfaces, eroding the hard-outer layer to expose a softer, more porous surface that will weather rapidly. Be aware that sandblasting will disqualify a project from consideration when applying for federal tax credits.

Painting

In general, exposed masonry should not be painted. Unless the surface was painted from the beginning (as was sometimes the case with very soft brick), cleaning and tuckpointing of the masonry is usually preferable. A previously painted surface should be chemically cleaned. Only if chemical paint removal proves impractical (for example, due to a cementitious paint coat) should previously painted brick or stone be repainted.

References:

The following publications contain more detailed information about masonry.

Introduction to Early American Masonry: Stone, Brick, Mortar, and Plaster by Harley J. Mckee, FAIA., National Trust/Columbia University Series on the Technology of Early American Buildings Vol I. New York

Preservation Briefs are available on the National Park Service website. Preservation Briefs provide information on **preserving, rehabilitating, and restoring** historic buildings.

<https://www.nps.gov/tps/how-to-preserve/briefs.htm>

WOOD

One of the most popular building materials in the district is wood, due to its structural flexibility, economy, and strength.

Storefronts, cornices, brackets, and other decorative façade elements were often made of wood. These original exterior elements should be retained whenever possible.

Regular maintenance will prevent deterioration.

Painting

All surfaces are primed and painted to prevent deterioration due to moisture.

Millwork

Severely rotted or missing pieces? These may be reproduced by a good carpenter or millwork shop. It is best to match or at least complement the existing details when replacing woodwork.

References:

Respectful Rehabilitation-Answers to Your Questions About Old Buildings by the Preservation Press, Washington D.C.

Preservation Briefs are available on the National Park Service website. Preservation Briefs provide information on **preserving, rehabilitating, and restoring** historic buildings.

<https://www.nps.gov/tps/how-to-preserve/briefs.htm>

METALS

Cast iron and sheet metal are sometimes used in ornamental and practical roles in historic buildings.

Intricate detail was reproduced in cast iron or stamped sheet metal as an architectural ornament at low cost, while practical hardware such as fences, gutters, down spouts, structural supports and roofing were done in metal as well. The decorative or utilitarian components in metal give buildings their human scale and liveliness.

Condition Assessment

These architectural elements are essential to the character and appearance of your building. They should not be removed unless absolutely necessary.

Typically any aged metal work should be assessed by a professional.

Restoring

Due to the potential of hazardous material please refer to the National Park Service Briefs on metal work for more information before starting any repairs.

References:

Metals in America's Historic Buildings: Uses and Preservation Treatments by Margot Gayle, David W. Look, AIA, and John G. Waite, Government Printing Office, Washington D.C.

Preservation Briefs are available on the National Park Service website. Preservation Briefs provide information on **preserving, rehabilitating, and restoring** historic buildings.

<https://www.nps.gov/tps/how-to-preserve/briefs.htm>

OTHER MATERIALS

Stucco

Some buildings have been covered with other materials to modernize their appearance or limit the need for maintenance. Stucco is a common example. These materials often obscure important details or cause them to be removed. They can cause or intensify internal structural problems and they reduce the visual interest of a complex wall surface.

Siding

The loss of original detail is the most obvious problem encountered with applied sidings. An impervious layer of siding can allow serious decay or insect damage to go unseen and unchecked. Moisture from condensation or interior water vapor can rot wooden materials or damage masonry in the wall.

Today there are many synthetic and metal siding types that are intended to mimic wood lap siding. Synthetic siding such as vinyl, aluminum, and steel siding should not be applied to buildings in historic downtowns. Whenever possible, such materials should be removed in the course of maintenance and improvements to properties.

References:

Preservation Briefs are available on the National Park Service website. Preservation Briefs provide information on **preserving, rehabilitating, and restoring** historic buildings.

<https://www.nps.gov/tps/how-to-preserve/briefs.htm>