



**PLANNING &
DEVELOPMENT
DEPARTMENT**

Planning & Development Department Policy
WINDOW REPLACEMENT (HOP)

Policy No.

1-1

Effective Date:

Upon Approval

1. STATEMENT

This policy establishes the City of Houston Planning and Development Department's formal position and requirements regarding the use of vinyl windows on designated landmarks, protected landmarks, and properties located within historic districts. It prohibits the installation of vinyl windows in any building or structure that is designated as a landmark, protected landmark or that is located within an historic district, unless specific exceptions apply. It also sets guidelines to ensure that window replacements maintain the historic appearance and architectural authenticity of such properties.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to provide clear internal guidance regarding the review, approval, and enforcement of window replacement projects on designated historic structures. This policy establishes that the use of vinyl windows is prohibited on designated landmarks, protected landmarks, and properties located within historic districts. This includes the designated structure itself, alterations, and new construction.

The policy ensures consistency with Article VII, Historic Preservation, Chapter 33, Code of Ordinances of the City of Houston and Chapter 211, Texas Local Government Code and nationally recognized preservation standards, including the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation.

3. SCOPE

3.1. This policy applies to:

- 3.1.1. All exterior window replacement projects on designated landmarks, protected landmarks, and properties located within historic districts that are visible from the street within the City of Houston.
- 3.1.2. All Historic Office of Preservation (HOP) staff members responsible for reviewing and processing Certificates of Appropriateness (COA).
- 3.1.3. All applicants seeking permits for designated landmarks, protected landmarks, and properties located within historic districts.

4. DEFINITIONS

- 4.1. Alteration – Any change to the exterior of a building, structure, object or site. Alteration shall include, but is not limited to, replacing historic material; changing to a different kind, type or size of roofing or siding materials or foundation; changing, eliminating, or adding exterior doors, door frames, windows, window frames, shutters, railings, columns, beams, walls, porches, steps,

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porte-cocheres, balconies, signs attached to the exterior of a building, or ornamentation; or the dismantling, moving or removing of any exterior feature. Alteration includes expanding an existing structure or the construction of an addition to an existing structure.

- 4.2. Certificate of Appropriateness (COA)– A current and valid permit issued by the HAHC or the director, as applicable, authorizing the issuance of a building permit for construction, alteration, rehabilitation, restoration, relocation or demolition required by this article.
- 4.3. Contributing Structure – A building, structure, object or site that reinforces, or that has conditions, which, if reversed, would reinforce, the cultural, architectural or historical significance of the historic district in which it is located, and that is identified as contributing upon the designation of the historic district in which it is located. The term also includes any structure that was identified as "potentially contributing" in any historic district.
- 4.4. Designation – The formal recognition by the city council of a building, structure, object, site or district as historically, architecturally, culturally or archaeologically significant to the city, state, nation or region.
- 4.5. Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission (HAHC) – a 13-member appointed Commission that issues COAs and reviews Historic District, Landmark, Protected Landmark, and Archaeological designation applications.
- 4.6. Historic District – a geographical area designated by the city council that possesses a significant concentration, linkage or continuity of buildings, structures, objects or sites united by historical, cultural, architectural or archaeological significance to the city, state, nation or region.
- 4.7. Inset and Recessed – Windows must have a minimum 1 ¾ inch inset depth from the exterior casing to the face of the window unit (upper sash) when installed.
- 4.8. Landmark – Any individual building, structure, object or site designated by the city council for its historical, cultural, architectural or archaeological significance in the city, state, nation or region.
- 4.9. New Construction – Freestanding building or structure proposed to be constructed within a historic district designated by city council, whether that building or structure is on the location of a vacant lot or a lot with another structure on it.
- 4.10. Non-Contributing Structure – A building, structure, object or site that does not reinforce the cultural, architectural, or historical significance of the historic district in which it is located and is identified as non-contributing upon the designation of the historic district in which it is located.
- 4.11. Protected Landmark – A landmark whose owner has elected to permanently protect the landmark by foregoing the 90-day waiver certificate authorized by this article.
- 4.12. Street – A public or private street or roadway that is not an alley or a shared driveway.
- 4.13. Structure – that which is built or constructed, an edifice or building of any kind, or any piece of

work artificially built up or composed of parts joined together in some definite manner.

4.14. Vinyl Windows – Windows made primarily of polyvinyl chloride (PVC) or similar plastic materials.

5. POLICY

5.1. Vinyl windows shall not be approved for use on locally designated historic structures, including landmarks and protected landmarks, as well as contributing and non-contributing structures in historic districts. This includes alterations and new construction. Vinyl windows are incompatible with the preservation of historic character due to their:

5.1.1. Non-traditional material composition and visual appearance.

5.1.2. Inability to replicate historic profiles, muntin patterns, and detailing with sufficient accuracy.

5.1.3. Poor long-term durability and incompatibility with traditional repair methods.

5.1.4. Adverse impacts on the architectural integrity and historic character of structures.

5.2. Acceptable replacement window materials must be compatible with the architectural style of the structure and/or historic district.

5.2.1. For most designated structures and districts, acceptable materials are limited to:

5.2.1.1. Wood

5.2.1.2. Wood-clad

5.2.1.3. Wood composite

5.2.2. For designated structures designed in a Mid-Century Modern architectural style, acceptable materials may include:

5.2.2.1. Aluminum

6. REQUIREMENTS

6.1. To ensure compliance with this policy, the following requirements shall apply to all window replacement projects involving designated landmarks, protected landmarks, and properties located within historic districts:

6.1.1. Repair First – Original historic windows must be evaluated for repair before replacement is considered. Applicants must provide documentation (photos, condition reports, or contractor assessments) demonstrating why replacement is warranted.

6.1.2. Material Standards – Replacement windows must be constructed of historically appropriate materials and replicate the original appearance.

6.1.3. Design Compatibility – Replacement units must match the original in sash dimensions, muntin configuration, profile, and operation (i.e., inset and recessed). Stock or standard-sized units that alter the size of the original window openings are not permitted.

6.1.4. Documentation – Applicants must submit product specifications, cut sheets, and detailed drawings showing compliance with design guidelines.

7. PROCESS

7.1. All window replacements must receive prior approval from the HOP or the HAHC. The process for approval is as follows:

7.1.1. Applicants must apply for a COA or for a Pre-Application Design Review on the Historic Preservation Tracker website prior to purchasing or replacing windows.

7.1.2. Applicants must submit detailed plans and material specifications demonstrating compliance with this policy.

7.1.3. Once submitted, staff will evaluate the application and supporting documents for compliance with this policy and applicable design guidelines.

7.1.3.1. If vinyl windows are proposed, staff will inform applicant of this policy and provide guidance on acceptable alternatives and repair options. If the applicant still wishes to propose vinyl windows, the application will be recommended for denial.

7.1.3.2. Acceptable materials and designs may be approved administratively by the Director or referred to the HAHC for consideration at a public meeting, if required. Basis of approval is based on the consistency with Article VII, Chapter 33, Code of Ordinances of the City of Houston, applicable design guidelines, and this policy.

7.1.3.3. Unauthorized installation of vinyl windows constitutes a violation of the preservation ordinance and may result in enforcement actions, including fines or required removal.

8. EXCEPTIONS

8.1. Exceptions may be granted only in cases where:

8.1.1. The window opening for the proposed replacement window is not visible from the street, or

8.1.2. The window is non-original and has already replaced with vinyl, or

8.1.3. The window is located on an accessory structure located towards the rear of the lot, or

8.1.4. The original window material cannot be reasonably repaired or replicated, and

8.1.5. The proposed alternative material is demonstrated to be the closest match in appearance and durability, and

8.1.6. The substitution is approved by the HAHC.

9. APPENDIX

9.1. City of Houston Historic Preservation Ordinance

9.1.1. Article VII., Chapter 33

9.2. Inset and Recessed window diagram

9.2.1. This diagram illustrates window visibility and placement requirements referenced in this policy.

Available at: <https://www.houstontx.gov/planning/HistoricPres/Resources.html>.