



# The Local Landmarker

## Issue 11, March 2009



### *On the Cover: The Amos Block in Syracuse, a CLG since 1986*

The Amos Block was constructed in 1878 by Jacob Amos, a two-term mayor of the city who did much to improve city life through paving streets and installing sewer systems. Originally a wholesale grocery and warehouse building, it was constructed with the rear of the building facing the Erie Canal, which then ran through downtown Syracuse. Its location made it easy to load and unload goods from the canal. The Victorian Romanesque building was designed by J. Lyman Silsbee, who moved to Chicago shortly after this project and mentored a new generation of architects. Frank Lloyd Wright worked in Silsbee's office early in his career. The ornate façade shown here is on West Water Street. The Amos Block was renovated in 2006 and now houses retail shops and apartments.

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## *From the Coordinator*

### **This Issue**

This issue of *The Local Landmarker* is about historic windows. Many of you sitting on preservation commissions have had a great deal of headaches recently about window replacement projects. The spike in fuel costs last year drove many people to look for ways to make their historic building more energy efficient, which is a worthy goal. However, few people undertake any real research about the most cost effective approach to energy conservation. Older windows that have not been properly maintained can often feel drafty and may seem to be the main culprits in heat loss. Window manufacturers are aware of this, and make it almost impossible to turn on a radio or TV, or open a newspaper without being hit with an advertisement for replacement windows. While there may be some good products out there for new construction, when it comes to historic buildings, the retention of original character defining features is important. Not only are historic windows extremely important for a building's architectural integrity, many were also made to be repaired. Most can be retrofitted to be more weather-tight rather easily, resulting in a better "return" on investment and a far more "green" approach than buying new windows.

Kimberly Konrad Alvarez and Jack Alvarez are the guest columnists for this issue of *The Landmarker*. The Alvarez's are well known in the Albany area as historic window experts, having worked tirelessly to promote the issue and offer workshops for owners and contractors. They were also instrumental in getting historic wood windows listed on the Preservation League's 2006 *Seven to Save* Endangered list. When I thought of an issue about historic windows, I immediately thought of them.

### **Grants**

CLG grant applications for Fiscal Year 2010 will be distributed in May and due in July, so be thinking of projects you may wish to apply for. As always, I'm available to discuss ideas, applications, etc. before you submit the application. For some ideas about previously awarded grants, you can check out the following website:

[www.nysparks.state.ny.us/shpo/certified/program.htm](http://www.nysparks.state.ny.us/shpo/certified/program.htm)

See you in the field!



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Listserv: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/NYSCLGS/>

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The New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation oversees the Certified Local Government program. This office receives federal funding from the National Park Service. Regulations of the U.S. Department of the Interior strictly prohibit unlawful discrimination in the departmental federally assisted programs on the basis of race, color, national origin, age or handicap. Any person who believes he or she has been discriminated against in any program, activity, or facility operated by a recipient of federal assistance should write to: Director, Equal Opportunity Program, U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, P.O. 37127, Washington, D.C. 20013-7127



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## *Restoring Our Appreciation of Historic Wood Windows: Making a Case for Restoration Versus Replacement*

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Kimberly Konrad Alvarez & John D. Alvarez II, AIA

The recent emphasis on cutting fuel costs and increasing energy efficiency in buildings has increased the threats to wood windows in historic buildings across the Northeast. Replacement window manufacturers advertise new units that claim to be “Energy Star” rated and *the* answer to the heat loss in “drafty” old buildings. When combined with concern over lead paint issues, the perceived energy costs savings are prompting more applications from property owners who claim that replacing historic windows is the only way to comply with modern energy conservation codes. As a result, preservation commissions are often placed in a difficult position.

Without having practical arguments for retention or restoration of these important character-defining elements and fearful of appearing capricious, commissions can feel pressured to rule to allow the removal of historic fabric. Fortunately, there is a strong case for preserving wood windows aside from the aesthetic argument-- **window restoration has proven favorable over window replacement in terms of *architectural integrity and aesthetics, energy efficiency, sustainability, durability and long term, material life span economics.***, despite the information conveyed by replacement window manufacturers.

Given the right tools, commissions across the state can do their part to preserve the character and craftsmanship of architecturally significant districts and educate the public about genuinely green approaches to energy efficiency.

### ARCHITECTURAL INTEGRITY

Preservationists have long used the “aesthetic and integrity” argument when addressing the question of the appropriateness of replacing original windows. It can be very jarring to see an otherwise perfectly restored Greek Revival

building with new, white vinyl windows with “snap-in” muntins or no muntins at all, where once existed elegant and finely proportioned six-over-six wood sash with mortise and tenon joinery. In this case the glass-to-frame ratio has been altered, the faceted nature of the individual panes has been replaced with a single, reflective surface, and the proportions of the framing and joinery indicative of period building technology have been erased.

The valuable role that windows play in the architectural character of a building should not be underestimated. Windows are one of the few parts of a building which are integral to both the interior and exterior, and serve both a functional and decorative role. What other architectural feature has this much “responsibility”?

Structures built prior to 1930 incorporated architectural elements, including windows that celebrated a particular style and craft in a variety of wood species, shapes, cuts and



Windows on the curb awaiting trash pick up  
*[Kim Konrad Alvarez]*

finishes. The insertion of a plastic or aluminum window into a building 80 years or older, therefore, can look out of place and can negatively impact the architectural integrity of the building. Windows offer some of the most reliable clues to understanding the



history and evolution of a building and, by extension, a street block or whole community.

## ENERGY EFFICIENCY

The most common reason people replace old windows is the “promise” of improved energy efficiency. How could a preservation commission deny an owner this opportunity? Unfortunately for the property owner, the “facts” about energy savings from replacement window companies are sometimes skewed, misinformed, or outright false. Window manufacturers universally boast about their windows’ low U-values (the measure of the rate of heat loss through a material). The quoted U-values are misleading because they are usually given not for the entire window unit, but only for the value through the center of the glass (the location of the greatest heat loss). Not mentioned is the dramatic heat loss of their own windows where an imperfectly squared historic window opening does not allow a new replacement unit to be installed tight within the wall, U-values will be significantly higher (less efficient) owing to infiltration around and between the unit frame and the original window opening. What is most critical when evaluating the energy loss at a window or door opening in any building is the *infiltration* of outside air rather than the insulating factor or heat lost through the glass. **Air infiltration can account for as much as 50% of the total heat loss of a building.**

The replacement window industry insists that windows are the principal source of heat loss in a building, and frequently mislead the general public in claiming that installing energy-efficient or “Energy Star” windows is more important and will generate the greatest energy cost savings than insulating the attic, foundation, or walls. Rarely is the energy loss tested before and after windows are replaced so that property owners can see the extent of change or benefit in efficiency. In fact, actual energy conservation research and test data indicate that on average only 20%- 25% of heat loss occurs through doors and windows while the remaining 75-80% is lost through the roof, floors, walls and chimneys. Studies have shown that a double-glazed window may

save \$3.00 a year per window in energy cost (this is \$30 per year for ten windows at 10 cent per KWH). When weighed against the cost of replacement windows and installation costs in this scenario, recovering the investment through energy savings can take 50-70 years. Since it is *extremely* rare to find a replacement window that is made to last 50-70 years, recouping that savings is nearly impossible in an owner’s lifetime.

Unfortunately, there is a major lack of tangible energy conservation information for existing products, such as existing historic wood window assemblies or those that have been restored or upgraded. Today, consumers can find national ratings for U-factors of building materials and products containing Energy Star labels, but it is important to note that these types of ratings have not been performed for older windows or upgrade products. Therefore, consumers have very little, if any, real data to help make comparisons for energy loss or savings between retaining existing windows and replacing them.

Historically, the best solution for better energy efficiency has been in stopping air infiltration by the installation of effective weatherstripping. Weatherstripping has been used on windows and doors for more than 80 years and is still the easiest and most economical way to keep old wood windows energy efficient and draft-proof. Storm windows are another traditional method for decreasing energy loss. Whether interior or exterior, storm windows create an insulating air space between the primary window and the storm. Storm windows can dramatically improve the U-values of old windows by reducing the heat lost through the surface of the glass.

Another idea to consider is retrofitting historic wood windows by substituting low-e glazing into existing single-pane storm windows. When used in combination with a storm sash, single-pane low-e glass can provide a level of combined energy savings equal to a standard new double-glazed unit. Using low-e coatings and reducing air infiltration is a very simple and cost-effective way to achieve the desired U-value of an entire window unit and avoids modifying visible glass/light, mullions, or sash





weights. Therefore, the energy efficiency of restored windows incorporating upgraded components, such as weatherstripping and tight-fitting storm windows with low-e coatings, can meet and even exceed the efficiency of replacement units.

## SUSTAINABILITY



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Home Comfort Weatherstrip is a resilient cushion strip that makes door and window contacts noiseless and dustproof as well as weathertight. Contains no wood or metal. Cannot break or rust; is moth and vermin proof. As it comes in continuous lengths on a reel there is no waste in left over pieces. Your hardware or lumber dealer will cut off the exact footage you need. The average window or door requires about 20 feet of Home Comfort Weatherstrip. Including enameled tacks to match, the maroon retails for 8¢ per foot; the white 10¢.

#### Demand the Genuine

Imitations are not satisfactory. Be sure that you get the genuine Home Comfort Weatherstrip. The name Home Comfort is on the 4 1/2" double sewed patented jacking lap. If your dealer does not have it, order direct, mentioning his name.

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Weather stripping advertisement, *Better Homes and Gardens*, September, 1926

rather than replacing elements, historic preservation conserves existing materials and the associated “embodied energy” used to create the original structure and architectural features. A preservation minded project can use more materials produced locally or regionally, while common replacement practice requires the installation of mass-produced materials usually transported over long distances. The “retain and repair first” approach can also reduce the need for landfills. Thousands of old wood windows are removed and sent to landfills each year, owing to misconceptions of the value of replacement windows. The wood sash that are most often

Today, the new approach for a responsible way of life and for architecture as a profession is to incorporate *green* or *sustainable design*. For many, the road to “green” is by using new technology and materials that place the least amount of burden or waste on the environment and thus to reduce one’s “carbon footprint.” However, since at least 1966 (the year the National Historic Preservation Act was passed), preservationists have been practicing “green design.” Long before the trendy term was coined,

historic preservation promoted the philosophy of reduce, reuse, and recycle. By repairing

removed are 75-100 years old with normal signs of deterioration. Constructed of old-growth hardwoods, many can be repaired and upgraded to meet modern requirements and give many more years of service .

Compare these windows to modern windows, which their manufacturers typically warranty for an average of 12-15 years. Now that may not mean that they will only last that long, but it is interesting that they do not warranty their products for anywhere near the lifespan of the older windows found in historic buildings. Key in this is that many replacement windows are constructed of lower-quality materials in a way that makes it impossible to simply repair individual elements, leading to the need to purchase entire new window units if the replacement unit fails or breaks. Given their limited lifespan and the lack of potential for repair, even with limited energy savings, the evidence seems to contradict the claim that replacement windows satisfy the “green” or “sustainable” criteria over the long term. Instead, choosing to repair existing original materials recycles them in place, avoids needlessly filling our landfills with repairable building elements and results in an *effective* approach to sustainability that also supports the local economy. **Preservation holds the principles of sustainable design at the very center of its philosophy and practice.**

## DURABILITY

As mentioned above, wood windows that are 75-100 years old are most often removed and discarded when they begin to exhibit normal signs of age such as broken sash cords, paint failure or build up, broken panes of glass, deteriorated glazing putty, loose joinery or minor deterioration of wood members. While each of these ailments can negatively impact a window’s operation, appearance, safety, and energy efficiency, the fact that the window is nearly a century old is actually a strong testament to the quality of its materials and craftsmanship. The windows of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century were designed and constructed to endure many decades and even centuries with a certain level of care and maintenance. In contrast, since the late 1940s,



the business of fabricating windows has evolved from being craft-oriented to focusing on providing in-stock, pre-fabricated, low-priced products. At the same time, the labor force that once offered maintenance and repair services are now geared toward installing whole-window products. The imbalance often tips the scale toward the replacement option.

Windows pre-dating the 1940s are typically constructed of dense, old-growth woods which grew naturally over the decades, whereas, the majority of new wood replacement windows are constructed of light, porous, fast-grown (*i.e.*, farmed), soft woods that are most often the pine species. Because they are porous they are more susceptible to moisture migration and often do not hold paint well. The manufacturer's solution to this problem is to offer an exterior cladding material characterized as "maintenance-free."

Unfortunately, the cladding materials can trap any migrating moisture inside the wood and in moist environments can lead to substantial rot beneath the cladding--this is the primary reason for limited and short warranty terms.

Many people consider the introduction of the insulated glazing unit (IGU) or thermal pane to be a major advancement in the window industry. Most replacement windows offer a thermal or insulated glass unit wherein a vacuumed space is created by double-paned glass filled with argon gas and sealed with gaskets to maintain the vacuum and keep moisture out. Most insulated glass units also have a small amount of desiccant inside the glass space intended to absorb moisture for a limited time. However, as with most synthetic materials, the gaskets that seal these assemblies have a limited life and will deteriorate, allowing the argon gas to escape and air vapor to enter. Studies have found that most sealed gasket systems deteriorate within 25 years, which is why few replacement windows have warranty terms of more than 20 years and why it is not uncommon to find 15-20 year old double-paned windows with a fogged air space.

Old wood windows, on the other hand, are glazed with a system of glass, glazing clips and glazing putty. Glass is actually a fluid

and, like the wood which holds it in place, will expand and contract according to climate conditions. Historically, glazing putty was linseed oil-based, and cured slowly over the years. The slow-curing glazing putty was intended to have some level of flexibility and was an excellent counterpart to the glass. Quality glazing putty has a lifespan of more than 50 years; however, after 50 years it may begin to crack, become brittle and separate from the glass or it may become extremely hard with very little flexibility. As with most components of a wood window, glazing putty is intended to be renewable; replacement with new putty required little expense, effort and impact to the original window. If a pane of glass in an old window breaks, it, too, is designed to be easily and inexpensively replaced. If a pane of glass in a replacement window breaks, a whole new window sash is necessary, requiring the costly services of a contractor.

Typical replacement windows involve a spring balance mechanism which relies on friction and the strength of the user to operate them. In contrast, most windows constructed before 1930 use a weight and pulley system with either cotton sash cords or chains. The pulley system is based on equilibrium, with cords or chains balanced on either side with a counterweight in the pocket matching the weight of the sash. If weighted correctly, even a large window requires very minimal strength to lift or lower. Replacement windows typically experience failure when a spring balance wears out. A counterweighted window fails when the sash cord or chain breaks or the pulley jams. Spring balances cannot be fixed and must be entirely replaced, whereas, broken sash cords can be fixed for the cost of the cotton sash cord and, usually, less than a half hour of labor time for most do-it-yourselfers or a handyman. Once a historic wood window is repaired or fully restored it will not need major work for many years, aside from typical maintenance such as an occasional cleaning of the glass, a quick spray of lubricant in the pulleys to keep them turning smoothly, and a touch up to keep the painted surfaces intact.



## ECONOMICS

The discussion of durability naturally leads to the topic of how economics or cost plays a large role in planning any window project. Typically, projects are evaluated for their upfront and immediate costs. However, when a historic building is involved it is important to consider long term impacts and a look at comparative *life-cycle costs*.

The cost of a typical replacement window can range from \$200-\$1500 per window, depending on the size and material (vinyl, aluminum or wood frame), and always involves the removal of the existing wood sash and the installation of a new sash unit into the existing wood frame. The old weight and pulley system is discarded or abandoned in place (behind the new unit frame) and replaced with an operation system that relies on friction and the user's strength. It is not uncommon for any rotted wood to be simply covered over with new vinyl or aluminum cladding, rather than repaired since this would be an additional cost. In general, the installation crew prefers to be in and out in the shortest amount of time. Most of the cost of replacement windows is the price of the new product itself and not the minimal labor for installation. It can naturally be assumed that the lower the product cost, the lower the quality of the replacement unit because the labor is typically the same. **In comparing replacement costs to repair and/or restoration of an existing old wood window it is important to understand that there is no straightforward formula for the repair approach because the conditions and the extent of deterioration will vary from window to window.**

If there is only minor deterioration or a malfunction that requires select repairs, such as strengthening loose joinery, minor reglazing, replacing broken glass or sash cords, the cost can range from \$50-\$500 per window (based on 1-10 hours of labor). If the window requires complete restoration, the cost can range from \$500-\$1000 per window for residential double-hung windows or \$1000-\$5000 per window for large institutional windows or complex and highly decorative windows. The difference here is that the repair and restoration costs include direct labor at standard craftsman rates in addition

to materials, overhead and profits.

Rehabilitation or restoration and repair costs are for skilled craftsman labor, rather than for the actual product since all of the materials involved are relatively inexpensive. Every dollar that is spent on a repair or restoration job is invested in the local economy compared to dollars paid to a manufacturer of the replacement window products, which is not necessarily a local business.

The above example relates to the initial outlay of funds, however, this is not the only aspect of cost that is important to consider in the planning of a project. **Life-cycle costs are equally if not more important, especially if one is concerned about sustainability and being environmentally responsible.** Life-cycle cost comparisons usually come out in favor of preservation even when values such as the architectural character of the original window and the inherent quality of material and craftsmanship are *not* accounted for.

Moreover, maintenance versus replacement costs further support preservation when fit into the equation. When figuring life cycle costs, the lifespan of older wood windows is an important consideration. Typically these windows have proven to have endured between five decades and more than a century. The lifespan of vinyl, aluminum or modern clad/wood replacement windows, on

the other hand, is in some cases still unknown, but given manufacturer's warranties, does not seem to be in the

same time frame. With replacement windows, it is generally the lifting and lowering mechanisms that wear out in about 15-20 years, followed shortly



The same window before and after restoration [Courtesy of Steve Swiat, Northwood Restoration, Buffalo]





thereafter with the deterioration of the insulated glass unit and the cladding material. All or one of these failures can require replacement of the “replacement” unit.

Another aspect in which the economic argument often favors the restoration approach is with respect to the whole building view. Often when a property owner embarks on a window replacement project it is because a handful of original windows require some level of repair. It is rare that all windows will need full restoration or extensive repairs. It is typically the elevation most exposed to weather that has the most window deterioration; other, more sheltered elevations can be surprising in how well they have preserved original building materials such as windows. The first step for any property owner should be an assessment evaluating the condition of each window and prioritizing the order in which repairs are undertaken. Certainly, such an approach will result in a more lengthy process of overall window repair compared to wholesale replacement, however, it is a more economical approach. For example, let’s say there are 20 windows in a particular house, five per elevation. If the south elevation is exhibiting the most deterioration likely due to the exposure, it is rare that a replacement window contractor would replace only those windows in disrepair, but rather would make a case for replacing all the building’s windows, so they all look alike. If each window costs \$500, that is a \$10,000 project, whereas if only the deteriorated windows were restored at \$500 each or even at \$1,000 each the restoration approach would cost a quarter to a half that of the full replacement, and would last 3-5 times longer.

Lastly, if the reason driving the need for replacement windows is to eliminate lead paint hazards, it should be acknowledged that whether the windows are replaced or restored the most hazardous work involves the removal of the old wood sash. Therefore, removal for replacement is no safer than removal for restoration. The difference in approach occurs after the sash is removed. In the replacement approach, the old sash is disposed of in a

landfill, and the original painted frames and jambs are covered over with vinyl or aluminum. The lead paint remains in place underneath. In the restoration approach, the old sash are fully stripped of the paint and glazing and then reprimed, reglazed and repainted to meet modern standards. On the window frame itself, the areas most affected by friction are the jambs. These are usually tested for the presence of lead and either stripped and repainted or repainted encasing any traces of lead-based paint. In the latter approach, the lead paint on the windows has been abated in the approved method, making the area safe from that point on.

### GUIDING THE DESIRED OUTCOME

Perhaps the most difficult part of a commission’s work will be education about this issue. Overall, there needs to be a shift on the general public’s appreciation for durable, sustainable materials and quality craftsmanship. Such an outlook does not need to be a thing of the past, but rather it can be the direction in which we move in the future. Preservation of old wood windows can be a difficult case to make when most owners of historic property are continuously barraged by relentless marketing campaigns and higher energy bills. Armed with basic window facts and with a little counter marketing, local preservation commissions can help property owners weigh their options more thoroughly and make the right decision for the integrity of their historic home, for the environment and for their wallet.

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*Kimberly Konrad Alvarez, of Landmark Consulting, and John Alvarez, with Mesick Cohen Wilson Baker Architects, live in Albany.*

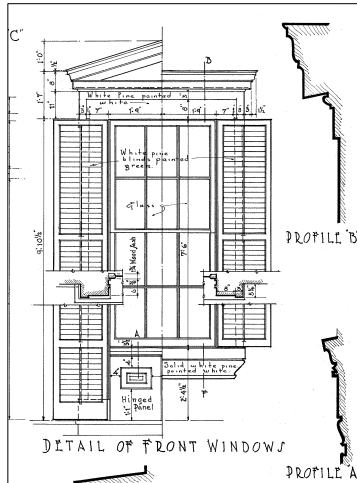
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For further reading, note that there are a number of articles placed on the CLG Yahoo Listserv website: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/NYSCLGS>. Other resources are noted below.





## For further information



General Leavenworth Mansion, 607  
James Street, Syracuse  
(HABS, Library of Congress, 1934)

### National Park Service

*The Repair of Historic Wooden Windows*, National Park Service Preservation Brief #9 at [www.cr.nps.gov/buildings.htm](http://www.cr.nps.gov/buildings.htm).

*Secretary of Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation*.  
[www.cr.nps.gov/local-law/arch\\_stnds\\_0.htm](http://www.cr.nps.gov/local-law/arch_stnds_0.htm)

### National Trust for Historic Preservation

[www.preservationnation.org/issues/sustainability/](http://www.preservationnation.org/issues/sustainability/)  
"Window Know-How: A Guide to Going Green" at  
[www.preservationnation.org/magazine/2009/march-april/ma09window.html](http://www.preservationnation.org/magazine/2009/march-april/ma09window.html)

"Historic Wood Windows Tip Sheet"

[www.preservationnation.org/issues/sustainability/additional-resources/July2008WindowsTipSheet.pdf](http://www.preservationnation.org/issues/sustainability/additional-resources/July2008WindowsTipSheet.pdf)

*Repairing Old and Historic Windows*, New York Landmarks Conservancy, 1992;  
[www.nylandmarks.org](http://www.nylandmarks.org)

"Restoring Window Sashes," *Fine Homebuilding*, David Gibney, Feb/March 2004, pp. 84-89.

"Top Myths About Replacement Windows," James Crouch, *Preservation in Print*,  
December/January 2009, Pg 10. [www.prcno.org](http://www.prcno.org)

"What Replacement Windows Can't Replace: The Real Cost of Removing Historic Windows," Walter Sedovic & Jill Gotthelf, *Association for Preservation Technology (APT) Bulletin*, 36:4, 2005, or see  
[www.apti.org/publications/Past-Bulletin-Articles/Sedovic-36-4.pdf](http://www.apti.org/publications/Past-Bulletin-Articles/Sedovic-36-4.pdf)

See these websites:

[www.historichomeworks.com](http://www.historichomeworks.com)

Old House Journal website:

[www.oldhousejournal.com/index.shtml](http://www.oldhousejournal.com/index.shtml)

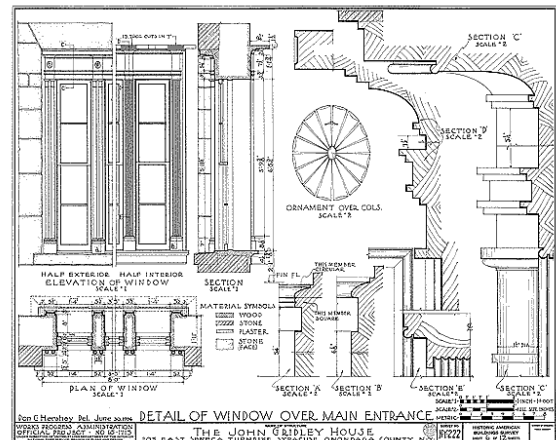
[www.oldhousejournal.com/strips\\_and\\_storms\\_windows/magazine/1099](http://www.oldhousejournal.com/strips_and_storms_windows/magazine/1099)

[www.oldhousejournal.com/Sash\\_Window\\_Clinic/magazine/1078](http://www.oldhousejournal.com/Sash_Window_Clinic/magazine/1078)

[www.oldhousejournal.com/embracing\\_energy/magazine/1453](http://www.oldhousejournal.com/embracing_energy/magazine/1453)

*Rehab Rochester* section of the Landmark Society of Western New York's website:  
[www.landmarksociety.org](http://www.landmarksociety.org)

[www.windowrepair.com](http://www.windowrepair.com)



John Gridley House,  
205 East Seneca Turnpike, Syracuse  
(HABS, Library of Congress, 1936)



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## **Project Review Guide**

These questions can help commission and board members lead property owners to the right window project.

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### **ARCHITECTURAL INTEGRITY & AESTHETICS**

- What role do your windows play in the architectural significance of your historic building?
- How do the replacement windows match the original construction method and appearance? (i.e. mortised & tenon joinery), wood species, quality and cut, wood member proportions (stiles, rails, muntins), overall dimensions and profiles and, most importantly, the frame to glass ratio?

### **ENERGY EFFICIENCY**

- What are the U-values for the entire window unit, not just the value through the center of the glass? In addition to the window manufacturer's stated U-values for the window units, what is the air infiltration rating, if any?
- Has the extent of air infiltration been tested for the existing windows (use of a blower door test)?
- Has energy loss been investigated and corrected at the roof, chimneys, foundations, and walls first?
- Do existing windows have appropriately installed or repaired caulking, weatherstripping and/or storm windows?
- What is the projected annual energy cost savings for the new windows? How many years of this savings will it take to recover the cost of the replacement windows and installation?

### **SUSTAINABILITY**

- What are the property owner's plans for the removed original sash? (Rather than being sent to a landfill, should they remain in the attic or basement so they can be reinstalled in the future if desired?)
- Have the property owners explored the option of repair by a local craftsman?
- How long does the property owner expect these new windows to last? What is the warranty term? (many do not read the fine print.)

### **DURABILITY:**

- What is the overall extent of deterioration or need for the replacement? Do all windows need repair or only some windows?

### **ECONOMICS:**

- Encourage property owners to solicit repair/restoration quotes with estimated years of service (based on age of original windows)
- Encourage property owners to calculate the life-cycle cost comparisons of restoration of those windows that need attention only versus the cost of replacing all windows.



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## WHEN IS WINDOW REPLACEMENT OKAY?

**There may actually be a time when the case for the replacement of existing windows can be made.** Buildings that have been abandoned for many years can suffer severe deterioration of materials, including window units. Windows can be heavily damaged by impact from trees, or partly damaged in a time-honored way, by baseballs or rocks. Also, not all older windows are created equal, so some materials can honestly have a shorter life span than others from the same time period. Additionally, in some buildings, particularly in tightly spaced urban lots, windows on side or rear elevations may not significantly add to the architectural character of a building, or may originally have been inexpensive units (also, many local laws do not allow the commission to review work not in the public right of way, making these units outside the purview of a commission). Also on rear and side elevations in urban lots, a major rehabilitation may trigger modern codes that prevent the use of combustible (wooden) window materials at lot lines. In these cases, **it is important to ask the following questions:**

- **Are a majority of the window units truly at the end of their life?**
- **Does the building still have integrity of window design? (does a majority of character defining windows remain in place and repairable?)**
- **Were the windows being proposed for replacement originally good quality units that can actually be repaired?**
- **What significance do the window units have to the building's overall architectural style or history? (They need not be "fancy" or stained glass units to do this – more simple divided light sash can be important as well)**
- **What modern constraints are being placed on the project?**

Asking these questions, you then move forward carefully, as you may be impacting a building's appearance and performance for decades to come. If replacement is determined

to be the appropriate approach, then the materials and appearance of the new units will be crucial to the success of the project. Overall, it is important to understand that the choice of material can dictate the appearance as well.

**Vinyl, for the most part, should never be considered for replacement units at designated structures.** Their construction in no way meets the appearance of historic windows. Typically, vinyl units have rails and stiles the same width, whereas most historic windows have wider bottom rails (the horizontal member at the bottom of the sash), and narrower stiles (the members at the sides of the window). These proportions are important to the character of a window, and should be kept. Also, vinyl is a material that can flex during movement, potentially breaking seals that are supposed to make them energy efficient, and have been known to sag or rack, also lessening their effectiveness.

When codes dictate that wooden windows cannot be used, one approach has been to use metal windows matching the original in as many details as possible in regard to proportion and configuration. However, this is an approach to be used only in these inflexible situations, and in non-character defining locations.

**When windows are truly deteriorated beyond repair, new windows should be approved than match the historic units in proportion, configuration (number of panes in each sash), operation (double hung or casement), and other character-defining details.** The highest and best replacement would be a new, true divided light, painted wooden unit. However, as can be inferred from the previous article, newer wooden units may not be a good option given the potentially short life of modern plantation grown wood. While there are some units on the market that use sustainably grown mahogany or Spanish cedar as their materials, their costs can sometimes be out of reach for homeowners if they choose to replace all windows, which as noted in the Alvarez's article in most cases is not necessary. In





*When is Window Replacement Okay? cont.*

these cases, it may be appropriate to encourage phasing of the high quality wood replacements or as an alternative; approve aluminum-clad wooden replacement windows that fill the window opening without the use of fillers or spacers; that the new window be placed in the same plane as the original window (neither deeper or shallower in relation to the wall); and that it match the original in operation and division of panes.

**It is in the detail of window panes that a replacement window project can utterly fail.**

Historic multi-pane windows typically have true divided lights, meaning that each pane is a separate piece of glass separated by a muntin (the muntin is the bar of wood or other material that creates the space for the panes and which the putty, or “glazing” compound is placed against). Many modern windows use a single sheet of glass, and for muntins use a variety of tricks. The cheapest and least appropriate muntin is a “snap-in” one, literally “snapped” into place from the interior of the window. This type of muntin does nothing to break up the reflection of the single sheet of glass from the exterior, provides no relief on the exterior of the building and has been known to fall out, be taken out or be broken, thus resulting in an inappropriate 1/1 appearance. Another approach is the use of a fake muntin sandwiched between the double panes of an insulating glass unit. As with the “snap-in” muntin, this type does nothing to break up the reflection of the single sheet of glass from the exterior, provides no relief on the exterior of the building and when seen from certain angles, completely disappears. Other muntins are applied only on the exterior. This type of window attempts to have the appropriate exterior relief desired in a replacement project, but does not go far enough in providing the full character that a historic true divided light window had in the same opening.

In the case of an appropriate replacement window, the highest and best window is one that has true divided lights, with each pane being a separate piece of glass. However, given that new units will likely have

insulating glass, an acceptable treatment can be achieved by using a replacement window that has exterior and interior muntins, and interior “spacers” between the glasses, in line with the muntins. Manufacturers are beginning to make these units with spacers matching the color of the sash and muntins, providing for a look that is not an exact match, but is closer to the appearance of the original window.

There are countless replacement window manufacturers claiming to have products appropriate for use in historic buildings. **In addition to the highest and best options listed above, a replacement window inserted into a historic building should offer a warranty or performance and durability guarantee of at least 25 years.** This will insure that the commission will not be faced with a repeat request in a matter of years and will help the property owner weed out the lower quality products.

**It is best not to wait until a window replacement project is before you to do your homework. It is advisable to take the following steps BEFORE you have to learn on the job.**

- **Maintain a list of experienced contractors who can do window repair.**
- **Maintain a list of historic house part “salvager businesses” who can accept donations of historic windows, or open your own!**
- **Work with municipal officials, staff, and or local banks to develop grant programs for window repair and restoration and/or replacement in kind.**

Knowing when it is time to allow an appropriate replacement window is an important part of being on a commission. It can also show a homeowner that you do understand the realities of existing and new materials, and can help you serve as a resource to help a property owner do the right thing to maintain the integrity, architectural worth, and economic value of their building.



## *Featured Website and The Back Page*

The City of Astoria, Oregon is developing an idea for their economic future, directly related to historic preservation. The goal is to develop a "historic preservation economic cluster." As described in *The Daily Astorian*, the local newspaper:

*"A historic preservation cluster would provide a framework for an interdependent relationship among property-owners, developers, contractors, craftspeople, suppliers, merchants, educators, government agencies and tourism-related businesses throughout Clatsop County...If you say Napa Valley, people think wine. We want Astoria to mean historic preservation. ...The whole idea is to make Clatsop County the 'go-to' place for historic preservation - products, services and education..."*

What a great idea! Who in New York State wants to try to do the same for their area? The entire article can be read at:

[www.dailyastorian.com/main.asp?Search=1&ArticleID=58529&SectionID=2&SubSectionID=398&S=1](http://www.dailyastorian.com/main.asp?Search=1&ArticleID=58529&SectionID=2&SubSectionID=398&S=1)

My favorite quote in the article: **"The economics really do support historic preservation. It is cost effective. It creates value that only time can generate."**

### *Before and After*



*Shown above, before (l) and after (r) is the former C.W. Snow Warehouse, 230 West Willow Street, Syracuse. What was an underutilized industrial building has been transformed into a highly successful 48-unit loft apartment building. Research revealed that the 1913 building was the last commission of noted Syracuse architect Archimedes Russell. As noted in the National Register nomination, the building's importance is due to its association with Russell and the fact that it was one of Syracuse's earliest industrial to use a patented, flared "mushroom" column structural system that alleviated the need for steel girders.*

*The character-defining columns were preserved on the interior as part of the rehabilitation and make for interesting spaces within the apartments. The large expanses of windows had been bricked up and were restored, flooding the apartments with light. Unusual historical elements, such as a historic metal staircase, aisle markings painted on floors and the company safe were left visible in the rehabilitation, making each apartment unique. These features helped in marketing the apartments to potential renters. The project received a New York State Historic Preservation Office award for Project Achievement in 2008.*

