

Fact Sheet

Barrier-Free Access for Historic Buildings

Providing barrier-free access to landmark buildings ensures all New Yorkers and visitors can utilize the city's historic resources. LPC can provide guidance on how to achieve accessibility at historic properties through careful planning and sensitive design.

The Commission has a long history of approving proposals for work that accommodates barrier-free access at landmark properties, including ramps, lifts, and associated fixtures such as signage, push plates, and free-standing hardware. While the most appropriate type of installation depends primarily on the site-specific conditions of a building, care should be taken to ensure that the proposed work does not detract from the architectural character and historic features of the building, streetscape, and historic district.

Key Goals for Barrier-Free Access:

- Ensure the primary entrance is accessible wherever possible.
- Provide the best access in the manner that is least intrusive to the historic building.
- Consider changes to interior spaces which may lessen the impact on the exterior.
- Minimize damage to the features, materials, finishes, and proportions that contribute to the historic character of a building or site.
- Retain and/or reuse the greatest amount of historic fabric possible.
- New installations should recall the historic condition to the greatest degree possible, and should be finished to match or blend in with adjacent materials. For example, a ramp installed in front of a masonry building should be clad in a masonry material with a similar texture and finish, while a ramp incorporated into a loading dock should be clad in a material that blends in with the loading dock.

Installation Guidelines

Doors and Entrances

Historic Doors

- When proposing modifications to historic doors, first explore replacing the hinges with off-set hinges to increase the size of the opening, changing the door swing, or installing automatic opener hardware.

Non-Historic Doors

- Door openings that do not meet ADA standards may be widened up to 8” inches to meet DOB code requirements.
- Door operation may be changed, such as changing paired doors to a single door with a sidelight.
- Variations in the width of operable leaves, door materials, and details are allowed, as long as they are necessitated by code requirements or operation limitations.

At-Grade Entrances

- An existing entrance may be brought to grade by removing existing steps, landings, or other elevated elements, so long as these elements are not significant architectural features of the building.
- Primary entrances may be lowered no more than 18” inches.
- Secondary entrances may be lowered no more than 30” inches.
- If your entrance has cast iron vault light steps, only one step may be removed.

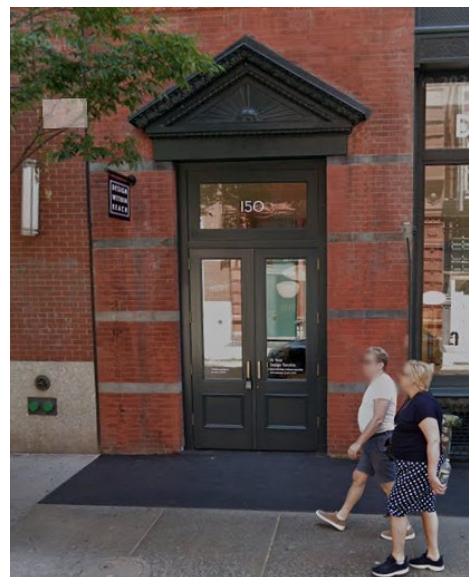


Figure 1. Before (left) and after (right) showing new doors lowered to grade.

Ramps

- Ramps should be installed at the primary entrance closest to grade to minimize the length and height of the ramp, and to reduce the requirements for landings and associated railings.
- To reduce the length of ramps, orient them to take advantage of natural slopes at the site.
- Avoid switchbacks.
- Where possible, ramps should be obscured or partially obscured by existing features such as walls or ironwork.
- Ramp handrails should be simple in design, with the minimum number of vertical posts allowed.



Figure 2. Ramp installed at a primary entrance with materials matching the historic building



Figure 3. Ramp without handrails



Figure 4. Ramp installed within an areaway

Lifts

- Mechanical lifts should be installed at non-intrusive locations, such as recessed portions of the building, below grade areaways, or behind walls and stoops. To the extent possible, lifts should not be installed in front of, or attached to, significant architectural features or materials.
- Wheelchair platform lifts should be stored in the down position.



Figure 5. Mechanical lift finished to match the surrounding materials and recede from view



Figure 6. Platform lift with clear glass finished to match the adjacent building finishes

Handrails and Areaway Alterations

If installing a handrail on a stoop or areaway steps, the handrail should be simple in design and attached in the least-obtrusive manner.



Figure 7. Before (top) and after (bottom) showing simply designed handrails installed at stair treads.

Actuators

- Door actuators installed on facades should be as small as possible and installed at non-decorative areas of the entrance or wall, such as flat wood or aluminum elements or plain masonry. Actuators should not be installed through decorative masonry, cast iron or other ornamental features.
- Actuators may also be installed on free-standing posts, as long as the posts do not go through historic paving and have a simple design that does not compete with the building.



Figure 8. Actuator installed on a free-standing post.

Accessible Sidewalks

- Accessible pedestrian ramps with detectible warning units at sidewalk intersections may be installed at concrete, granite, or bluestone sidewalks. At stone sidewalks, the pavers may be modified to form the slope and sides of the ramp, or “neckdown” expansions of the sidewalk into the road may also be considered at certain locations.
- Sidewalks may be sloped in order to make a building accessible, such as sloping away from a store entrance.



Figure 99 Detectable warning unit at a sidewalk intersection.



Figure 10. Concrete sidewalk sloping away from a storefront entrance.

LPC Regulation

- The guidelines above are examples of changes that can usually be approved by LPC staff through our permitting process, pursuant to the Commission's rules.
- For buildings in which the conditions require a solution that does not meet the requirements for staff-level approval, proposals must be reviewed by the full Commission at a public hearing.
 - The public hearing is an opportunity for applicants to present proposals to the panel of 11 Commissioners and explain why they believe a proposed installation is appropriate to the building or historic district. The hearing is also an opportunity for public testimony and discussion about the application.
 - Your assigned staff preservationist will guide you through the public hearing process.
 - More information on the public hearing process can be found here: <https://www.nyc.gov/site/lpc/hearings/for-applicants.page>

LPC Review

Applications for barrier-free access installations are submitted through [Portico](#), LPC's new web-based application portal, and should include typical LPC submission materials, such as:

- Color photographs of the facades, areaways, site, and streetscape.
- DOB filing drawings, including plans, elevations, details, and sections. Accurate dimensions (e.g., total height, depth and length of ramps and any associated landings and railings; width of masonry openings being modified; dimensions of any associated or actuators, etc.), should be provided on the drawings so that LPC staff can assess the visual impact on the building and streetscape.

For questions related to barrier-free access, including accessibility standards in existing buildings in which no construction is planned, occupancy-related questions, and inquiries regarding accessibility waivers, please reach out to the [NYC Department of Buildings \(DOB\)](#) and the [Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities \(MOPD\)](#).