

Preserving the Charm of Historic Windows

A GUIDE FOR HOMEOWNERS

OUR HISTORIC WINDOWS IN HISTORIC DISTRICTS MATTER. Windows are an important defining element of historic buildings. They do more than just let in light and air. Their design, craftsmanship and aesthetic qualities often make them worthy of preservation. The wrong window, or a poor installation, can significantly alter the look and feel of a historic home.

This document will answer common questions, assist you in keeping the historic character and charm of your home, and help you understand Historic Preservation Guidelines.

What makes a window look historic?

Why can't I use vinyl windows?

Can I repair my historic windows?



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Made possible by:
The City of Boise Planning & Development Services
& The North End Neighborhood Association

AT A GLANCE

Historic Window Basics

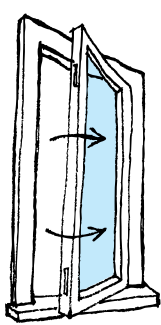
Windows are an integral component of a historic home. Altering windows can potentially change a home's character and, as a result, the historic integrity of the building. Here are some basics to keep in mind:

- Repair of existing wood windows in concert with removable storms is the most sustainable, historically appropriate and oftentimes most energy efficient method of treating windows.
- Material, dimension, profile, sill depth and installation are all equally important considerations with window replacement.
- Wood, metal clad wood and certain fiberglass windows are acceptable replacement materials by The Historic Preservation Commission.
- Vinyl, vinyl clad, vinyl composite and wood composite windows are not acceptable.
- Sash replacements are oftentimes a more affordable and convenient method of increasing energy efficiency in lieu of a full window replacement.
- The North End Neighborhood Association (NENA) maintains a list of window suppliers familiar with the historic design guidelines and sensitive to working on historic homes. Visit www.northendboise.org.

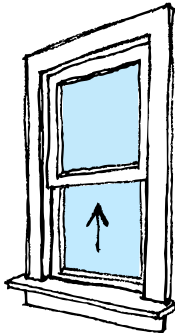


Know Your Windows

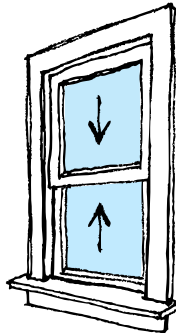
COMMON WINDOW TYPES:



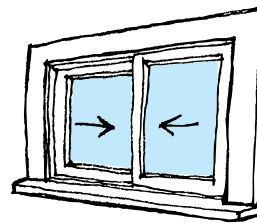
Casement Window



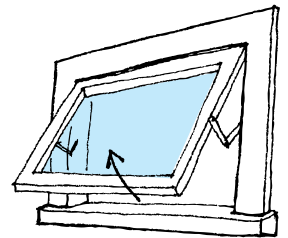
Single Hung Window



Double Hung Window



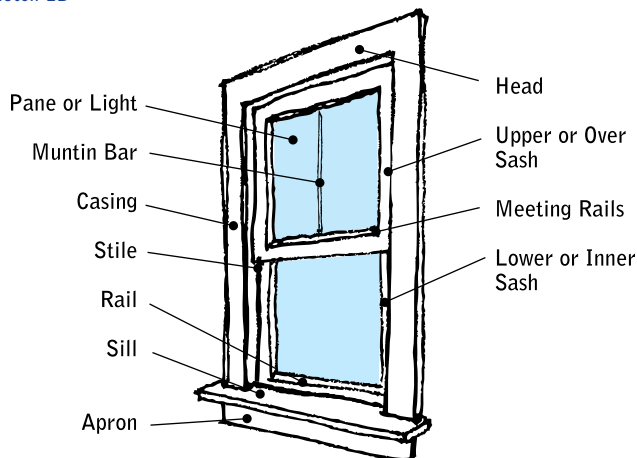
Sliding Window



Awning Window

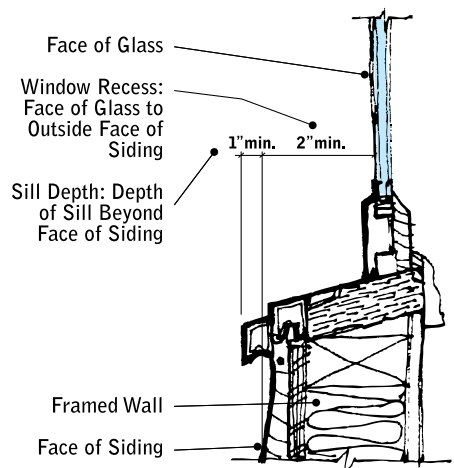
WINDOW COMPONENTS:

Sketch 1B



WINDOW SECTION:

Sketch 2B



WHEN REPAIRING OR REPLACING HISTORIC WINDOWS, carefully weigh aesthetic, performance, sustainability, energy efficiency, cost, and long-term durability aspects.



HISTORIC WINDOW

Repair

One of the basic tenets of preservation is to repair something first, when possible, rather than replace.

- It is often cheaper to repair old windows.
- Many old windows are made of old-growth wood, a denser, longer-lasting material than wood harvested today.
- Some replacement windows, particularly vinyl products, are only guaranteed for a few years.
- Many historic windows have lasted 100+ years with regular maintenance.
- If elements of the window's structure have rotted, replacing just those elements can be an effective way to save an otherwise viable window.

Consider these small improvements before replacement:

- Removing paint that has sealed the window closed
- Weatherproofing by recaulking
- Installing weatherstripping
- Installing storm windows in lieu of replacement
- Reglazing windows (replacing glass)

HISTORIC WINDOW

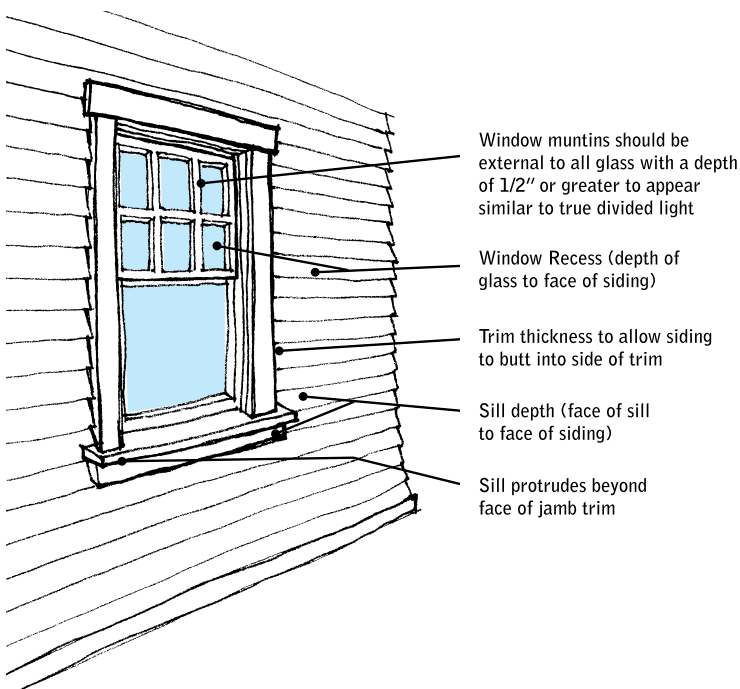
Replacement

Some window components may be so rotted or otherwise deteriorated that replacement is necessary. When replacing windows:

- Always match the size, style and materials of the originals.
- Wood or metal clad wood windows should be used to retain the character and appearance of the original wood windows.
- Profile, sill depth, material, and muntin (grid) pattern are important considerations.
- Pay close attention to the sill depth required (see sketch 2b). Casement windows should match the sill depth of the top sash of a double hung window.
- Some window manufacturers have window series that are designed to inherently provide the window recess required, where others need additional framing.
- True divided light (window glazing where individual small panes are separated by wood muntin bars) is preferred.
- Simulated divided light windows (dimensional grilles permanently applied to the exterior of the glass) offer an acceptable substitute to historic wood muntins.
- Flat grilles placed between window panes or only on the interior are not allowed and poorly replicate historic window qualities.

HISTORIC WINDOW SPECIFICS

Sketch 3A



HISTORIC WINDOWS

Frequently Asked Questions

Can I use vinyl replacement windows? No. Vinyl windows are not historically appropriate in a Historic District. Acceptable materials include wood, metal clad wood and fiberglass. Vinyl-clad wood windows are not acceptable.

Why are historic windows important? Historic windows are an important architectural element of a building facade. The original windows of a historic structure contribute to the overall character and significance and should be preserved. Replacement of historic windows with inappropriate elements can often diminish or destroy the historic character of a building.

Is energy efficiency possible on historic windows? Yes. Efficiency in existing windows can be maximized by maintenance, weather-stripping, caulking, storm windows, and window coverings. Still, windows only account for up to 10% of a building's energy costs. By comparison, insulating your roof can save 80% of all energy savings possible.

Can I mix window types? No. Mixing window types and materials creates an inconsistent appearance. This issue becomes particularly important with condominium and apartment buildings. Windows should be restored to their historic configuration.

What if the front is historic and I use vinyl on the back of the house? The front and back must consistently match in window appearance. The integrity of the Historic District encompasses the entire district, including the entire home.



vinyl



wood

Why are muntins and window recess important? In the photos above, these houses are similar in age and sit side by side in the North End. While the house on the right retains its original double hung windows, the one on the left has all new vinyl windows replacements. The vinyl window's top pane sits flush with the wall, while wood window's top pane is recessed. The difference in sill depth is also easy to see, as the sill on the vinyl window is much shallower than that of the wood window. This example also highlights the difference between the wood window's muntins and the interior grid system of the vinyl window. In this picture, it is almost impossible to see the grid system of the vinyl window, and while muntins cast shadows and break the reflective surface of the window, an internal grid system allows for an uninterrupted reflective surface.

Can I move a window or door, or make a window larger? Window location in historic homes, as well as the relationship of solid to void on the facade of the building, is important to the overall character of the home. Moving, replacing, or altering windows on homes in Historic Districts requires review and a Certificate of Appropriateness.



FOR MORE INFORMATION

Additional Resources

- National Trust for Historic Preservation:** www.preservationnation.org
- and the **Preservation Green Lab:** www.preservationnation.org/information-center/sustainable-communities/green-lab
- North End Neighborhood Association (NENA):** www.northendboise.org
- City of Boise Planning & Development Services:** <http://pds.cityofboise.org>
- NENA recommended window suppliers:** www.northendboise.org

