



GUIDELINES FOR PORCHES



Township of Hopewell Historic Preservation Commission

GUIDELINES FOR PORCHES



A front porch can be stately and provide a gracious transition into a building.

These *Guidelines* were developed in conjunction with Hopewell Township's Historic Preservation Commission (HPC). The HPC reviews Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) applications for proposed exterior alterations to properties locally designated as Historic Landmarks or within a local Historic District. The applicant is responsible for complying with the provisions of the Zoning and Building Codes at the time of application. The applicant must obtain a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) as well as all necessary permits prior to proceeding with any work. For more information, or to obtain permit applications, please call the COA Administrator at (609) 737-0612, ext. 643.

Please review this information during the early stages of planning your project. Familiarity with this material can assist in moving a project quickly through the approval process, saving applicants both time and money. Additional *Guidelines* addressing other historic building topics are available at the Township Administration Building and on its web site at www.hopewelltpw.org.

PURPOSE

These *Guidelines* were prepared to assist property owners with information when considering the repair, replacement or installation of porches. They are not intended to replace consultation with qualified architects, contractors and the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC). The HPC will be happy to provide consultation and assistance with materials, free of charge.



Gingerbread brackets are appropriate on Victorian house porches.

PORCHES

The rich architectural variety of Hopewell Township is distinguished by its collection of porches. Historically, porches were an outside room where residents could find a sheltered transition into their homes, exterior living space, and a place to meet and converse with neighbors. When they were constructed, the form, details and decorative elements were often intended to complement the style of the house.

Porches remain one of the most visible house elements and play a significant role in its appearance and that of the streetscape. They can act as an extension of a home providing a welcoming feeling for visitors. Unfortunately porches today are often one of the most altered components of a building frequently because they are not properly maintained or they are viewed as potentially enclosable indoor space.



PORCH CHECKLIST

- **Roof** – Verify roofing material is secure, flashing is intact, and there is no ponding
- **Lintel** – Verify paint surface is intact, especially behind gutter
- **Porch ceiling** – Check for dampness indicating roofing or flashing problem
- **Gutter and downspout** – Verify they are secure; clear leaves and other debris
- **Post** (Column if round) – Check base for rot and that paint surface is intact
- **Balustrade:** top rail, bottom rail, balusters, newel post – Verify elements are secure and that paint film is intact
- **Apron** – Check substructure for water or insect damage
- **Porch floor** – Verify water is draining off surface
- **Porch steps** – Check base for rot and that paint surface is intact

MAINTAINING HISTORIC PORCHES

Because of the importance porches play in the perception of historic buildings and streetscapes, original materials and details should be preserved as long as possible. Typically areas covered by a porch roof tend to require less maintenance; however, steps, railings, and roofs are usually exposed to the weather and might require additional maintenance.

One of the best ways to preserve wood porch features is regular painting. If a component is deteriorating, repair or replacement in kind is recommended as part of the porch's regular maintenance.

The HPC encourages:

1. Identifying deteriorated elements
2. Finding and correcting sources of deteriorated elements, such as deteriorated, cracked, blocked, inappropriately hung, broken or missing gutters or downspouts
3. Replacing only those parts which can not be repaired – in some instances, such as columns and posts, the base can be replaced without replacing the entire column or post at a fraction of the cost
4. Replacing missing or deteriorated materials with similar new materials, avoiding replacement of a wood railing with a metal or vinyl railing system

The HPC encourages:

- Repairing damaged elements using standard repair techniques for that material (Refer to the *Guideline* brochures appropriate for each material) and restoring the porch to its original historic appearance
- Replacing only the original elements that can not be repaired using elements of the same material, size, profile and other visual characteristics
- If a substantial portion of the porch is deteriorated and cannot be repaired or replicated, or if a porch is missing, creating a simplified design using stock lumber and moldings that convey similar visual characteristics as the original porch, duplicating the dimensions and materials but not necessarily the detailing

PORCH REPAIR INFORMATION

Since many of the components of porches are discussed in depth in other *Guideline* brochures, it might be helpful to consult the following information to address specific repair needs:

- *Guidelines for Exterior Woodwork*
- *Guidelines for Roofing*
- *Guidelines for Masonry & Stucco*

GUIDELINES FOR NEW PORCHES

There are times when property owners might consider the construction of a new porch. This can occur when a previous porch is reconstructed; a new porch is added onto an existing house or is part of an addition; or when a new residence is erected. If considering the construction of a new porch, the HPC recommends the following general guidelines:

- New porches are encouraged on streets where porches are common
- At existing buildings, new construction should not damage, destroy, conceal or negatively affect existing historic material and features
- On additions, porches should be simple in design and relate to the existing building
- Side and rear elevation porches are typically simpler in design than front elevation porches
- On new buildings, porches should visually relate to the proposed building in a manner similar to historic porches on neighboring buildings
- Consider the size, shape, scale, massing, form, materials, and color of the design and its appropriateness to the house and streetscape
- Most porches in Hopewell Township were historically made of wood; stone or brick porches are appropriate only on masonry buildings

LOOKING FOR EVIDENCE OF PRIOR PORCHES

It is important that documentation be found when replacing a missing porch. This can be physical evidence that a porch was present or documentation that shows or describes a porch.

- Look for shadows on the wall or trim from roofs, posts or railings
- Look for evidence of nailing patterns on siding or repairs to masonry walls
- Look for historic photos, drawings or maps
- Compare porches on neighboring buildings of similar type, design, style and date of construction
- Look in attics, basements, garage or storage areas for original components
- Look for evidence of former porch piers or foundations in landscape
- Ask long-term neighbors or prior residents if they remember a porch on the house



Since porches are typically the closest portion of the building to the street and are experienced from both sides, details, such as this unusual balustrade, can make a big difference in their appearance.

PORCH GUIDELINES

The HPC encourages:

- Painting wood porches regularly to preserve the wood
- Retaining, repairing and replacing porch elements in-kind whenever possible
- Rebuilding a porch with appropriate documentation
- Porch enclosures that retain the visual characteristics of an open porch
- A painted finish complementing the architectural characteristics of the house – pressure-treated wood can be painted after its initial weathering period

The HPC discourages:

- Enclosing a porch at the front of a building
- Installing metal posts and railings; they are almost never appropriate for a historic building
- Replacing wood steps with concrete or brick – wood steps are typically appropriate for wood porches
- Using “natural” or stained wood; they are generally not appropriate for a porch on a historic building



The large areas of screening on this porch make it appear more like a porch than an enclosed room. It is recommended that the white screen enclosure framing be painted a darker color, similar to the screen color, to minimize its visibility.

ENCLOSING PORCHES

Porches were meant to be open exterior spaces. Enclosing a front porch is a radical change to the building and its visual perception from the streetscape. If considering porch enclosure, it is recommended that this occur only at a side or rear elevation porch. If enclosing a porch, it is recommended that the finished space look more like a porch than an enclosed room.

The HPC encourages:

- Retaining porch elements in place and constructing enclosure framing inside of porch columns and railings
- Temporary enclosure systems, such as screens or glazing that can be removed seasonally
- Reversible enclosure systems that do not damage decorative or unique historic building fabric
- Translucent enclosure systems, with large screened or glazed openings
- Vertical and horizontal framing members that align behind porch elements like columns and railings



Porch enclosures that are attached to existing decorative porch elements such as this column can cause damage that is both difficult and costly to repair.



This porch enclosure is located behind the porch columns and decorative balustrade, is as translucent as possible, and is reversible. Major framing members are also located behind columns and the balustrade, minimizing their visibility.



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