



Subject: New Openings in Secondary Elevations or Introducing New Windows in Blank Walls

Applicable Standards: 2. Retention of Historic Character
9. Compatible New Additions/Alterations

Issue: Rehabilitating historic buildings for new uses occasionally requires cutting in new window openings in secondary elevations to increase light and ventilation. Secondary building elevations, while usually not as important as the façade, are often articulated and quite visible, even though they may have few, if any, openings. Since secondary elevations can contribute to the historic character of a building, the integration of new openings requires careful consideration to meet the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. This can be accomplished through attention to the number, location, and design of proposed new openings during the design process.

Application I (*Incompatible new openings*): This freestanding brick warehouse was constructed in 1859 to store grain and dry goods. Although the largely solid end wall elevations were secondary, they were highly visible and contributed to the historic character of this building. During a conversion to offices, a series of new openings were inserted in the end walls to admit more light and take advantage of desirable views. The number and design of the new windows, which mimic the historic windows in size, proportion, detail and light configuration, fundamentally altered this building's historic character giving the building a significantly different look. The treatment did not meet the Standards.



New windows could have been installed while maintaining the historic massiveness of the end wall. This would have required the introduction of only a few smaller windows.



Top: The historically important 1859 brick warehouse with largely solid end wall.

Bottom: The number and design of the windows added to the end wall make this an inappropriate treatment.



Left: 1882 corner commercial building.

Right: The number and location of the new openings do not alter the historic character nor cause this elevation to compete with the facade.

Application 2 (*Compatible new openings*): This 1882 structure exemplifies the transition in commercial architecture after the Civil War from simple, domestically scaled buildings to structures distinguished as symbols of commercial prestige by their size and height, decoration, quality of architecture and prominence. When rehabilitating this building into bank offices, the owner proposed inserting new openings on the third floors of the secondary side elevation for added light and ventilation. The number and location of these new openings did not impact the character-defining features nor direct too much focus to the secondary elevation.



Application 3 (*Incompatible treatment modified to meet the Standards*): A nineteenth century commercial building with an exposed party wall, where the adjacent buildings have been razed, presents a greater opportunity for compatible new openings. Nonetheless, the design must not make such a strong architectural statement as to radically change the appearance of the building or overwhelm the composition of the historic façade.

Left: 19th century commercial building with exposed party wall. Above: Inappropriate treatment. Below: Appropriate solution.

This 1897 commercial building with exposed party wall on the west was constructed to house a significant early twentieth century retail establishment. Four entry doorways were cut into the party wall when the building was altered in 1937 and 1992. When rehabilitating this building for mixed-use in 1999, with a restaurant and specialty shops on the first floor and residential apartments on the upper three stories, twenty-five new openings were proposed on the west elevation. These new openings with varying header heights included four different window sizes and pane configurations, and two projecting balconies. The number, placement, rhythm created by the variations in header heights and window sizes and proposed balconies make a strong architectural statement that is incompatible with the historic character of this large solid masonry wall.



The revised elevation design eliminated the balconies and some of the new window openings, standardized the header heights, sash size and pane configuration. This compatible treatment meets the standards.

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These bulletins are issued to explain preservation project decisions made by the U.S. Department of the Interior. The resulting determinations, based on the [Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation](#), are not necessarily applicable beyond the unique facts and circumstances of each particular case.