



## Subject: Adding New Openings on Secondary Elevations

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

**Issue:** Rehabilitating a historic building to accommodate a new use may require inserting openings in a formerly blank wall, or increasing the number already there. This is frequently the case when commercial or warehouse structures are converted into apartments. Residential use generally requires that each unit have access to natural light and air. Because of the original use of these buildings, particularly the upper floors which were sometimes just storage space, many of these buildings had few windows and, often, one or more completely unfenestrated walls. The character of certain types of historic buildings, such as grain silos and grain elevators, or ice houses and cold storage facilities, is defined—at least in part—by their blank walls. Consequently, they are not good candidates for residential conversion, or for any new use that requires a lot of windows.

However, some other buildings, especially commercial and warehouse structures, may have one or more blank or unfenestrated exterior walls that are not significant and which can be successfully altered without negatively impacting the building's historic character. The number of new openings should be limited so that enough mass remains to keep the wall's sense of solidity. It is usually recommended when adding compatible new openings to a blank wall that windows not be cut into the first bay at either end of the wall but, instead, pulled back at least one bay. This approach helps to differentiate the new windows from features that are part of the original construction of the building, and identifies them as contemporary openings added to satisfy requirements for the new use. So that the new openings do not appear historic, they should also be very plain, preferably just cutouts in the wall, without trim or period architectural surrounds. And, the windows themselves should generally be distinguishable from the historic windows by the use of a simpler, or a slightly different light configuration.

**Application 1** (*Compatible treatment*): Originally constructed in 1927 as a manufacturer's distribution and storage facility, this building was altered in 1934 with the addition of another story. The proposal to rehabilitate the building into apartments called for windows to be inserted into a previously unfenestrated, side elevation. Even though highly visible, because the wall was not important in defining the historic character of this building, adding windows was determined to be a compatible treatment. The new windows are set back from both ends of the building, and are simply punched out openings in the wall without sills. In further contrast to the existing, historic windows in the building which are multi-paned, the new windows have a one-over-one configuration. The completed project meet the Standards.



A fourth floor was added in 1934 to this building originally constructed in 1927.



*Simple, compatible openings were cut into this blank, non-significant secondary elevation when the building was rehabilitated for apartments.*

**Application 2 (Compatible treatment):** In another example, a three-story, former department store constructed in 1914, was also converted into apartments. The front of the building featured storefront windows on the first floor, and large, equally distinctive windows on the second and third floors. The side elevation had a number of irregularly spaced openings that had been added over the years. Additional windows to provide light and air for the residential spaces were necessary for the new use. Neither the side elevation itself nor the openings in it were important to the historic character of the building. Accordingly, the existing openings were modified in order for the new apartment layout to function effectively. Three of the openings were closed up and bricked in, four were enlarged to accommodate the new windows, and several new openings were added. The new window openings are simple, unobtrusive cutouts without a sill. The pane configuration of the new windows is clearly contemporary, and it does not detract from the historic windows that dominate all three floors of the primary street elevation. This project, too, meets the Standards.



*The side elevation of a 1914 department store featured several non-historic openings which had been added over the years.*



*Although highly visible, because the wall is not important in defining the historic character of the building, it was possible to change the existing openings and to add several new windows to accommodate the new use.*