This brochure, published by the Lower Merion Township Historical Architectural Review Board (HARB), contains guidance for repair and replacement projects in the Township’s commercial and residential historic districts. The HARB reviews all exterior changes to historic buildings and new construction as part of its advisory role to the Building and Planning Committee of the Township of Lower Merion’s Board of Commissioners.

The brochure is intended to guide your repair and replacement project, but does not replace consultation with qualified architects, contractors and the HARB.

Please review this information before planning repairs or replacement work for your property. Familiarity with the HARB’s standards will help move a project quickly through the approval process thus saving time and money.

What is the difference between repair and renovation?

The basic difference between repair and renovation work is simple: repairs do not alter a building’s historic design. Renovation and alteration projects often do alter the design of a historic building.

For example, a project to repair the deteriorated sections of a historic dormer in a roof does not alter the fundamental building design even if it involves the use of a substantial amount of new wood clapboard. But installing a skylight in the roof is considered a renovation project because it adds a new feature. Such a change does alter a building’s original design and thus its historic integrity.

While renovations can be done in a sensitive manner, the HARB encourages owners to attempt repair and selective replacement work before undertaking substantial alterations or renovations.

What is important to know about repairs and replacement on a historic building?

The HARB encourages necessary repairs and in-kind replacement of historic materials and elements. These activities help maintain a building’s historic character and can prevent the need for more intrusive or expensive work later.

The HARB recommends:

- non-intrusive repairs that respect your building’s important materials and architectural elements;
- replacement, only after repairs have been deemed impossible, that uses original materials and techniques to the extent possible;
- the use of compatible materials and techniques that enhance and do not detract from the historic building. When in-kind replacement is impossible, use materials that are similar in design, color, texture, materials workmanship and visual quality to the historic original.

Sensitive repairs and renovations to Dolobran, maintain the building’s character.

March 1996
Walls

As with roofs, a significant change in exterior wall materials can drastically alter the appearance and historic character of a building. Sensitive repairs and replacement of exterior wall fabric can enhance a building's character.

The HARB recommends:

- use of in-kind wall material where possible or surface finish that closely approximates the type and texture of original materials;
- clapboard, shingle or tile with an exposure (vertical dimension) that approximates the original;
- use of wall color that is appropriate to the era of your building;
- wall material that does not hide architectural details, eaves or cornices. Experienced contractors can usually retain and work with existing historic cornice brackets, water tables, corner boards, window and door frames and decorative trim.

Guidelines for repairing and replacing specific building elements

The following guidelines deal with repairing and replacing some specific building elements, including the roof, walls, windows and doors, porches and architectural details. Following the general dictum, “repair rather than replace, and replace rather than reconstruct,” these guidelines clarify the HARB’s standards for common repair and replacement projects.

Roof

The roof covers a large portion of your building’s surface area and keeps the building dry. Changes to a roof’s shape or roofing material can dramatically alter a building’s appearance.

The HARB recommends:

- use of in-kind materials or a return to original fabric to the extent possible for the repair and replacement of roofing;
- when original materials are unavailable or are cost prohibitive, use of materials that imitate the original materials in texture, thickness, shadow and color;
- in the event that a roof structure must be replaced, recreation of the original roof’s shape and lines.

Windows and doors

The HARB looks for the following in window and door repair and replacement projects:

- care in the installation of new screen and storm windows/doors;
- for replacement projects, the retention of historic door and window configurations and locations;
- guided by the examination of existing windows and doors, the use of original materials or compatible new materials, shapes and patterns when duplicating missing elements;
- retention of character-defining elements. Window elements include window type, muntin and Mullion patterns and size, window surrounds, shutters and historic screening. For doors, retain the door type, sidelong and transoms.
Porches
Porches are often the most prominent character-defining element of a historic residence. Repair and replacement of porch elements can be highly visible and should be undertaken with sensitivity.

The HARH guidelines include:

- Repair and reinforce deteriorated or missing items. Do not replace an entire porch or feature when only repair or limited-element replacement is necessary.

- Retain unusual architectural elements in the course of repair work, such as brackets or a sunburst detail in the porch gable end.

- Replace deteriorated flooring, railings, columns and stairs with in-kind materials. If this is not possible, use compatible substitute materials. Substitute materials should convey the same visual appearance as the original and be chemically compatible (meaning the new material won’t react adversely) with historic elements.

- Use your porch’s original element shapes and patterns when replacement is necessary.

Character-defining details of historic buildings
When undertaking repair and replacement projects, don’t neglect or accidentally destroy your building’s important historic or character-defining architectural details. Destruction or removal of details such as overhangs, decorative shingles and brickwork, cornerboards, gutters and downspouts, moldings and porch elements can severely alter your building’s historic character.

The HARH encourages:

- Retain and repair your building’s important architectural details.

- Do not hide or obscure architectural details in the process of repair or replacement projects.

- If detail replacement is necessary, match the old in design, color, texture and other visual qualities and, where possible, materials.

- Document the replacement of missing details with photographs, drawings or physical evidence of the historic element.

Who Can Help Me?

If you are considering a repair or replacement project contact the HARH for review of your project in its earliest stages.

If you would like to discuss your project informally, the HARH has reserved 15 to 20 minutes at the end of every monthly meeting to provide advice and consultation to any member of the public. This informational meeting with the HARH will allow you to review your project and get feedback on potential concerns before you finalize your plans.

Contact the Department of Building Regulations at (610) 645-6200 for the date of the next HARH meeting and to schedule your consultation. The HARH is here to help.
This publication was initiated and overseen by the Township of Lower Merion Planning and Community Development Department under a grant from the Bureau for Historic Preservation of the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, and by the Township of Lower Merion through the Community Development Block Grant Program.

This project has been financed in part with Federal funds from the National Park Service, Department of the Interior. However, the contents and opinions do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Department of the Interior, nor does the mention of trade names or commercial products constitute endorsement or recommendation by the Department of the Interior.

This program receives Federal funds from the National Park Service under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the U.S. Department of the Interior strictly prohibits unlawful discrimination in departmental Federally Assisted Programs on the basis of race, color, national origin, age or handicap. Any person who believes that he or she has been discriminated against should write: Director, Equal Opportunity Program, Department of the Interior, National Park Service, P. M. S. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127.