

HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE ENFORCEMENT PROGRAM

The Historic Preservation Office (HPO) conducts property inspections and enforcement activities to ensure compliance with approved building permits, building codes, and the standards established by the DC Historic Preservation Review Board under the historic preservation law. HPO enforcement activities are based on the following policies and principles:

1. Fair and equitable enforcement is essential to achieve the intended purposes of the historic preservation law.
2. Violations of the preservation law may endanger public safety, destroy or damage irreplaceable cultural artifacts, and diminish property values. These violations affect the quality of life for the community at large.
3. Violations of the preservation law may also violate the DC Building Code and other laws or regulations. Preservation inspectors are authorized code officials and may take coordinated action to enforce the building code.
4. The goal of enforcement is to obtain compliance with the preservation law. Fines and other enforcement mechanisms are a necessary means to achieve compliance and are not intended to be punitive or to collect revenue.
5. The highest enforcement priorities are to stop and correct situations that threaten public safety or destroy historic property.
6. The HPO considers program priorities and resources when responding to enforcement requests. Not every minor violation of the preservation law warrants enforcement action.
7. Anyone may request enforcement action to address an apparent violation. The HPO does not disclose the origin of enforcement requests.
8. HPO inspectors exercise judgment and discretion in taking enforcement action. They may issue a verbal direction, notice of violation, notice of infraction, or stop work order as appropriate to the situation.
9. Fines are assessed according to a standard civil infractions schedule. When fines are adjudicated, the preservation office advocates for a payment that is commensurate with all the facts and circumstances of the case, including the degree of compliance obtained.

HIGHEST PRIORITIES

- Demolition, in whole or substantial part, of historic property
- Non-reversible alterations of original features or finishes to historic property, such as sandblasting or removing or altering original masonry
- Substantial alteration or removal of important character-defining elements of historic property, such as cornices, porches, stairs, and distinctive detailing
- Excavation or underpinning without a permit on the site of or immediately adjacent to historic property
- Removal or replacement of original windows or doors on primary building elevations without a permit and inconsistent with HPRB standards
- Paving or construction within public space
- Work that exceeds HPO delegated authority or is inconsistent with HPRB standards and practices

LOWER PRIORITIES

- Minor alterations to historic property that do not affect character-defining qualities of the building or district
- In-kind repair or replacement on historic property
- Unpermitted work that is consistent with HPRB standards
- Minor alterations on secondary building elevations (not prominently visible from a public street) that do not compromise the structural or historical integrity of the property, such as replacement of windows, doors or siding
- Rear decks, patios, fences, and minor site work not prominently visible from a public street
- Reversible aesthetic issues that do not affect the historical character or structural integrity of a building
- Alterations to non-contributing buildings that do not affect the historic qualities of a district

REFERRED TO OTHER AGENCIES or EXEMPTED FROM PERMIT REVIEW

- Work referred to DCRA Construction Inspection (442-9557)
- Interior work not affecting the structural integrity of historic property
 - Mechanical, plumbing, and electrical work not affecting the historic character of a property
 - Work not affecting designated historic property
- Work referred to DDOT Public Space Inspection (727-1000)
- Utility work in public space
 - Electric and gas meters
 - Parking and other non-construction uses in public space, such as temporary signs and sidewalk cafes
- Work not requiring a permit and not subject to inspection
- Painting and caulking
 - Storm windows, storm doors, and window screens
 - Minor repairs
 - Gutters and downspouts
 - Security bars