



Subject: Adding Vehicular Entrances and Garage Doors to Historic Buildings

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

Issue: Rehabilitating historic buildings sometimes requires using part of the interior for parking. Clearly, such an alteration can have a major impact on a building that was never intended for such use. It can also result in loss of historic fabric if it requires cutting an opening for a garage door. Thus, for most historic buildings, this is not a compatible rehabilitation treatment.

However, there are some historic buildings in which it may be possible to convert a portion of the interior for parking without negatively impacting their historic character. When considering modifying an interior space for parking that has not been used for parking previously it is necessary, first of all, to evaluate the character and condition of the interior space. Generally, only some industrial or commercial spaces or previously altered spaces which are basically devoid of character-defining features and finishes may be suitable to adapt for parking. If a historic building interior meets these criteria, the exterior must also be evaluated to determine if a garage door can be added without a significant loss of historic building material and without adversely impacting the character of the exterior. In most instances, a garage door may be added only on a secondary elevation. Selecting a traditional design for the garage door(s) in keeping with the historic period and architectural style of the building is also critical.

Application 1 (*Compatible location/Compatible treatment*): This mid-19th century building was originally used as a warehouse on the first floor with the owner living above. The building is narrow and very deep, extending through the block from one street to another. The primary elevation with its cast-iron storefront faces a busy street while the rear faces a smaller street that is more like an alley in use and appearance. The shipping entrance at the rear was separated by decorative cast-iron piers into four bays of double doors.

The rehabilitation project proposed to return the upper floors to residential use. The first floor, which had little historic features or finishes remaining, was to be converted into an office in the front and parking in the rear. The rear of the building is a secondary elevation and using this portion for parking was determined to be compatible. Since no garage opening existed, the rear entrance had to be modified for vehicular access while retaining its historic character. One cast-iron pier was moved over several feet to create an opening wide enough for a car. Wood garage doors replicating the existing pedestrian doors were installed. Although moving the pier resulted in a slight change to the formerly symmetrical entrance, it did not negatively impact its historic character. The project met the Standards.



*Left:
Before rehabilitation
the ground floor of
the rear elevation
was divided into
four equal-sized
bays.*



*Left and Upper Right:
The left bay was
enlarged to create a
vehicular opening
which is compatible
with the building's
historic character.*

Application 2 (*Compatible location/Compatible treatment*): This Tuscan Revival-style building was constructed in 1912 as regional headquarters for a national company. The property was to be rehabilitated for apartments. The first floor of the more utilitarian wing added later, which had been used for parking company vehicles, was proposed to be used as parking for the residents. Although one garage door already existed on the side of the addition, another, slightly wider opening was needed to allow incoming and outgoing cars to maneuver around cars parked inside.

Since the property is situated on a corner, this side of the building is clearly visible. But, it is a secondary elevation and of considerably less importance than the primary façade. In this case, the existence of a garage door on this elevation was a factor in determining that adding another garage door would not greatly change the character of the historic building. A simple opening was cut into this wall and traditional paneled wood garage doors were chosen to complement the early-twentieth century style of the building. The completed project met the Standards.

Below: A wing was added to the right side of the headquarters building several years after it was constructed in 1912. Because this wing had always been used for parking and had a garage door on the side elevation (right top), adding another garage door was determined to be a compatible treatment (right bottom).



Application 3 (*Compatible location/ Incompatible treatment*): This 1880s retail building, situated on a downtown corner, had been altered numerous times since its construction. The storefront had been remodeled and a rear addition had been constructed. The first floor of the building was to be rehabilitated for continued commercial use and the second floor for apartments. The rehabilitation included a compatible storefront design, and a proposal to cut a vehicular opening in the side wall of the non-historic addition so that the interior could be used for parking. Although the rear addition faces a street, it is a secondary elevation, and it was determined that adding a garage door in this location would not negatively impact the character of the historic building.

Most treatments were completed as proposed. However, the new garage entrance differs from what had been proposed and approved. Two doors, varnished rather than painted as they would have been traditionally, are installed in a very large opening. A large pent-roof overhang which spans the entire length of the addition, extending from the garage to the back door, is also incompatible with the building's historic character. The garage entrance treatment did not meet the Standards and the project was denied certification.

Left and Center: The front and side elevations of this building are shown here before rehabilitation.

Right: The cumulative effect of the size, design and finish of the new garage door and the new pent roof overhang is a contemporary treatment that is incompatible with the historic character of the building.



Anne Grimmer, Technical Preservation Services, National Park Service

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.