



Historic Preservation Tax Incentives Program

Technical Preservation Services
National Park Service

Retaining Corridors and Other Circulation Spaces in Historic Buildings

The organization of a building, its sequence of spaces and circulation patterns, is important in conveying the historic context, character, and development of most buildings. For this reason, corridors are almost always primary spaces. Hallways and corridors are generally experienced as one element in a sequence of related spaces, a group that often includes entrance lobbies, stairwells, and elevator lobbies. This sequence of spaces working together provides the circulation artery for a building.

Therefore, the retention of existing corridors on all floors during rehabilitation is necessary if a project is to meet the Secretary of Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. Removal or extensive alterations of these spaces would almost necessarily cause the loss of historic fabric, which would further diminish the historic character and feeling of the building. Retaining only one or more "representative" corridors on a selected floor is also not sound preservation practice.

While significant alterations to the width or length of corridors do not meet the Standards, there is flexibility within the floor plan to moderately "truncate" the ends of a corridor, provided that the corridor's general configuration (whether it follows a "U," "L," "H," "E," or other plan) is retained and its features and finishes are preserved. Additionally, in buildings where there are primary and secondary corridors, more change will generally be acceptable in the secondary space. Secondary corridors can be identified as those that serve a distinctly utilitarian purpose as an alternative circulation route to the primary hallways, stairs, and elevators.

Changes in primary corridors should be limited to those that minimally diminish the extent of the space without destroying the overall configuration. The core of these plans where primary corridors meet the elevators is generally a highly significant space that can accommodate the least amount of change. So, too, are open staircases and other primary stairs in the vertical circulation core of a building. However, when significant alterations to the historic configuration of the corridors and vertical circulation have already occurred, a greater degree of change to these spaces may be possible.

When the historic features and finishes of the corridor walls or floors are completely lost, but the historic configuration remains intact, it is generally recommended that the location and width of the historic corridor be retained. If corridor finishes are altered or missing but other character-defining features, such as historic doors and ceiling heights, are intact or minimally changed, less change may be appropriate because the corridor may retain sufficient integrity to contribute to the character of the building. But if wall finishes are missing or altered, ceiling heights have been dropped, and all corridor doors have been replaced, it may be possible to relocate or remove the corridor, depending on other factors such as its significance to the overall character of the building. An exception to this rule would be where the configuration of the corridor is essential to understanding the historic function of the building such as in a small school building where the central corridor connects to the primary stairs and entrances of the building.

Additional flexibility is available in taller buildings with repetitive floor plans. In these buildings, one or two floors may sometimes be substantially changed when taken in context of the overall project. However, in no case is retaining a few sample floors instead of the majority of the repetitive floor plans

appropriate. In this type of building, the repetitive floor plan is significant to the building's architectural character.

Where no historic fabric or none of the historic configuration of the corridor remains, complete reconfiguration of the interior is possible as long as the new design is compatible with the historic character of the building.

For additional guidance, see *Preservation Brief 18: Rehabilitating Interiors in Historic Buildings – Identifying Character-Defining Elements*, *Preservation Brief 17: Architectural Character – Identifying the Visual Aspects of Historic Buildings as an Aid to Preserving Their Character*, and the *Technical Preservation Services' Publications and Online Materials* index.

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