



**Subject:** Corridors in Historic Highrise Apartment Buildings and Hotels

- Applicable Standards:**
- 2. Retention of Historic Character
  - 5. Preservation of Distinctive Features, Finishes and Craftsmanship

**Issue:** Generally, an early 20<sup>th</sup> century highrise apartment building or hotel is organized into grand public rooms (and sometimes commercial space) on the lower levels and multiple apartments or lodging floors above. These “inhabited” floors comprise most of the space in this property type, and are served by elevator lobbies and public corridors (the elevator lobby-public corridor plan is also found on the upper floors of a related building type, the early 20<sup>th</sup> century office building). Thus, elevator lobbies and corridors are important in defining the historic character of apartment houses and hotels, and the attendant historic fabric—including plaster walls and ceilings, wainscoting, doors, transoms, and trim—is significant in defining the historic character of the elevator lobbies and corridors.

The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation call for the retention of character-defining components of a building. In an apartment building or hotel project, however, corridors are frequently at risk. Rehabilitation plans may involve demolishing the corridors on all levels and then rebuilding them with new materials, demolishing them on all but a few levels, or severely reducing them in size to shift more square footage to the private apartments or rooms. While these approaches clearly do not meet the Standards, some modification of corridors is permitted under the Standards. For example, it is acceptable 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.

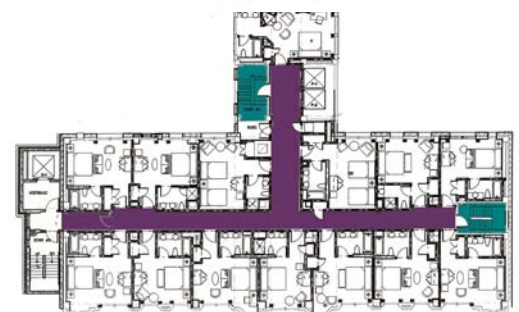
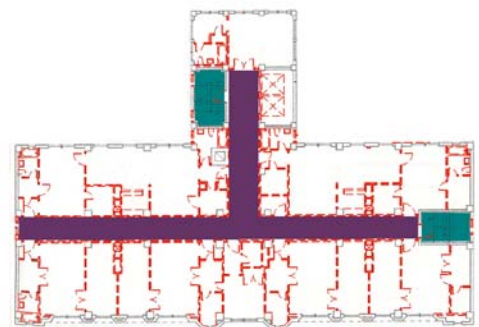
**Application 1** (*Incompatible treatment*): Completed in 1926, this ten-story brick and terra cotta building was originally an apartment hotel (“bachelor” apartments without kitchenettes on the first floor and efficiency apartments on the remaining floors). Eventually, it was converted to hotel use only. The building is distinguished by virtually intact historic fabric and floor plans, including a T-shaped, double-loaded corridor system on floors two through ten. The rehabilitation proposal calls for gutting of these floors, which are in excellent condition, and construction of new corridors and hotel rooms. While the new corridor system would essentially reproduce the shape of the historic corridor system, the proposal to completely eliminate intact, character-defining features, finishes and spaces, including the apartment layouts, does not meet the Standards.



*LEFT: Pre-rehabilitation photograph of typical corridor showing historic detailing, including wood trim and plaster finishes.*

*TOP RIGHT: Proposed demolition plan for each of the upper floors. Red, dotted lines indicate removal of original corridor and room partitions with the historic trim and detailing.*

*BOTTOM RIGHT: Proposed plan for the upper floors. The longer section of the new corridor is narrower than its historic counterpart. All finishes, detailing and trim would be imitations of the original.*

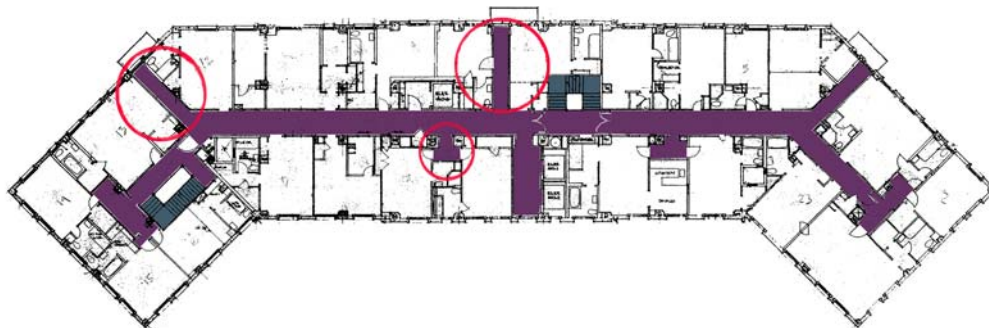


**Application 2 (Compatible treatment):** Opened in 1927 to serve as an apartment hotel (originally, 85 apartment suites and 32 hotel rooms), this building is a fifteen-story, reinforced-concrete tower. Over the years, virtually all of the building became a hotel. Then, as part of the recent rehabilitation, the building shifted back to apartment building use. Above lobby level, the floors are served by double-loaded corridors that follow the footprint of the wide central section of the building and its diagonal end wings. The rehabilitation retained the elevator lobbies, corridors, and the associated historic fabric, with a few minor modifications (the basic room configuration was also retained, with some grouping of rooms to create apartments). Two small corridor “access ways” for fire escapes were converted to private space for adjacent apartments (as the fire escapes themselves were eliminated); drywall was laminated to the deteriorated plaster walls (historic trim and detailing were retained); and a drywall ceiling was dropped slightly below the historic flat plaster ceiling to accommodate the new mechanical, electrical and plumbing systems. This work preserves the historic character of the corridors and, thus, meets the Standards.



*LEFT: Pre-rehabilitation view of typical corridor showing historic trim and deteriorated flat plaster.*

*RIGHT: Post-rehabilitation view of typical corridor showing retention of historic trim, drywall finishes that match the appearance of the original flat plaster, and a slightly lower ceiling that conceals new systems. Also shown are a compatible, largely glazed fire door and a portion of the preserved open stair (lower left of image).*



*Pre-rehabilitation plan of typical upper floor. Circled areas indicate the only major changes to the corridor plan to take place during rehabilitation.*



*Post-rehabilitation plan of typical upper floor. Corridors and staircases have survived intact. Former fire escape “accessways” have been absorbed into two apartments and a vestibule is absorbed into one apartment on each floor. Shown in lavender are intact, previously public areas (a small vestibule and the end leg of the corridor) that have been incorporated into two of the apartments on each floor.*

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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.