



**Subject: Exterior Stair/Elevator Tower Additions**

- Applicable Standards:**
- 9. Compatible New Additions/Alterations
  - 10. Reversibility of New Additions/Alterations

**Issue:** A common problem that must be addressed when rehabilitating a historic structure is providing appropriate access to and from upper floors. Most local building codes require two separate means of egress from commercial buildings. In addition, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), as well as basic real estate marketing, often dictate the need for elevators in buildings that historically did not offer this amenity. In many cases this requirement can be met within the original structure; however, in some situations the addition of a new stair or elevator shaft within the historic building would result in the destruction of significant historic fabric. It is in these situations that the possibility of constructing an exterior addition to house the exit stair or elevator shaft should be explored.

As with all new additions to historic buildings, the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation require that stair/elevator tower additions be compatible with the character of the historic building. To achieve this, the addition should be located on a secondary elevation and not be highly visible from public spaces, and its construction should not destroy character-defining historic materials on the building. The addition should also be compatible with the massing, size, scale and architectural features of the historic structure, and designed so that it is clearly apparent that it is a later alteration. Finally, the new addition should be attached in such a way that the future removal would not impair the essential integrity and form of the historic property.

**Application 1** (*Incompatible addition*): A former American Legion Hall, built in 1938 in a simplified Art Deco style, was rehabilitated into commercial office space. The historic building includes a buff brick and stone "head house" with a distinctive stepped gable entrance facing the street, and a later red brick "shed" addition (c.1955) to the rear. The rehabilitation included the construction of an elevator tower adjacent to the front elevation. Although the design of the tower is appropriately simple in design, massing and scale, and is built with compatible materials, its location nearly flush with the building's façade is inappropriate. The addition in this



*Prior to rehabilitation. Note the symmetrical head house (1938) and later rear brick shed addition (1955).*



*After rehabilitation. The addition is located very close to the facade and, as a result, is highly visible, altering the symmetrical balance of the historic facade.*

location is a highly visible new element that markedly alters the building's appearance and character by destroying the balance found in the historic facade. A better approach would have been to construct the addition further toward the rear of the building where it would have been less obtrusive, and would have preserved the character of the historic building.



*This modern, metal stair tower addition located between an existing projecting tower and articulated corner is compatible with the character of the historic structure. It is also located on the rear elevation of the building, and is not visible from major public vantage points.*

**Application 2 (Compatible addition):** A second example involves a large university building, including a late-19th century stone Gothic Style historic structure with a later brick historic addition abutting it. A new stair to provide an additional means of egress was added to the rear elevation of the original structure, inconspicuously placed near the intersection with the later addition. The new stair is constructed in modern materials and is clearly differentiated from the old. Moreover, its simple, contemporary design is compatible with the historic building. Finally, the addition is not visible when looking at the building's primary elevation. Accordingly, this stair tower addition successfully conforms with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation.