Interpreting The Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation

Subject: Incompatible Alterations to the Setting and Environment of a Historic Property

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

Issue: Setting is essential to a historic property’s significance. Drastic changes to the surrounding grading, landscape features, or incompatible new construction on the site, diminish a historic property’s ability to convey its historic significance. Therefore, such alterations do not conform to the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation.

Application (Incompatible treatment): The rehabilitation of this 1935 Spanish Colonial Revival-style railroad depot involved temporarily removing the structure from the site in order to prepare the site for redevelopment, and then returning the building to the site in a slightly different location. The depot would be relocated about 85 feet south and 21 feet west of its original location, but otherwise it would maintain the same orientation to the street and to the railroad tracks. Relocation of the depot, which required approval from the National Register of Historic Places, did not have a significant impact on the historic setting of the building and appeared to meet the Standards.

However, as more details of the project were provided, it became apparent that the proposed site development would have a negative impact on the historic character of the property. The proposed relocation of the building was not a matter of simply moving the building some distance south and west from its original location. The rehabilitation project also involved excavating the site in order to build an underground parking structure and placing the historic building on top of it. In addition, extensive new landscaping features and new construction several stories taller than the historic depot were also proposed on the site.

The extensive reconfiguration of the site significantly altered the historic setting of the depot. Originally, the building sat

Primary street elevation before rehabilitation.

Passenger waiting area before rehabilitation.

Site plan showing the relocation of the depot on the site.
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.

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October 2006, ITS Number 41