



Subject: Reusing Special Use Structures

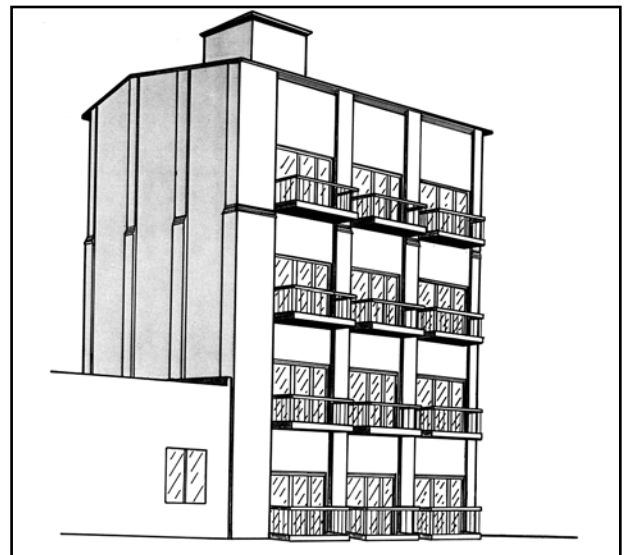
- Applicable Standards:
1. Compatible Use
  2. Retention of Historic Character

**Issue:** Standard 1 of the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation requires that a historic property be used "for its historic purpose or be placed in a new use that requires minimal change to the defining characteristics" of the property. Because changing a property's use will almost always entail physical changes to accommodate the new use, it is essential to match the building and the use. Otherwise, a property may suffer more change than its historic character can withstand. For example, since residences require numerous windows to provide light and air, ice houses and other buildings with few or no window openings typically do not make good candidates for reuse as housing. Other building types requiring special care when selecting a new use include jails, powerplants, hangars, and other special use structures.

**Application 1** (*Incompatible treatment*): An ice service company that was eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places was proposed for rehabilitation into multi-unit residential use. The property consisted of two portions: a one-story rectangular structure built in 1920 that provided office space, an engine room, and coolers; and a 50 foot high windowless ice storage house added in 1924. The firm manufactured, stored, and supplied ice until the widespread availability of electric coil refrigeration eventually rendered the service obsolete. The ice storage house had been used since the 1950s as a lumber warehouse—a change that required relatively few modifications, and none to character-defining features.

The rehabilitation to convert the structure into residential apartments proposed the insertion of numerous openings for windows and doors. Balconies were also proposed. Yet, the blank, monolithic appearance of the ice storage house was its defining characteristic. The changes proposed to accommodate the residential use would have dealt a serious blow to the historic character of the building. The proposed rehabilitation did not meet the Standards.

**Application 2** (*Incompatible treatment*): A jail built in 1887 was proposed for rehabilitation into residential apartments. The



**Top:** The solid windowless walls are the character-defining features of this building, indicative of its function of ice-storage. **Bottom:** The proposal to insert windows, doors, and balconies in the building would have greatly altered the monolithic appearance of the structure.

property consisted of a warden's house and a cell block. The stark interior of the cell block reflected the building's historic use. The cells, five feet by eight feet, were separated by 18 inch load-bearing masonry walls. The internal structural system was thus independent of the exterior walls. To accommodate the insertion of apartments on all floors, the plans called for the total demolition of the historic floor plan in the largest and oldest section of the jail. The planned removal of the load-bearing cell walls also meant that the floor and roof structure resting upon them would be lost as well.

While modifications to the interior of buildings are permitted within the scope of the Standards for Rehabilitation and the Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings, the changes required to convert the jail to housing would have removed virtually all vestiges of the character-defining features of the historic structure.

In each of these cases, the proposed changes to the physical fabric and composition of the historic buildings resulted from the selection of a use that did not suit the building.

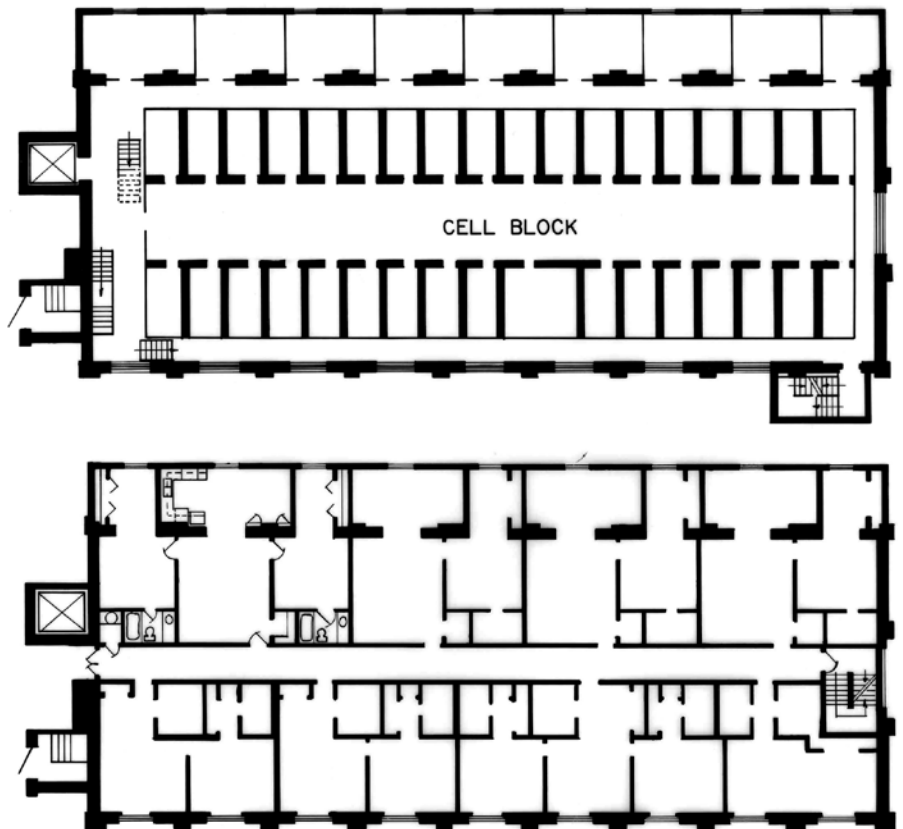


*Top left:* The historic jail featured a three-story warden's house (partially visible, left), and a four-story cell block.

*Top right:* Cell block interior. Cell walls were five feet by eight, separated by 18 inch load-bearing walls.

*Center:* Floor plan before rehabilitation. Section at top was added in the 1950s.

*Bottom:* Floor plan showing proposed insertion of apartments and the removal of nearly all the historic fabric.



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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.

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