



ROOF DECKS AND ROOF ADDITIONS DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS AND SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS

ROOF DECKS

The Historic Preservation Review Board (HPRB) generally requires that new roof decks not be visible from surrounding streets or public sidewalks so as not to alter the character or appearance of the building or its streetscape. This typically requires a substantial set back, the extent of which depends on the height of the proposed deck and its framing, the height of the building and its parapets, the height of adjacent buildings, the topography of the area, the width of the street, and views from public vantage points surrounding the building. Visibility of roof decks from mid-block alleys is typically not a concern unless the alley has a particular historic character or designation. If it can be demonstrated that a deck is not visible from street views, a permit application can typically be approved by the Historic Preservation Office (HPO) staff under delegation of authority from the HPRB. A roof deck that is visible from a street typically requires review by the HPRB to determine its compatibility.

ROOF DECKS SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS

In order to evaluate a proposed roof deck, the following is required:

- 1) **Scaled roof plan** – a dimensioned and scaled drawing showing the entire roof of the building with the proposed deck and setbacks.
- 2) **Photographs** – showing the building from the sidewalk on the opposite side of the street, and from oblique views up and down the same sidewalk. Photographs from on top of the roof, showing the height of parapet walls, other roof decks on adjoining properties, and views to the street are strongly encouraged.
- 3) **Section drawing** – a dimensioned and scaled drawing showing the deck, the structure supporting the deck, any stair towers or penthouses, and the existing roof and parapet walls.
- 4) **Field test** – in most instances, a mock up of the proposed deck on the building is required to ensure that it will not be visible; see below.

ROOF ADDITIONS

Adding vertically to a historic building is generally discouraged as such additions typically alter significant features, such as its roof line, height, relationship with surrounding buildings, and overall form and mass. Additions on top of a building can sometimes be achieved when they are not visible from street views, do not result in the removal or alteration of important character-defining features of the building or streetscape, and are compatible with their context. If conditions allow, this approach typically requires a substantial setback, the extent of which depends on the height of the addition, the height of the building, the height of adjacent buildings, the topography of the area, the width of the street, the relationship of the subject building to its surroundings, and views from public vantage points surrounding the building.

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Under most circumstances, roof additions that are visible from a public street are not appropriate, as they would alter an historic building's height, mass, design composition, cornice line, roof, and its relationship to surrounding buildings and streetscape – all of which are important character-defining features that are protected for historic property. In rare cases, a visible roof addition may be found acceptable if it does not fundamentally alter the character of the building and is sufficiently designed to be compatible with the building. Any visible roof top addition requires review by the HPRB, and applicants are encouraged to consult with the HPO early in their project planning to discuss their proposal and preparation of submission materials.

**ROOF ADDITIONS
SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS**

Applicants should understand that the level of documentation expected by the HPRB for evaluating any roof top addition is somewhat higher than for rear additions, as the impact on the character and perception of the building is potentially far greater. The burden of proof is on the applicant to illustrate the full impact and visibility of the addition, as well as to demonstrate how the addition is compatible with the character of the historic property to which it is being added.

In order to understand and evaluate the relationship of the proposed addition to the design of the historic building and the impact on its surroundings, the following is required:

- 1) **Scaled elevation drawing** – showing the building, addition, and either all buildings on the block, or for long blocks, at least 4-5 buildings on either side of the subject property sufficient to show the building in its immediate context.
- 2) **Scaled and dimensioned sight-line cross section drawing** – taken from 6'0" above the sidewalk on the opposite side of the street.
- 3) **Perspective drawings or renderings** – showing the building and addition from at least three viewpoints – one from the sidewalk directly across the street from the building, and at least two from the same sidewalk up and down the street in each direction from where the addition would be most visible. The specific viewpoints will depend on the site conditions for each project; applicants should discuss the vantage points for the preparation of renderings with the HPO staff, and to see if additional renderings may be required.
- 4) **Photographs** – showing the building from the various viewpoints selected for renderings.
- 5) **Block site plan** – showing the footprint of all buildings on the block on both sides of the street. Viewpoints selected for perspective renderings and photographs should be keyed to the block site plan.
- 6) **Field test** – in most instances, a mock up of the proposed addition is required so that its impact can be evaluated in its context; see below.

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Conducting a Field Test for Roof Decks and Roof Additions

A field or “flag test” is often necessary for the HPO to evaluate the potential visibility of a proposed roof deck, addition, or installation of solar or mechanical equipment. In many instances, if proposed roof work can be demonstrated as not visible from surrounding streets, the HPO can approve work under delegation from the HPRB. Work that is found to be visible from a street typically must be referred to the HPRB for review, for which documentation of the flag test is important in the Board’s evaluation of the proposal’s compatibility with historic property. The following steps should be taken in conducting a field test for roof decks and additions:

1. The contractor, property owner, or building agent coordinates a day/time with HPO staff for the test to be conducted. If the owner will not be present, the contractor/agent should ensure that the roof can be accessed.
2. A tape measure, camera, and a copy of the dimensioned plans should be available on site.
3. Based on the dimensioned drawings for the work, the contractor should set up a flag, 2” x 4”s, surveyor rods or PVC pipe that accurately depict the vertical and horizontal edges of the proposed work. The extent of the mock-up should be discussed with HPO in advance and executed prior to HPO arrival. Generally, the corners closest to streets and the highest points of the proposed work are the most important.
4. Once installed, HPO staff may go up on the roof to confirm the measurements.
5. Together with the applicant, HPO staff will walk the block looking at site lines to see the extent of visibility. If the proposed work is found to be visible, HPO will work with the applicant to see if adjustments in the location, height, footprint, or dimensions of the installation could eliminate its visibility.
6. If the visibility of the proposed work cannot be addressed through adjustments in its placement and dimensions, the HPO will ask the applicant to photograph the installation as supplemental to their submission to the HPRB.