



# HISTORIC RESOURCES BOARD

## ALTERATIONS APPLICATION REVIEW PROCESS

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### WHAT IS AN EXTERIOR ALTERATION OF HISTORIC STRUCTURES?

All applications for a building permit for exterior alteration to any historic structure/site in the downtown area or significant building elsewhere in the city (Category 1 and 2 on the inventory and all structures within historic districts), new construction on a parcel with a historic structure or structure in the downtown area or a significant building elsewhere in the city are considered exterior alterations. Most alteration applications are considered minor projects for the purpose of fee assessment and are reviewed at the staff level.

### APPLICATION PROCEDURE

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There are three reviewing bodies, the **Architectural Review Board**, **Historic Resources Board**, and **Planning Staff**, that may review and/or approve exterior alterations of historic structures as detailed below. Depending on the extent of alterations, a planning entitlement may be required in addition to a building permit.

Please note Virtual appointments are required to submit all applications. Appointments can be made by calling the Planning Division at (650) 329-2441 x0. To ensure timely processing, incomplete applications will not be accepted.

Prior to your appointment, upload all required documents as a Pre-Application through the City's [Online Permitting Services portal](#). Directions on creating an account and submitting a pre-app are available at [bit.ly/paloaltoOPS](http://bit.ly/paloaltoOPS). Please note, the account used for the pre-app will be the main contact and uploader for the entirety of the project.

### REVIEW AND DECISION PROCESS

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(1) **Review Bodies** for alterations and their specific role include:

- (1) **Architectural Review Board (ARB) approval** is needed for changes to historic sites in the downtown area or significant structures elsewhere in the city, excluding single-family and duplex homes. The ARB will refer applications to the Historic Resources Board for a recommendation on any proposed changes.
- (2) **Historic Resources Board (HRB) review** applications for historic single-family and duplex residences in downtown or significant buildings elsewhere in the city. Property owners are encouraged, but not required, to follow the board's recommendations in their design proposals.
- (3) **Planning Staff may review and approve** minor exterior alterations. Alterations are considered minor exterior alterations should they not adversely affect the exterior architectural characteristics nor the historical or aesthetic value of the historic structure, its site or surroundings. Adverse effects of a project can be direct or indirect. Typical examples include:
  - physical destruction or damage;
  - alteration inconsistent with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties;
  - decommissioning of the property;
  - change in the character of the property's use or setting;
  - introduction of incompatible visual, atmospheric, or audible elements;
  - neglect and deterioration.

(2) **Time Limit:**

The HRB will provide recommendations on alterations to historic single-family or duplex residences within 30 days of referral from the architectural review board or the chief building official. If the HRB misses this deadline, commercial or multi-family applications will return to the architectural review board, while single-family or duplex applications will go to the chief building official for a building permit decision.

(3) **Standards of Review:**

The review bodies shall consider the architectural style, design, arrangement, texture, materials and color, and any other pertinent factors. The prime concern should be the exterior appearance of the building site.

(1) On buildings **not in a historical district**, the proposed alterations should not adversely affect the exterior architectural characteristics nor the historical or aesthetic value of the building and its site.

(2) **In historic districts**, the proposed alterations should not adversely affect:

- The exterior architectural characteristics nor the historical, architectural, or aesthetic value of the building and its site; or
- The relationship of the building, in terms of harmony and appropriateness, with its surroundings, including neighborhood structures

(4) **Appeals**

Any interested party can appeal the architectural review board's decision to the city council if it denies approval for altering the exterior of a historic structure in the downtown area, a significant structure elsewhere in the city, or in a historic district. Appeals follow the procedures in Chapter 18.78.