

Fact Sheet

Barrier-Free Access for Historic Buildings

Providing barrier-free access to landmark buildings ensures all New Yorkers and visitors can enjoy the city's historic resources. LPC can provide guidance on how to achieve accessibility at historic properties through careful planning and sensitive design.

The Commission has a long history of approving proposals for work that accommodate barrier-free access at landmark properties, including ramps, lifts, and associated fixtures, such as signage, push plates and free-standing hardware. While the most appropriate type of installation depends primarily on the site-specific conditions of a building, care should be taken to ensure that the proposed work does not detract from the architectural character and historic features of the building, streetscape and historic district.

Key Considerations for Barrier-Free Access:

- Whenever feasible, barrier-free access should be provided at a primary entrance. However, all opportunities should be considered before deciding on any proposal, to guarantee that the best access is provided in the manner least intrusive to the historic building.
- Historic properties are distinguished by features, materials, finishes, and proportions that contribute to their historic character and effort should be made to minimize damage to these elements. Features that may be less important to the historic character of the building should be identified, and applicants should consider selecting a plan that primarily affects secondary spaces and finishes.

Installation Guidelines

Historic Doors

- When proposing modifications to historic doors, first explore replacing the hinges with off-set hinges to increase the size of the opening.
- If the historic door is several inches out of compliance, consider replacing the doors with a door and sidelight that recall the historic configuration.

Ramps

- If proposing a ramp, select a primary entrance closest to grade to minimize the length and height of the ramp and to reduce the requirements for landings and associated railings.
- To reduce the length of ramps, orient them to take advantage of natural slopes at the site.
- Switchbacks should be avoided unless they can be incorporated into landscaping.

- The materials, finishes, and design of the ramp should be harmonious with adjacent features at the building. For example, a ramp installed in front of a masonry building should be clad in a masonry material with a similar texture and finish; while a ramp that is to be incorporated into a loading dock should be clad in a material that blends in with the loading dock.

Mechanical Platform Lifts

- Locate mechanical lifts at non-intrusive locations, such as below grade areaway, to minimize the visibility of the installation. To the extent possible, lifts should not be located in front of or attached to significant decorative features or materials.
- The materials, finishes, and designs selected for lifts should be harmonious with adjacent features at the building. For example, a lift installed at a building's areaway should be finished to match the texture and finish of surrounding materials, while a lift installed near a storefront or display window could have clear glass walls to maintain transparency.

LPC Regulation

- Many changes to entry doors and the installation of associated signage can be approved by LPC staff, pursuant to the Commission's rules for doors and signage. Additionally, changes to the slope of a sidewalk that does not require the installation of railings can also be approved by LPC staff.
- Because the decisions made for the installation of extended ramps and mechanical lifts depend on varying site-specific conditions, these proposals require review by the full Commission at a public hearing. The public hearing is an opportunity to explain why a proposed installation is appropriate to the building or historic district. LPC Staff will provide guidance on the best approach for a site, and how to prepare a presentation to the Commissioners. Applicants should be prepared to make a case for appropriateness when presenting at a [Public Hearing](#).

LPC Review

Applications for barrier-free access installations should include typical LPC submission materials, including:

- Permit application form signed by the building owner.
- Color photographs of the facades, areaways, site and streetscape.
- DOB filing drawings, including plans, elevations, details and sections.

Accurate dimensions (total height, depth and length of ramps and any associated landings and railings; width of masonry openings being modified; dimensions of any associated signs, push pads or stanchions), should be provided on the drawings in order for staff to assess the visual impact on the building and streetscape.



Figure 1 A ramp installed at a primary entrance with materials matching the historic building.



Figure 2 A simply-designed ramp with steps and handrails.



Figure 3 A ramp that harmonizes with the existing features and materials of the building.



Figure 4 A mechanical lift finished to match the surrounding materials and therefore recede from view.



Figure 5 A ramp installed within an areaway.

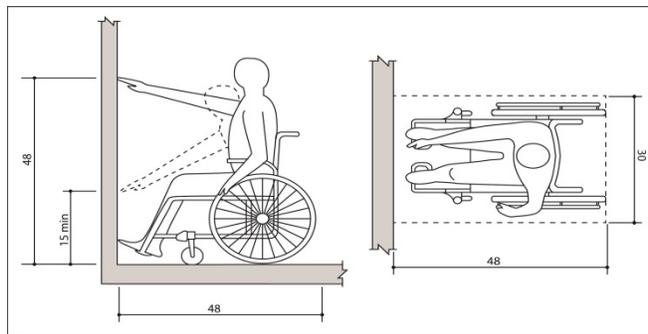


Figure 6 A platform lift with clear glass finished to match the adjacent building finishes.

Appendix

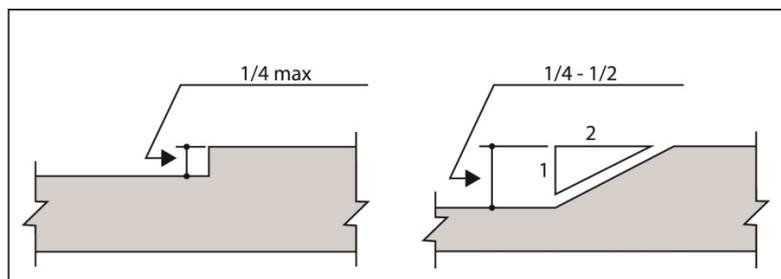
Barrier-Free Access Basics

- There is no requirement to meet accessibility standards in an existing building if no construction is planned.
- Accessibility is required if the occupancy or use of the building changes.
- Accessibility is not required to be met for single two-family residences.
- Accessibility waivers may be granted by the Dept. of Buildings after consulting with the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities (MOPD).



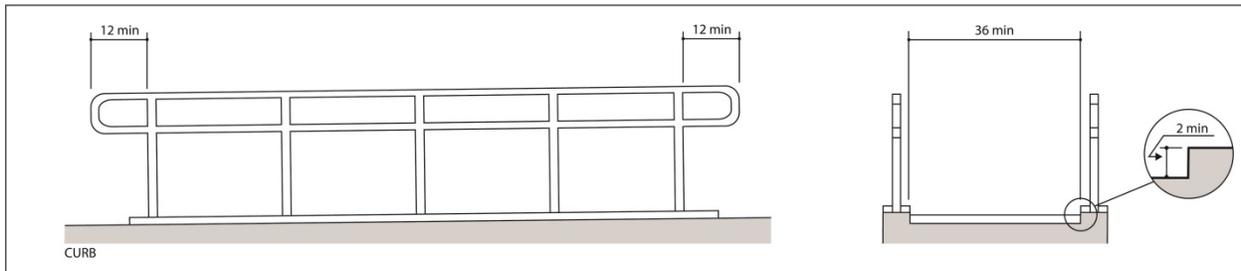
Doors and Thresholds

- A door must have a minimum clear width of 32" with the door able to open 90 degrees, measured between the face of the door and the opposite stop.
- Outfitting paired historic doors with automatic opener hardware may be a good option for accommodating accessibility.
- If the door does not have an automatic actuator, and is an out-swinging door, then there must be a minimum of 18" of clear wall space on the pull side of the door next to the handle so that the wheelchair user can get close enough to open the door.
- Revolving doors or turnstiles are not permitted at an accessible entrance.
- Changes in level up to 1/4" may be vertical and without edge treatment.
- Changes in level between 1/4" and 1" may be beveled with a slope no greater than 1:2.
- Changes in level greater than 1" must be accomplished with a ramp or platform lift.



Ramps and Handrails

- Minimum clear width of a ramp is 36”.
- A slope between 1:10 and 1:12 is allowed for a maximum rise of 6” for a maximum run of 2’.
- A slope between 1:8 and 1:10 is allowed for a maximum rise of 3” for a maximum run of 5’.
- All exterior ramps must be provided with non-slip surfaces.
- If the sloping portion of a ramp exceeds 30°, a landing should be introduced.
- Ramps and landings with a drop-off must have a curb, wall, or railing that prevents people from slipping off of the raised area. A curb must be a minimum of 2” high.
- Railings are not required for ramps less than 6” high.
- If the overall rise in height is less than 30”, the Code does not provide requirements for the spacing between pickets.
- If the overall rise in height is greater than 30” the Code requires a 42” high railing with pickets spaced no more than 4” apart.



Platform Lifts

- There are two main types of platform lifts, which can be useful when the rise to an entrance is very high or the installation of a ramp is not feasible.
 - Inclined – Guided along a stairway or stoop.
 - Vertical – Attached to mechanism that guides a user along a vertical path.
- Platform lifts must comply with the width, landing clearances and height placement of controls specified for allowable reach limitations.
 - The minimum platform size is 32” by 48”.
 - Controls can be placed no higher than 48” or lower than 15”.
 - If the lift travels more than 60” above grade, it must be fully enclosed with a roof.
 - The sides of the platform not used for entrance or exit must be guarded by 42” tall sidewalls of solid construction with no openings.