

Chapter 9

Barrier-Free Access



Historic buildings can and should be made accessible to all. Accessibility can be achieved through careful planning and sensitive design to eliminate physical barriers to entry and use of the building. In New York City, these types of alterations and installations call for altering buildings to accommodate ramps, lifts, and associated fixtures such as signage, push plates, and freestanding hardware. Accessibility and the impact of the installation or alteration on the building's significant architectural features serve as the basis for LPC's rules for work involving barrier-free access (see [LPC Rules](#), Section 2-18, available on our website, www.nyc.gov/landmarks).

In This Chapter, You Will Find:



This chapter explains LPC's rules for work related to barrier-free access. Our goal is to help you submit a fully completed permit application for work that conforms to the LPC Rules so you can get your permit more quickly.



Note: Barrier-free access must comply with other applicable local, state, and federal regulations and codes, including the American National Standard (ANSI), the New York City Building Code, and the Americans with Disabilities Act Standards for Accessible Design. Be sure your proposal meets those requirements as well. To learn more, visit the website of the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities at www.nyc.gov/mopd.

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Section A

How to Get Started



Before applying for your permit, you should:

Find Information about Your Building

This will help you determine how the LPC Rules apply.

What type of building is it?

Search for your building on the [Discover NYC Landmarks map](#) to determine how the LPC Rules apply to your specific building type.

Click on your building to find **construction date, architect and style, building and landmark type**, and a link to the **LPC designation report** with additional historical background.

What did your building look like?

Find **historic tax photos** from the 1940s and 1980s, available through the NYC Department of Records & Information Services [NYC Municipal Archives Collections](#).

Additional information, including guidance on finding **historic maps**, can be found in the **LPC Resource Guide** [Researching Historic Buildings in New York City](#), available at www.nyc.gov/landmarks.

See If Your Work Requires an LPC Permit

Maybe you don't need a permit. LPC generally requires a permit for barrier-free access work, but a permit is **not required** for:

Ordinary maintenance, repair, and retrofitting of barrier-free access installations.

Replacing minor hardware elements in-kind.

Unsure whether your work requires a permit?

Contact LPC at 212-669-7817 or info@lpc.nyc.gov.

What You Will Need

Applications typically require submitting the materials listed below but additional materials may be required depending on the type of work. See *Section B* for required materials by work type.

Basic Application Materials

- **An LPC Permit Application Form**, filled out and signed by the property owner.
- **Color photos** of the entire building to provide context, and close-ups of the areas of proposed barrier-free access work.
- **Comparative drawings:**
 - Elevations of existing conditions and proposed barrier-free access alterations and/or installations
 - Floor and/or site plans of existing conditions and locations of proposed barrier-free access alterations and/or installations
 - Section of existing conditions and proposed barrier-free access alterations and/or installations
 - Large-scale details (in elevation, section, or plan) of proposed barrier-free access alterations and/or installations where they adjoin the building or site features
- **Color specifications / paint cards.**
- **Material specifications or manufacturer cut sheets.**
- **Two sets of Department of Buildings (DOB) filing drawings** if proposed work requires a DOB permit.

When possible, your application materials must be supplemented with a written explanation and/or code citation. This must demonstrate the need to alter historic features at the building's entrance and/or install ramps or lifts at a primary facade location. It must also note less invasive alternatives that were explored but determined not to be feasible.

Section B

LPC Rules and Criteria



This is how the Landmarks Preservation Commission works:

The LPC Rules establish criteria that allow staff to review and approve proposals for certain types of work at landmark properties. Permit applications for work that meets the LPC Rules can be approved faster. If the work does not meet the rules, staff may suggest alternatives that do meet the rules — or your proposal may be presented to the LPC Commissioners for review at a public hearing. LPC staff can guide you through this process. For more information, visit www.nyc.gov/landmarks.

This section explains and illustrates the rules and criteria for the most common types of work involving barrier-free access. See [LPC Rules](#), Section 2-19, for more information.

→ In This Section:

General Criteria

Ramps

- Installing New Ramps
- Replacing Existing Ramps

Lifts

- Installing New Lifts
- Replacing Existing Lifts

Doors

- Making Door and Door Surround Changes
- Installing Door Actuators
- Making Grade Changes

Areaways

- Installing Handrails
- Making Minor Areaway Alterations

General Criteria

Physical barriers to access can include steps, the width of openings, or even the weight of doors. Making buildings accessible can involve many different types of alterations, including changing doors or widening entryways, installing ramps, and/or installing lifts. Staff can approve barrier-free access projects that meet the following general criteria. Certain types of work may have additional requirements.

When feasible, barrier-free access must be provided at the **primary public entrance** to a building or storefront. Before applying to LPC, explore all approaches to making the building or space accessible through the primary entrance to that space.

Note: Providing access at a secondary entrance such as a service entrance may not meet Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards.

Your barrier-free access installation must have the **least possible impact** on significant architectural features. Staff may request evidence of option studies, or request such studies, to confirm that your proposal has the least possible impact.

Does your barrier-free access installation extend onto a public sidewalk?

If so, your project may need to be reviewed by the Department of Transportation (DOT) for a revocable consent.



Does your barrier-free access work require excavation or does it occur in front yards, areaways, or on sidewalks?

If so, please refer to *Chapter 7: Excavation*, *Chapter 8: Yards*, and *Chapter 10: Sidewalks* of this guidebook for additional information.

Ramps

Ramps are the most common way to provide barrier-free access to a building or storefront. If thoughtfully designed, a ramp can blend well with the historic features of the building and not detract from the streetscape or historic district.

Required Application Materials

- **Photos** of building facades.
- **Photos of areas** of installation.
- **Existing and proposed annotated floor plans and elevations.**
- **Vertical and horizontal section drawings** of proposed ramp and railings:
 - *Large-scale detail drawings of ramp where it abuts the building or site features*
- **Material specifications.**
- **Color samples.**
- **Two sets of DOB filing drawings** if proposed work requires a DOB permit.

If LPC needs additional materials once your application is reviewed, you will receive a Materials Checklist from LPC staff.



Attention

If your building is an individual landmark, staff can only approve ramps without handrails.

Installing New Ramps

Location, materials, and design of new ramps must be harmonious with features adjacent to the building or sidewalk. Staff can approve new ramps at individual landmarks and historic district buildings if they meet the following criteria:

Location

If possible, the ramp must be located at the primary entrance, closest to grade, to minimize its height and length.

At primary entrances, steps and landings that the ramp connects to must retain their historic orientation whenever possible. For

example, front-facing steps must not be closed off or changed to side-facing steps.

At storefronts, the ramp should be confined to the store being made accessible and associated with the accessible entrance planned. See *Chapter 3, Storefronts*, for more information.

At apartment buildings with deeply recessed courts, the ramp must be installed within the recess and typically positioned off to one side.

For ramp installations at all buildings, the visible impact of the ramp must be minimized, if possible, by existing architectural features of the areaway like ironwork or masonry.

Installation

Installation must avoid or minimize damage to significant historic fabric, such as sidewalk paving materials, vault lights, steps, and landings.

A tinted concrete ramp with metal handrails installed in front of a storefront entrance.



Design

Length: Ramps must be as short as possible with no switchbacks or landings. A longer ramp can be approved if it has less visual impact on the facade. Take advantage of natural slopes to minimize length.

Handrail: If required, the handrail must be of simple design, typically constructed of metal with a painted or neutral finish and no pickets unless required by code.

Materials

The ramp should typically be a material that matches the building or sidewalk, or is otherwise neutral. For example, a ramp installed in front of a stone building could be clad in a matching stone, or in some cases could be concrete or diamond plate depending on the immediate context of the streetscape and the historic district. Staff can help you make this determination.

Replacing Existing Ramps

If the existing ramp was grandfathered or Commission-approved, staff can approve a new ramp that meets the following criteria:

Size and footprint must match or be smaller than the existing ramp or altered to the minimum degree necessary for code compliance.

Replacement ramp materials must match existing materials and handrail design or match adjacent facade materials. Utilitarian materials with a neutral finish can also be used.

If required by code, staff can approve additional pickets to the handrail design.



A simple ramp designed in steel diamond plate without handrails in the SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District.

Lifts

Code requirements or site conditions sometimes call for a mechanical platform lift instead of ramps to provide accessibility, such as a vertical lift or one that follows a stair railing. Care must be taken to carefully design and place lifts to minimize impact on the building's historic features. Location, materials, and design must be harmonious with adjacent features on the building.



A metal platform lift installed within an areaway, finished to match the surrounding brownstone and screened by ironwork.



Attention

If your building is an individual landmark, staff **cannot** approve a lift. This type of work requires full Commission review at a public hearing.

Installing New Lifts

New lifts of any type must not detract from the special architectural and historic character of the building or streetscape, not require significant alterations to the existing fabric at the proposed location, and be reversible.

Vertical Platform Lifts

Staff can approve installation of a new vertical wheelchair platform lift if the work meets the following criteria:

Location

The lift must be placed in a recessed location at the base of the facade to minimize disruption of its composition. It must be at least partially obscured by existing features such as ironwork or masonry walls.

A minimal amount of historic fabric can be removed to access the lift in the elevated position, such as a portion of a fence or curb.

The lift must be stored in the down position.

Installation

The lift and associated rails must only require minimal attachment points through non-decorative elements on the facade.

Finish

Lift components, including the platform, machine housing, and rails, must be finished to match immediately adjacent facade materials or elements, or have a neutral finish.

Required Application Materials

- Photos** of building facades.
- Photos of areas** of installation.
- Existing and proposed annotated floor plans and elevations.**
- Comparative vertical and horizontal section drawings** of existing conditions and proposed lift:
 - *Large-scale detail drawings of lift where it abuts building or site features*
- Material specifications or manufacturer cut sheets.**
- Color samples.**
- Two sets of DOB filing drawings** if proposed work requires a DOB permit.

If LPC requires additional materials after your application is reviewed, you will receive a Materials Checklist from LPC staff.



A chair lift on rails, finished to match the existing metal stairs and installed with minimal attachment points.

Wheelchair and Chair Lifts on Rails

Staff can approve installation of a new wheelchair or chair lift on stair rails if the work meets the following criteria:

Installation

The lift and associated rails must only require minimal attachment points through non-decorative elements on the facade.

Finish

Lift components, including the platform, machine housing, and rails, must be finished to match immediately adjacent facade materials or elements, or must have a neutral finish.

Replacing Existing Lifts

If the existing vertical lift or chair lift on stair rails was either grandfathered or Commission-approved, staff can approve a new lift that meets the following criteria:

Platform lift and guiderails must be installed using existing penetrations in the building facade or other elements. Additional penetrations may be approved if required to meet code.

Lift mechanicals must be in the same location and match the footprint and height of existing mechanicals, or be reduced in size.

The vertical lift may be fully enclosed if necessary to meet code.

Doors

In some historic buildings, doors need to be modified to accommodate barrier-free access. This includes replacing doors and accompanying elements, altering door surrounds, and installing hardware to make them more accessible.

Making Door and Door Surround Changes

Staff can approve door and door surround changes if the work meets the following criteria:

If the existing door is original or historic

All historic fabric, such as sidelights, doors, transoms,

framing, and door surround detailing must be retained.

Alterations to the doorswing, hardware and hinges, and installation of automatic opener hardware can be approved at the staff level provided door configuration and details are maintained.

If the existing door is non-historic

A new door and accompanying elements can be installed and must recall the historic condition in terms of configuration, detailing, material, and finish.

The opening may be widened up to eight inches to meet code,

Required Application Materials

- Photos** of building facades.
- Photos** of door and surround.
- Existing and proposed annotated floor plans and elevations.**
- Comparative vertical and horizontal section drawings** of existing conditions and proposed door and surround:
 - *Large-scale detail drawings of door and surround*
- Material specifications.**
- Color samples.**

If LPC requires additional materials after your application is reviewed, you will receive a Materials Checklist from LPC staff.

Elevation drawings showing the replacement of non-historic paired entrance doors with a single door and sidelight to provide a wider entry for wheelchair access.



provided that the door surround is recreated in-kind.

The operation or swing direction of the new door may be altered, and the configuration may vary, to meet required clearances. For example, paired doors can be changed to unequal paired doors, or a single door with a fixed leaf or sidelight.

A replacement door in an alternate material may be installed to meet force requirements — i.e., if the existing door is too heavy or difficult to open.

Installing Door Actuators

Outfitting historic doors with automatic opener hardware such as an actuator or push plate may be a good option for accommodating accessibility. Staff can approve installation of an actuator or push plate if it meets the following criteria:

Actuators or push plates must be as small as possible and installed at an area of plain masonry, wood, or metal, but not cast iron. They can also be installed at a non-decorative door return to minimize damage to historic fabric (with no exposed conduit).

If actuators need to be installed on freestanding posts or bollards, such posts or bollards must be installed through non-historic paving. They must be simply designed and finished to match the adjacent facade material or other neutral finish.



A push plate door actuator installed at an area of plain masonry.



A freestanding post with a push plate door actuator, installed through non-historic paving.

Making Grade Changes

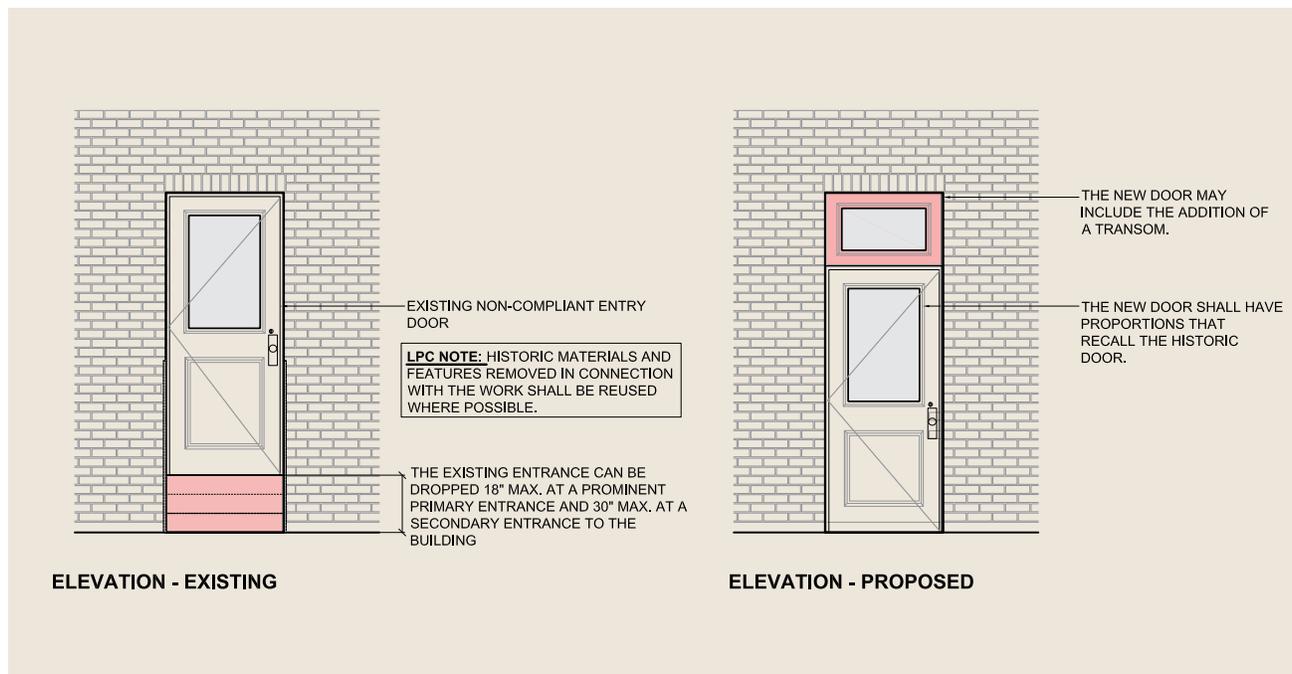
In some historic buildings, lowering the existing entrance to bring it to grade can make it accessible. Staff can approve making a grade change if it meets the following criteria:

Modifications such as removing existing entrance steps, landings, or ramps, provided that the entrance is dropped or raised no more than 18 inches at a primary entrance and no more than 30 inches at secondary entrances.

Significant architectural features, such as granite or cast iron steps, must be retained and reused where possible. For example, a granite step can be reused as a threshold at the new at-grade entrance.

New doors installed in conjunction with an at-grade entrance must have proportions that recall the historic door. This may require the addition of a transom within the enlarged opening even if it did not historically have one.

Sidewalks can be modified to slope the sidewalk up to the entrance. See *Chapter 10* for more information on sidewalks.



Elevation drawings showing the removal of steps and installation of new door and transom at-grade.

Areaways

In some historic buildings, better accessibility can be achieved by installing handrails at existing stoops or areaway steps and making other alterations to areaways.

Installing Handrails

Staff can approve the installation of simply designed handrails, generally consisting of as few elements as possible. The installation can be at an existing stoop or areaway steps at the top of a stoop wall, inside the stoop wall, or at stair treads — whichever location is least obtrusive. Staff can help you make this determination.



A simple metal railing has been installed on the top of this masonry stoop for safety.

Making Minor Areaway Alterations

Staff can approve minor alterations to historic ironwork or masonry to meet accessibility requirements. For example, a small portion of masonry can be removed to widen an opening and enlarge a gate to provide access to an areaway, so long as altered elements are restored to match existing conditions.

Required Application Materials

- Photos** of building facades.
 - Photos** of entrance.
 - Existing and proposed annotated floor plans and elevations.**
 - Comparative vertical and horizontal section drawings** of existing conditions and proposed at-grade entrance:
- *Large-scale detail drawings of the at-grade entrance*
 - Material specifications.**
 - Color samples.**
- If LPC requires additional materials after your application is reviewed, you will receive a Materials Checklist from LPC staff.*