Walks, Ramps, and Stairs

ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN GUIDELINES FOR THE H-2 DISTRICT

Guidelines for Preservation and Rehabilitation

- Recommended actions or treatments are indicated by √.
- Actions or treatments not recommended and other warnings are indicated by X.

Retaining Existing Features

√ Identify and keep all important features of existing walks, ramps, and stairs, such as:
  - materials,
  - shape,
  - railings, and
  - risers and treads.

√ Repair or replace rather than remove deteriorated walks or steps.

√ Supplement rather than replace a building’s existing walks and steps when incorporating ramps and other additions in an effort to provide universal accessibility.

Walks

√ Additions to existing walks should match the original in:
  - materials,
  - texture and finish,
  - paving pattern,
  - mortar joints, and color.

DEFINITIONS

Repoint: To replace deteriorated mortar in the joints between bricks or masonry units.
Riser: The board that forms the vertical face of a step.
Spalling: The flaking of masonry due to frost, chemical reaction, or building movement.
Tread: The board that forms the horizontal part of a step.

Important Considerations...

Walks and steps are often characteristic features of a building and its relationship to a site. Carefully integrating ramps and other devices into the existing design of a building can often improve its accessibility while retaining its architectural character.
New walkways should be compatible with the architectural character of the house and its setting with respect to:

- materials,
- color,
- scale, and
- grade.

Restore uneven walks to level condition by:

- adding fill material where settling has occurred,
- resolving drainage problems that contribute to frost heaving,
- shaving or removing minor tree roots that cause heaving, and
- relocating or diverting the walk to avoid major tree roots.

Do not locate walks close to large trees with roots that may displace paving materials.

Ramps

- Check Building Code for requirements on ramp slopes, handrail or balustrade heights, landings, and the spacing of balusters.
- Locate ramps at the rear or side of a building where there is direct access to parking areas.
- Locate ramps to avoid damaging or destroying important landscape elements, such as mature trees.

Residential walks may include the public sidewalk, a front walk, and a secondary walk.

Business walks also include the public sidewalk, a primary walk, secondary walks to the parking lot, and ramps.

The above are appropriate paving materials for walks.

Use of masonry materials such as brick or pavers is most appropriate when the building is of masonry construction. If building is wood frame construction, a concrete walkway is most appropriate.

The location of a new walk should reflect foot traffic patterns. Typically a walk will connect the front door with a parking area or the sidewalk in front.

Definitions

Balusters: A series of short, vertical members that support a handrail.

Balustrade: An entire railing system, including handrail, balusters, and bottom rail.
√ Make ramps and railings simple and inconspicuous, using materials that are compatible with the building but that do not duplicate its architectural design.
X Do not install a ramp that will obscure or damage important features of a building.

When possible, make ramps removable so that a building can be returned to its earlier appearance if the ramp is no longer needed.

Walkway Steps
√ Make new or replacement steps that relate to walkways and are compatible in width and materials. New concrete used in stairs should be stained or tinted to match nearby historic concrete.
√ Design secondary stairs to be as inconspicuous as possible and locate them at the rear or least visible side of a building.
√ Use metal railings on walkway steps. A simple pipe rail may serve well, compared to a wooden railing found on porches.
√ Use metal railings on stairs along walks not directly adjacent to a porch.

Porch Stairs
√ Stairs that relate to a porch should be compatible in their materials and paint colors and should have a width that relates to the dimension between adjacent porch columns.
√ Use wood or metal railings on porch stairs. Handrails should repeat the form, size, and detailing of the porch railing, attach directly to the porch column and bottom stair tread, and be painted the color of trim on the adjacent building.
√ Replace wood risers and treads that are worn, sagging, broken, or rotted.
√ Repoint brick stairs with deteriorated mortar joints. See Masonry Features and Walls for more information on proper repointing techniques.
√ Check concrete and stone steps for broken corners, cracks, and spalling.
√ Install riser boards on all wood stairs.
X Do not install a stair that will obscure or damage important features of a building.

DEFINITIONS
Repoint: To replace deteriorated mortar in the joints between bricks or masonry units.
Spalling: The flaking of masonry due to frost, chemical reaction, or building movement.
Porches with wood steps should have closed risers and wood handrails.

Porches with masonry steps may have simple wrought-iron handrails.