EVERYTHING YOU EVER WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT HISTORIC WINDOWS

Why are the original windows an import feature of historic properties?

*Preservationists identify “character defining features” that relate the integrity of a historic property. The more intact the original materials such as windows, doors, siding, the higher the integrity. Think of replacing historic windows like a prosthetic body part. It may function like the original, but it’s not the same.

What if the original windows are badly damaged?

Wood windows can be repaired and if necessary, portions can be replaced with in-kind materials. This can’t be said of vinyl or aluminum window frames.

What if the window is beyond repair or I want to replace a non-historic window with a replica of the original?

Craftsmen can prepare an historically accurate replica just as craftsmen designed the original windows in homes all over Olympia, from the 1860s through the 1940s.

My old windows leak heat and waste energy. Shouldn’t I replace them?

No! **With proper sealing and storm windows you can improve the energy efficiency while retaining the historic integrity of the structure. The vast majority of heat loss in homes is through the attic or uninsulated walls, not windows. Adding just 3 1/2 inches of cheap fiberglass insulation in the attic has three times the R factor impact as moving from the least energy efficient single pane window with no storm window to the most energy efficient window.

How do I know where energy loss is occurring?


I am willing to keep my original windows but I don’t like the look of storm windows, even wooden ones. What else can I use? Got anything less expensive?

Window inserts such as those made by ION Ecobuilding in Olympia and Indo Windows in Portland are a low-cost, easy to install option. TIP: heavy curtains and shutters aren’t just for aesthetics, they keep the heat in!

Won’t vinyl windows last longer than wood?

Regardless of the manufacturers’ claims about 20 and 30 year lives, thirty percent of the windows being replaced each year are less than 10 years old, and many only two years old.
Aren’t vinyl windows better for the environment?

***The energy consumed in manufacturing vinyl is 40 times more than in producing wood for use. And if they were aluminum windows? 126 times more energy used in manufacture than for wood. When you throw away existing building materials such as windows, you waste the resources already expended to make them, along with a piece of our community’s history.

It’s cheaper to buy vinyl windows rather than wood. Why shouldn’t I?

Repairing and rebuilding historic wood windows means that the dollars are spent locally instead of at a distant window manufacturing plant. That’s economic sustainability, also part of sustainable development.

Is there financial assistance for repairing or replicating historic windows?

Indeed! Special Tax Valuation is program that lets property owners deduct repair costs from their assessed property taxes for 10 years. Currently preservation professionals are working with the federal government and local utilities to ensure rebates for weatherization of older homes. More information is available at www.olympiawa.gov/historic and http://www.nps.gov/history

Financial assistance may also be available for weatherization for very low-income people through the City’s housing program. Information is available at http://olympiawa.gov/city-services/housing-social-service.aspx

Sources:

* The Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation
  http://www.nps.gov/history/hps/tps/tax/rhb/guide.htm

**The Effects of Energy Efficient Treatments on Historic Windows
Center for Resource Conservation, 2011

*** Place Economics
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