

Historic Preservation Commission

Policy No. 24-01

ADOPTED POLICY FOR THE APPROPRIATENESS OF SUBSTITUTE MATERIALS
FOR PORCH AND DECK FLOORING

The Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) has reviewed several porch replacement projects over the last several years where the previous porch flooring/decking failed in only a few years. This failure is largely due to the quality of the materials available. Most domestic wood species available in the market for porch flooring/decking is significantly weaker, less durable, and less resistant to rot.

A review of the available substitute materials available for porch flooring/decking shows substantial growth in the quality and variety of products in the marketplace. While many of these products fail to accurately reproduce the physical and visual characteristics of wood, some accurately portray the physical and material characteristics of traditional wood flooring. To aid in the review of Historic Area Work Permit (HAWP) applications for replacing porch flooring and decking the HPC adopts the following:

Now, THEREFORE:

WHEREAS, Section 24A-8(b) of the Montgomery County Code identifies seven criteria to evaluate approvable HAWPs for properties designated on the Master Plan for Historic Preservation or properties that are in a historic district designated on the Master Plan for Historic Preservation;

WHEREAS, nothing in this policy may supersede Council-adopted Design Guidelines for Historic Districts or Sites that already specify the use of certain materials and finishes;

WHEREAS, porches and decks are identified as character-defining features of historic buildings;

WHEREAS, if the HPC determines the porch flooring/decking has deteriorated beyond repair, it shall be the policy of the Historic Preservation Commission that:

1. Sites listed on the Master Plan for Historic Preservation are properties that have been designated to the Master Plan for Historic Preservation based on their individual historic significance, including architectural significance. Because of the significance of these sites, preserving its historic character is of paramount concern. Wood is the appropriate material to maintain the historic appearance, materials, and construction methods at Master Plan sites. The HPC does not evaluate wood and species. The finish applied needs to be compatible with the species selected.
2. Historic districts are comprised of groups of cohesive historic resources that collectively contribute to the county's historic, architectural, archaeological, or cultural values. Resources in many districts are categorized as 'Outstanding,' 'Contributing,' or 'Non-Contributing' and the treatment of these resources varies based on their categorization.
3. Outstanding Resources/Primary – These resources have the highest level of architectural or historical significance in the historic district and the objective for Outstanding/Primary

resources is to preserve the historic and architectural character to the greatest extent possible. Wood should be used on all porches and decks for Outstanding/Primary resources. The wood should be painted and installed in a historically appropriate method. Porches on building additions and new construction to Outstanding/Primary resources will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. As with Master Plan Sites, the HPC does not evaluate wood species and the applied finish needs to be appropriate for the material selected.

4. Contributing Resources – These are significant for their contribution to the district as a whole and prioritize retaining the architectural style, overall volume, and size. Porch floors on ‘Contributing’ resources may be a compatible substitute material (discussed below), provided the material matches the building’s historic character and construction methods. Historic rear porches for ‘Contributing’ resources may be constructed using a compatible substitute material. Non-historic porches and decks on ‘Contributing’ resources that are not visible from the public right-of-way may be constructed using substitute materials.
5. Non-Contributing Resources/Secondary/Spatial – These were constructed after the district’s period of significance or have been so heavily modified that they no longer contribute to the historic district’s character. These resources do not need to use traditional materials. New porch flooring/decking materials for these resources need to satisfy the criteria for compatible substitute material.
6. Compatible substitute materials for replacement porch flooring/decking – On buildings where a substitute material is acceptable under this policy, the material must satisfy the following criteria:
 - It must match the dimensions and installation method (i.e.) of the existing material or a historically appropriate porch flooring, (e.g., boards must run perpendicular to the house for porches);
 - It must be millable;
 - It can be painted without voiding the product warranty; or,
 - Has a uniform appearance consistent with painted wood;
 - It has a minimal (or no) stamped or embossed texture on the surface; and,
 - It has a finished edge that appears as a cut solid board.