

## 9. Accessibility

### Context & Character

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was passed in 1990 and requires that all places of public accommodation be accessible to everyone. Historic commercial buildings must meet ADA requirements. Local and state codes apply as well. Commercial property owners need to consult the Americans with Disability Act Accessibility Guidelines (ADAAG) when complying with ADA requirements. State and local requirements, however, may differ from the ADA requirements, and property owners need to be aware of all applicable accessibility requirements before making any modifications to their buildings.

Compliance with ADA requirements, however, does not mean that the historic integrity of a building has to be compromised. Property owners can reach the goal of providing a high level of accessibility without compromising significant features or the overall character of their historic property. Creative solutions include incorporating ramps, installing wheelchair lifts, creating new entrances, and modifying doors, hardware, and thresholds. In addition, alternative measures can be considered if there is a threat to the historic resource.

### Design Objective

Modifications to a building or site to meet ADA accessibility requirements should not adversely affect character-defining spaces, architectural features or finishes.

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*Push plates for ADA access are appropriate solutions for access into commercial buildings.*

### General

**9.1 Accessibility solutions must meet all state and local accessibility requirements as well as ADA mandates.**

**9.2 Identify and evaluate accessibility options within a preservation context.**

- Damage to significant architectural features and materials should be avoided.



*This accessibility ramp is successfully integrated with the historic building both in scale and materials.*



*Doors can be modified with pressurized door openers to allow for ease of access.*

### **9.3 The design and location of ramps should not compromise the historic character of a building.**

- Access ramps should be located where they will have the least visual impact on the character and important architectural features of a historic building.
- Access ramps should be simple in design.
- Ramps of concrete, metal, wood or similar materials that are compatible with the primary materials of the building should be constructed.

### **9.4 Access to historic buildings through a primary public entrance should be retained.**

- Historic doors and door frames should be retained.
- Historic doors should be upgraded with a device to reduce door pressure.
- The use of automatic door openers with push plates is an appropriate alternative to meet ADA door requirements.
- If a primary public entrance cannot be retrofitted, make a secondary public entrance accessible.

### **9.5 Accessible elevators should be inconspicuous from the public way.**

- New elevators should be enclosed by an additional structure compatible with the design of the building.
- Consider using a glass cladding system.

#### **Additional Information**

Jester, Thomas C. and Sharon C. Park, AIA. *Preservation Briefs 32: Making Historic Properties Accessible*. Washington, DC: Technical Preservation Services, National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. 1995  
[www.nps.gov/history/hps/tps/briefs/brief32.htm](http://www.nps.gov/history/hps/tps/briefs/brief32.htm)