

HISTORIC PROPERTIES RESOURCES

Web site links updated March 2011

With the passage of the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), access for people with disabilities to all public spaces is now a civil right. Since then there has been a focus on preserving historically significant properties while making their buildings and activities more accessible to people with disabilities. Historic property owners, design professionals and administrators should evaluate properties thoroughly, to identify the applicable federal and state accessibility requirements, to explore alternatives and to implement solutions that provide independent access and are consistent with accepted historic preservation standards. According to the Department of Justice's *Title III Technical Assistance Manual*, p. 32 and following:

[The ADA requires barrier removal in historic buildings] if it is readily achievable. However, the ADA takes into account the national interest in preserving significant historic structures. Barrier removal would not be considered "readily achievable" if it would threaten or destroy the historic significance of a building or facility that is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under the National Historic Preservation Act (16 U.S.C. 470, et seq.), or is designated as historic under State or local law.

Establishing a written record of planning and evaluation is a good beginning and serves as a good faith effort to comply with the spirit of the ADA, thus reducing the risk of complaints. If, during the process, an owner believes that it is necessary to use either the alternative minimum requirements or alternative methods to achieve accessibility because full compliance with accessibility requirements would "threaten or destroy" a building's significance, then the [State Historic Preservation Officer](#) (SHPO) should be consulted. However, before consultation, specific information should be gathered to enable the SHPO to determine whether a proposal would threaten or destroy a property's historic significance. Owners should be prepared to submit: interior and exterior photographs; architectural plans and elevations for both existing and proposed conditions; explanations of all alternatives considered; and documentation of consultation with local preservation and accessibility officials and any interested persons, including individuals with disabilities and organizations representing such individuals. **It is important to follow the required consultation process and not proceed without written documentation.** Alterations made for accessibility should conform to requirements in Americans with Disabilities Act Architectural Barriers Act Accessibility Guidelines (ADAAG) to ensure compliance. Finally, owners should plan carefully and consider accessibility solutions that provide the highest level of accessibility that preserve the features inherent to a property's historic significance. For example, a lift should only be used as a last resort, as lifts require frequent maintenance and are awkward to use.

There is a wealth of guidance available on making historic properties accessible while preserving their historic character. **Access can be achieved in most all instances with careful planning, consultation and sensitive design.**

The [*Making Historic Properties Accessible Preservation Brief*](#) produced by the U.S. Department of the Interior National Park Service Preservation Assistance Division is a valuable resource concerning accessibility and historical properties. This brief introduces the complex issue of providing accessibility at historic properties, and underscores the need to balance accessibility and historic preservation. The Brief includes information on: planning accessibility modifications, reviewing the historical significance, assessing existing and required accessibility, identifying and evaluating accessibility options, accessibility solutions, the building site, considering a new entrance, moving through historic interiors, building amenities, and federal accessibility laws.

Historic Properties Resource Directory

[Access Board](#)

Washington, DC

Phone: (202) 272-0080

Email: info@access-board.gov

Description: The Access Board is an independent federal agency devoted to accessibility for people with disabilities. Key responsibilities of the Access Board include: developing and maintaining accessibility requirement for the built environment, transit vehicles, telecommunications equipment, and for electronic and information technology; providing technical assistance and training on these guidelines and standards; and enforcing accessibility standards for federally funded facilities.

[Institute for Human Centered Design](#)

Boston, MA

Phone: (617) 695-1225

Email: info@HumanCenteredDesign.org

Description: Institute for Human Centered Design promotes accessibility as well as universal design through education programs, technical assistance, training, consulting, publications and design advocacy. Its mission is to promote, facilitate and advocate for international adoption of policies and designs that enable every individual, regardless of disability or age, to participate fully in all aspects of society.

[Advisory Council on Historic Preservation](#)

Washington, DC

Phone: (202) 606-8503

Email: achp@achp.gov

Description: The Advisory Council on Historic Preservation is an independent federal agency that promotes historic preservation nationally by providing a forum for influencing Federal activities, programs, and policies that impact historic properties. It provides directory of *State Historic Preservation Officers and Deputies*. It lists all 50 State Historic Preservation Officers, which administer the national historic preservation program at the state level and can provide guidance on accessibility issues. An independent Federal agency, the ACHP promotes historic preservation nationally by providing a forum for influencing Federal activities, programs, and policies that impact historic properties.

American Cultural Resources Association

Baltimore, MD

Phone: (410) 933-3483

Description: American Cultural Resources Association (ACRA) mission is to promote the professional, ethical and business practices of the cultural resources industry, including all of its affiliated disciplines, for the benefit of the resources, the public, and the members of the association by: supporting the business needs of cultural resource practitioner's; Promoting professionalism in the cultural resources industry; providing educational and training opportunities for the cultural resources industry; influencing public policy; and promoting public awareness of cultural resources consulting and its diverse fields.

Association for Preservation Technology International

Springfield, IL

Phone: (217) 529-9039

Email: info@apti.org

Description: Association for Preservation Technology International (APT) is the premier cross-disciplinary organization dedicated to promoting the best technology for conserving historic structures and their settings. APT connects a network of architects, conservators, trades people, consultants, planners, curators, landscape architects, engineers, developers, educators, and students.

American Institute of Architects

Washington, DC

Phone: (202) 626-7300

Email: infocentral@aia.org

Description: The American Institute of Architects is the voice of the architecture profession dedicated to serving members, advancing their value, and improving the quality of the built environment.

Government Printing Office

Washington, DC

Phone: (202) 512-1800

Email: ContactCenter@gpo.gov

Description: The Government Printing Office sells *Standards for Rehabilitation and Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings* and *Preservation Brief 32:*

Making Historic Properties Accessible by Thomas C. Jester and Sharon C. Park of the National Park Services, which introduces the complex issue of providing accessibility at historic properties. It provides guidance on making historic properties accessible while preserving their historic character.

[Historic Windsor, Inc.](#)

Windsor, VT

Phone: (802) 674-6752

Email: histwininc@valley.net

Description: Historic Windsor, Inc., distributed, *Entrances to the Past*, a U.S. Park Service video produced on accessibility and historic preservation that focuses on the dual need to achieve reasonable access solutions for disabled people and the need to preserve historic buildings for future generations.

[National Center on Accessibility](#)

Bloomington, IN

Phone: (812) 856-4422

Email: nca@indiana.edu

Description: National Center on Accessibility (NCA) is a congressionally funded program through the National Park Service that provides direct technical assistance and resource materials on access to parks (including museums, and historical sites), recreation, and the hospitality/tourism industries.

[National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers](#)

Washington, DC

Phone: (202) 624-5465

Description: The National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers is the professional association of the state government officials--called State Historic Preservation Officers or SHPOs--who carry out the national historic preservation program as delegates of the Secretary of the Interior, pursuant to the National Historic Preservation Act. SHPOs have a statutory responsibility to foster the enactment and enforcement of historic preservation ordinances by local government.

[National Park Service](#)

Description: The National Park Service publishes several [publications](#) such as: *Preserving the Past and Making it Accessible for People with Disabilities*, *Preservation: Tax Incentives for Historic Buildings*, and *Accessibility Checklist for Historic Properties*.

[National Trust for Historic Preservation](#)

Washington, DC

Phone: (202) 588-6000

Email: preservation@nthp.org

Description: The National Trust for Historic Preservation is a private, nonprofit membership organization dedicated to saving historic places and revitalizing

America's communities. Recipient of the National Humanities Medal, the Trust was founded in 1949 and provides leadership, education, advocacy, and resources to protect the irreplaceable places that tell America's story.

[Preservation Trades Network, Inc.](#)

Burbank, OH

Phone: (866) 853-9335

Description: Preservation Trades Network (PTN) is a non-profit organization that brings together the building trades in the field of historic preservation, restoration and conservation of heritage, buildings, architecture, engineering and historic structures.

See also:

The **[National Arts and Disability Center](#)** to search for additional resources and information related to Historic Properties.