

# Treatments Resource Guide: Floorplans

The interior space, circulation, and configuration of a building are oftentimes considered character-defining features. The organization of a building, its sequence of spaces and circulation patterns, is important in conveying the historic context, character, and development of most buildings. Corridors are almost always primary spaces. Other spaces within the interior of a building can be further considered as primary and secondary spaces based on the building's historic use. Alterations should remain minimal so as not to impact the building's historic character.

**Standard 1:** A property will be used as it was historically or be given a new use that requires minimal change to its distinctive materials, features, spaces, and spatial relationships.

**Standard 2:** The historic character of a property will be retained and preserved. The removal of distinctive materials or alteration of features, spaces, and spatial relationships that characterize a property will be avoided.

## Primary vs. Secondary Spaces

[Identifying Primary and Secondary Spaces in Historic Buildings](#)

[Changing Secondary Interior Spaces in Historic Buildings](#)

[Historically-Finished Secondary Spaces—Avoiding Problematic Treatments at Project Completion](#)

[Interpreting the Standards Bulletin #44: Subdividing Significant Historic Interior Spaces](#)

**Primary Spaces:** are those that are essential in conveying the historic and architectural character of a building. They are most often associated with the primary use or purpose for which the building was designed or used during its period of significance and can vary greatly from building to building.

**Secondary Spaces:** are less critical in defining a building's importance within its period of significance. They often still help define the building's significance and character, but because of their size, location,



## Questions to Consider When Evaluating Spaces Within a Building

### Plans

- Does the building have a floor plan that is an important characteristic of the building type, style, or period of construction or historic function?
- Is the plan symmetrical and is this symmetry an important characteristic of the building type or style? Conversely, is the asymmetry an important characteristic?
- Has the plan been altered over time? Have the alterations been additive (large rooms subdivided into smaller ones); or have the alterations been subtractive (walls removed)?
- Does the plan retain its basic integrity?

### Spaces

- Are there rooms or spaces that are architecturally or historically significant?
- Have rooms survived that are characteristic of the building type or style or that are associated with specific persons or patterns of events?
- Is there a sequence of spaces that has been consciously designed or that is especially important to the understanding and appreciation of the building or the architect? Examples might include a foyer opening into a large hall; front and rear parlors connected by pocket doors; office lobby opening into an elevator hall; hallway to stairwell to upper hallway, etc.
- Does the space have distinctive proportions – ceiling height to room size, for example?
- Are the room shapes or volumes in any way unusual? Examples may include rooms with curved walls, rooms with six or eight walls, or rooms with vaulted ceilings.
- Are the rooms a consciously designed “whole,” that is, are the space, features, and finishes part of an integral design?
- Have the spaces retained their architectural integrity, despite alterations and deterioration?
- Do the spaces reflect the exterior design, e.g., tall windows indicating an assembly space on the second floor?

### Features

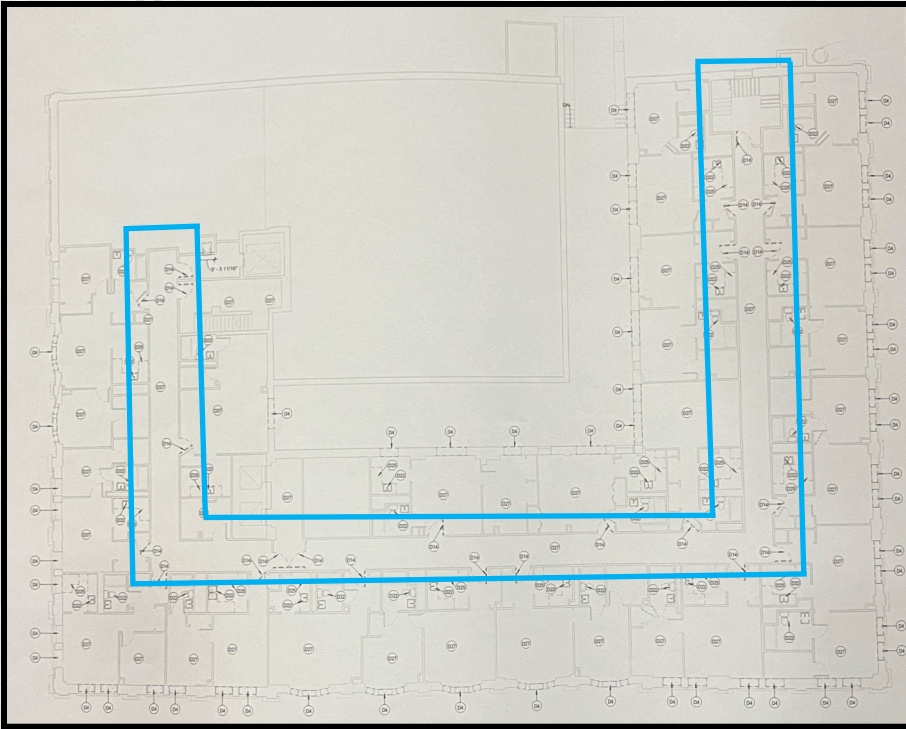
- Are there architectural details that are characteristic of the period of significance, construction or historic function? Examples might include wainscoting, parquet flooring, picture molding, mantels, ceiling medallions, built-in bookshelves and cabinets, crown molding, arches, as well as simpler, more utilitarian features, such as plain window and door trim.
- Are there features that indicate later changes and alterations that have gained significance over time? Examples might include lobby alterations, changes to wall and floor finishes, and later millwork.
- Are there features that were worked by hand, or that exhibit fine craftsmanship or are characteristic of the building style or type?
- Have the features survived intact in one or more rooms?
- Is the ceiling vaulted, coffered, decorated with plasterwork, domed, or otherwise embellished?
- What is the condition of the features: can they be retained and preserved?

### Finishes/Materials

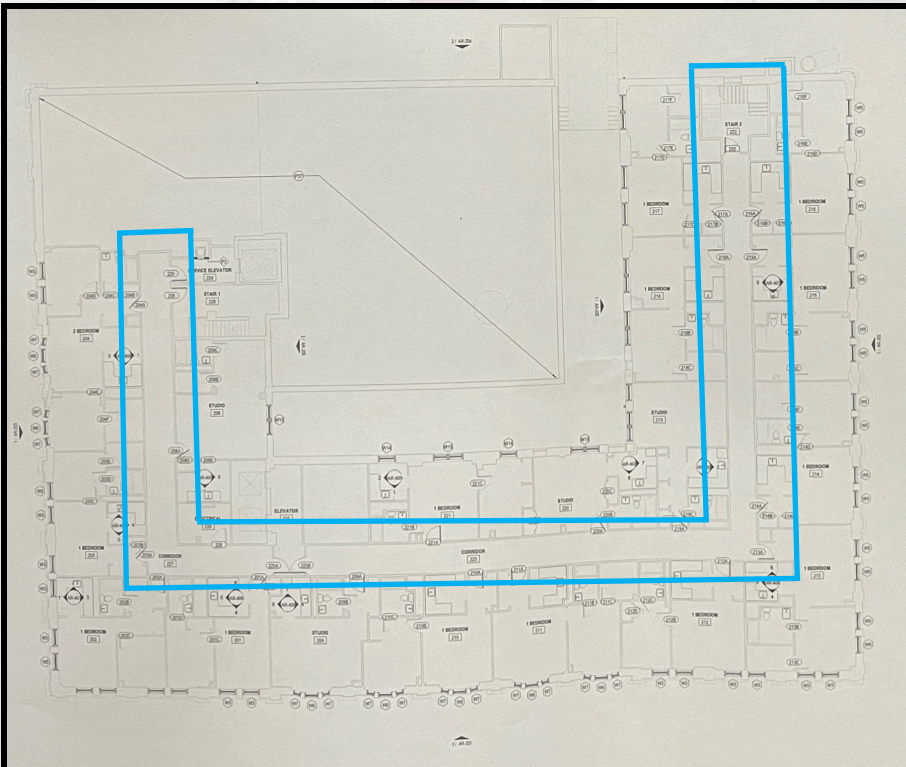
- Are there surviving historic finishes that can reasonably be retained and preserved? Examples might include plaster, tile, flooring, and marble?
- What is the condition of the finishes, e.g., has water damage been so severe as to render the finishes unsalvageable?
- Are there finishes such as graining that are characteristic of a period or style of architecture?

## Floorplan Retention

Floorplans and corridors are typically considered character-defining features, and these features should be retained in order to meet the *Standards*.



The pre-rehabilitation floorplan (above) and post-rehabilitation floorplan (below) show the retention and preservation of this character-defining corridor in a historic hotel.



## Maintaining Character-Defining Spaces

Large, open spaces are typically some of the most significant spaces in buildings, and proposals for subdividing them must be carefully evaluated in the context of the overall rehabilitation. Spaces should be evaluated for their importance architecturally in the building, as well as functionally.

Considerations to Undertake for Space Division Proposals:

- Role of the space in defining the character of the building
  - Physical Layout and condition
  - Manner of Subdivision

Refer to the National Park Service's [Subdividing Assembly Spaces in Historic Buildings](#) for in-depth guidance on subdivision of interior spaces.



This large assembly space in a former depot building was subdivided for individual office spaces. The subdivision of this space was completed in such a manner that the overall perspective of space is maintained and other character-defining features such as the coffered ceiling, modillion brackets and dentil molding, marble tile floor, chair rail, windows, doors, and structural glass block transoms.



## Floorplans, Corridors, Space, and Circulation

### Preservation Briefs:

[Preservation Brief #32: Making Historic Properties Accessible](#)

### Interpreting the Standards Bulletins:

[Interpreting the Standards Bulletin #1: Changes to Shotgun Interior Plan](#)

[Interpreting the Standards Bulletin #6: Preserving Historic Church Interiors](#)

[Interpreting the Standards Bulletin #11: Interior Alterations to School Buildings to Accommodate New Uses](#)

[Interpreting the Standards Bulletin #12: Rehabilitation and Adaptive Reuse of Schools](#)

[Interpreting the Standards Bulletin #20: Converting Historic School Buildings for Residential Use](#)

[Interpreting the Standards Bulletin #28: Corridors in Historic Highrise Apartment Buildings and Hotels](#)

[Interpreting the Standards Bulletin #31: Retaining Distinctive Corridor Features](#)

[Interpreting the Standards Bulletin #35: Changes to Shotgun Interior Plan](#)

[Interpreting the Standards Bulletin #40: Corridors in Historic School Buildings](#)

[Interpreting the Standards Bulletin #44: Subdividing Significant Historic Interior Spaces](#)

### Preservation Tech Notes:

[Preservation Tech Notes—Historic Interior Spaces—#1: Preserving Historic Corridors in Open Office Plans](#)

[Preservation Tech Notes—Historic Interior Spaces—#2: Preserving Historic Office Building Corridors](#)

[Preservation Tech Notes—Historic Interior Spaces—#3: Preserving Historic Corridor Doors and Glazing in High-Rise Buildings](#)

### Additional Guidance :

[Retaining Corridors and Other Circulation Spaces in Historic Buildings](#)

[Repetitive Floor Plans](#)

[Subdividing Assembly Spaces in Historic Buildings](#)

[Retaining the Floor Plan/Circulation Pattern](#)

[Changing Secondary Interior Spaces in Historic Buildings](#)

## Common Building Types that Undergo Rehabilitation

(Click the links below to see common character-defining features for each resource type.)

[Houses, Rowhouses, and Duplexes](#)

[Apartment Buildings and Tenements](#)

[Shotgun Houses](#)

[Schools](#)

[Factories, Industrial Buildings, and Warehouses](#)

[Fraternal and Lodge Halls](#)

[Commercial Office Buildings](#)

[Churches](#)

[Hotels](#)

[Hospitals](#)