

Historic Structure Report Guidelines

What is a Historic Structure Report?

A Historic Structure Report (HSR) is a preservation and rehabilitation tool that thoroughly documents the history and material elements of a historic structure, typically a historic building, and its associated environment, evaluates its existing condition, and provides the general recommendations necessary to responsibly deal with existing issues and concerns about the structure in consideration of its current and potential adaptive use(s).

A Historic Structure Report may be commissioned as a stand-alone document or as part of a more comprehensive planning activity for a historic property. As a stand-alone document, a Historic Structure Report may be developed in order to understand in detail a historic property's physical character, evolutionary development, and the issues or challenges involved in maintaining it. In the context of more extensive preservation planning, all Preservation Plans for a Historic Property should include a Historic Structure Report as a major component and, therefore, there are certain similarities between these two types of documents, as well as with associated reports, such as Condition Assessment Reports and Structural Assessment Reports.

Considerations in Commissioning a Historic Structure Report

A Historic Structure Report should be a detailed and complete as possible recordation of a historic property's existing and historic setting, construction and use history, documentation of existing condition, analysis of repair, rehabilitation, and restoration issues, and compilation of recommendations to appropriately address those issues. Once completed, a Historic Structure Report should be the primary reference document consulted when capital projects are being planned or when scheduled work is being coordinated.

However, developing a Historic Structure Report is also dependent on the condition and complexity of the structure, the amount of information available or attainable, and the use objectives of the building's owner or controlling interest. In this context, while a Historic Structure Report should always include a Conditions Assessment Report, it may be limited by such physical constraints that restrict information gathering. Similar lack of available information circumstances may affect its history component. As such, while any limitations to the report should be articulated and then addressed with the other recommendations as issues to be resolved, it should be considered an evolving rather than static document, updated when appropriate or as information becomes available, and become a regularly consulted, continuing record of the structure's historic development.

While a comprehensive Historic Structure Report should always be the target document, if other planning activities have already addressed information and issues typically included in one, there are insufficient resources to complete a comprehensive report, or limitations are intentionally set, then a partial Historic Structure Report may be applicable. In circumstances where other planning activities have accumulated pertinent information, those remaining components of a report should be addressed and the other information incorporated, by reference if necessary, to complete the document. Otherwise, the report should declare its abbreviated scope, acknowledge its missing elements, and plans should be made to gather and incorporate the missing information when circumstances allow.

In the long term, to ensure the continued preservation and useful life of historic properties, a Historic Structure Report should be a step in completing a Preservation Plan for the historic property that also includes property management plans, preservation project development and implementation plans, cost-of-work estimates, and funding plans. And, as with other preservation planning documents, a Historic Structure Report should be organized so that it provides necessary information in a manner understandable by the end user, who may not be an expert in the field.

A comprehensive Historic Structure Report should include:

1. Introductory information, including a table of contents, property identification information, including address, ownership, listing on historic registries, historic names, etc., and an executive summary, including acknowledgements, why the report is being done and for whom, current use of the property, proposed adaptive uses (if known), a summary of the methods used to create the report, etc.
2. Historical Overview – a detailed as possible history of the structure, its historic function and any significant personal history associated with it. If copious amounts of information about the history of the structure are available, a summary history may be more appropriate, with reference to sources of additional information.
3. Setting/Environmental/Function Context – a description of the structure’s existing setting (how it physically and functionally fits within the surrounding area).
4. Architectural and Landscape Overview – a detailed description of the structure’s site, structural system or type, exterior and interior architectural detailing and stylistic elements, including identification of historic character-defining features, finishes and materials, and identification and documentation of changes and alterations to the structure.
5. Conditions Assessment Report (see also *Conditions Assessment Report Guidelines*), including:
 - a. Summary description of the structure’s existing condition.
 - b. Detailed existing condition description of the individual exterior material components: foundation, siding, brick, windows, doors, porches, trim, cornice, roof, etc.
 - c. Room-by-room descriptions, including documentation of features, finishes, and materials and detailed identification of areas of deterioration and repair for floors, walls, ceilings, doors, windows, trim, fireplaces, stairs, and other architectural features.

- d. Evaluation of the physical condition of structure's materials including: masonry, mortar, roofing, trim, exterior finish materials, plaster (flat and decorative), wood floors, other wood features, finishes and millwork, fireplaces, structural elements, etc.
 - e. Summary description and evaluation of the structure's building systems: electrical, plumbing, HVAC, fire protection, etc.
 - f. As applicable, reference to supplemental technical reports.
6. Accessibility Assessment (ADA Audit) – documentation of likely accessibility issues as addressed in the American with Disabilities Act Accessibility Guidelines (ADAAG) and associated reference material. The intent of the Accessibility Assessment is to raise the awareness of the property owner by identifying and summarizing ADA issues that might need to be addressed in project planning documents by design professionals, which may include site and building accessible routes, existing architectural barriers, access to public toilet facilities, clearances at openings, apparent ramping and/or vertical lift needs, etc. It is beyond the scope of a HSR to provide specific ADA guidance or design solutions.
 7. Summary Building Code issues evaluation – documentation of likely building code compliance issues associated with current use or adaptive uses. The intent of the building codes issues evaluation is to raise the awareness of the property owner by identifying and summarizing code issues that might need to be addressed in project planning documents by design professionals, which may include means of egress and emergency egress considerations, fire separation issues, multiple occupancy classification considerations, fire protection, etc. It is beyond the scope of a HSR to provide specific code compliance guidance or design solutions.
 8. Recommendations – for repair/replacement/restoration/maintenance treatments for the structure's materials, finishes, features; for projects to bring the structure into a state of functional utility with associated scope of work descriptions and project prioritization; for adaptive use options (as applicable or requested); for building and structural system improvements, as applicable; and overview recommendations for analysis of ADA and building code issues by design professionals. Recommendations should be consistent with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties, consider the potential impact of recommended treatments, and avoid significantly altering the property's historic character and context.
 9. Existing conditions recordation information including: site plans, "as built" floor plans and elevations, detail photographs or drawings of significant features, context photo-documentation, and existing conditions detail photo-documentation.
 10. Supplementary information including, as requested, applicable, and available: archaeological investigation reports, cost estimates, technical reports (including Structural Assessment Report, paint analysis, and hazardous materials assessments - -lead paint, asbestos), maintenance plan, historic maps (Sanborn Maps), historic photographs, historic plans, reference materials (bibliography of useful preservation books and publications, Secretary of the Interior's Standards, Preservation Briefs, National Register information, etc.), end notes, etc.