



# State Historic Preservation Office

South Carolina Department of Archives and History  
8301 Parklane Road | Columbia, SC | 29223  
scdah.sc.gov

## Complying with Architectural Covenants

### Covenant Basics

#### What is a Preservation Covenant?

A covenant is a formal agreement between the State Historic Preservation Office and the owner of a historic property in which the owner agrees to ensure the maintenance and preservation of the architectural and historical characteristics that qualified the property as eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.

#### Why is there a covenant on my property?

Covenant agreements are frequently required as a condition for grant-funded stabilization work on a historic property. To protect their monetary investment in a property, the state or federal government retains a right to review any work on the building for a period of time through the covenant agreement. Additionally, federal agencies are charged with maintaining the historic properties that they own. If historic properties are sold, transferred, or leased to non-federal entities, the federal agency will often execute a covenant with the State Historic Preservation Office, or other qualified preservation entity, to protect a historic property in perpetuity.

#### What happens when the property is sold?

Covenant agreements are recorded as part of the deed for the property. The responsibility for upholding the terms of the covenant transfer to any new owner.

#### How long does the covenant last?

Covenants can be in place for a period of time or may run in perpetuity. The covenant will state the duration.

#### So I can't change anything on my property?

Many changes are permissible but you must receive **written** approval from the State Historic Preservation Office prior to starting any work. Most architectural covenants require work to meet the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation (see next page); ten guiding principles for protecting the historic character of the building while also allowing for reasonable changes. The terms of each covenant may differ, so be sure to carefully read your covenant.

### The Covenant Review Process

Check your deed records to see what the requirements are for the covenant on your particular property. If you have a question of whether there is a covenant on your property or the duration of your covenant contact the [State Historic Preservation Office](#), 803-896-6172.

To initiate a review under an architectural covenant, you will need to submit the following items to the State Historic Preservation Office:

- A signed cover letter with a clear and detailed description of the proposed work
- Photographs of the overall property
- Photographs of specific areas of proposed work

If available and necessary, please also provide:

- Architectural drawings and specifications
- Samples of proposed replacement materials
- Historic photographs

The State Historic Preservation Office will respond in writing to covenant review requests within thirty (30) days of receipt.

**Mail to:** Covenant Review  
c/o State Historic Preservation Office  
SC Department of Archives & History  
8301 Parklane Road  
Columbia, SC 29223

## Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation

Most architectural covenants require work to meet the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. First developed in 1976, these ten guiding principles for preserving the character of historic properties allow for modern changes and are a widely accepted standard for evaluating the appropriateness of proposed work. In addition to the Standards, a more detailed set of Guidelines has been developed for applying the principles below. The following list is a simplified version of the Standards. To access the full version and the guidelines, please visit:

<https://www.nps.gov/tps/standards/four-treatments/treatment-rehabilitation.htm>.

**Standard 1:** Use the property for its historic purpose or a new use that requires minimal changes.

**Standard 2:** Retain and preserve the historic character. Avoid altering materials.

**Standard 3:** Each property is a record of its time, place, and use. Changes shall not create a false sense of development.

**Standard 4:** Retain and preserve historically significant changes.

**Standard 5:** Distinctive features, finishes, and examples of craftsmanship or construction techniques shall be preserved.

**Standard 6:** Repair rather than replace. Replacement of any missing feature shall be based on documentary, physical, or pictorial evidence.

**Standard 7:** Avoid physical or chemical treatments that damage historic materials, and use the gentlest means possible for cleaning.

**Standard 8:** Protect and preserve archaeological resources.

**Standard 9:** Make new work compatible and distinct.

**Standard 10:** New construction should be reversible.

## Resources for Historic Property Owners

[Preservation Briefs](#)

[Illustrated Guidelines for Rehabilitation](#)

[Preservation Tech Notes](#)

[Technical Preservation Services Online Training](#)

[List of Preservation Project Professionals](#)

[Association for Preservation Technology](#)

[General Services Administration Historic Preservation](#)

[Technical Documents](#)

[Old House Journal](#)

[Traditional Building Magazine](#)

[Whole Building Design Guide: Historic Preservation](#)

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