
Chapter 13

Fire Escapes



Fire escapes began to appear on buildings in New York City in the 1860s, when they were first required to provide emergency egress for tenement buildings. During the early 20th century, fire escapes were added to many loft buildings after new labor laws were passed. While they served a utilitarian purpose, in some historic buildings they became significant features as they were elaborately detailed and designed to complement facades. In historic districts like SoHo, fire escapes define the streetscape. The historic use and appearance of fire escapes serve as the basis for LPC's rules for work involving modification, removal, and installation of fire escapes (see [LPC Rules](#), Section 2-22, available on our website, www.nyc.gov/landmarks).

In This Chapter, You Will Find:



This chapter explains LPC's rules for work on fire escapes. Our goal is to help you submit a fully completed permit application for work that conforms to the LPC Rules so you can get your permit more quickly.

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Section A

How to Get Started



Before applying for your permit, you should:

Find Information about Your Building

This will help you determine how the rules apply.

What type of building is it?

Search for the building on the [Discover NYC Landmarks map](#) to determine how the LPC Rules apply to your specific building type.

Click on your building to find **construction date, architect and style, building and landmark type**, and a link to the LPC **designation report** with historical background.

What did the building look like?

Find **historic tax photos** from the 1940s and 1980s, available through the NYC Department of Records & Information Services' [NYC Municipal Archives Collections](#).

Additional information, including guidance on finding **historic maps**, is available in the LPC Resource Guide [Researching Historic Buildings in New York City](#), available on our website at www.nyc.gov/landmarks.

See if the Work Requires a Permit

Maybe you don't need a permit.

LPC requires a permit for installing, modifying, and removing fire escapes, but a permit is **not required** for:

Repainting fire escapes to match the existing color.

Unsure whether your work requires a permit? Contact LPC at 212-669-7817 or info@lpc.nyc.gov.

What You Will Need

A complete application requires all the materials listed below.

Required Application Materials

- **LPC Permit Application Form** filled out and signed by the property owner.
- **Color photos** of the entire building for context and close-up photos of where the work will be taking place.
- **Comparative drawings:**
 - Elevation of existing conditions and proposed alterations or installations
 - Floor plans of existing conditions and locations of proposed alterations or installations
 - Section of existing conditions and proposed alterations or installations
- Large-scale details (in elevation, section, or plan, as needed) to illustrate proposed alteration or installations
- **An assessment** of deteriorated conditions of historic fire escapes to be removed or replaced.
- **Color specifications / paint cards** at visible facades only.
- **Material specifications.**
- Two sets of Department of Buildings (DOB) **filing drawings** if proposed work requires a DOB permit.

When possible, your application materials must be supplemented by a **written explanation and/or code citation** that demonstrates the need to install the fire escape at a particular location on the primary facade or visible secondary facade, rather than on a non-visible facade.

When applying to remove a fire escape, include details and specifications for repairing the facade after removal.

If LPC requires additional materials after your application is reviewed, you will receive a Materials Checklist from LPC staff.

Section B

LPC Rules and Criteria



This is how the Landmarks Preservation Commission works:

The LPC Rules establish the criteria that allow staff to review and approve proposals for certain types of work at landmark properties. Permit applications for work that meets the LPC Rules can be approved faster. If the work does not meet the rules, staff may suggest alternatives that do meet the rules — or your proposal may be presented to the LPC Commissioners for review at a public hearing. Staff can guide you through this process. Visit www.nyc.gov/landmarks for more information.

This section explains and illustrates the rules and criteria for the most common types of work involving fire escapes. See [LPC Rules](#), Section 2-22, for more information.

→ In This Section:

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- Modifying and Repairing Fire Escapes
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- Installing Fire Escapes at Primary Facades
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Fire Escapes

Modifying and Repairing Fire Escapes

Staff can approve work on an existing fire escape if it meets the following criteria:

Replacing

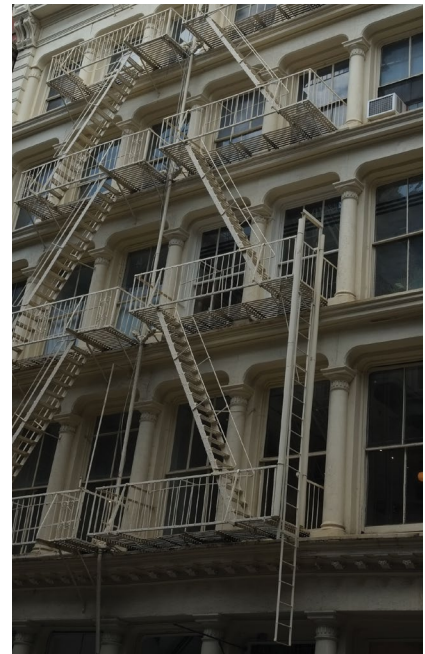
Replacing a component of the fire escape in-kind; matching the existing fire escape's materials, details, and color.

Repainting

Repainting the fire escape the existing color, a dark color such as black or brown that is typical of the historic district, or a color that matches or is similar to the existing color of the facade.

Modifying

Modifying the fire escape to replace a drop ladder with a swing stair (or vice versa), or horizontally and/or vertically extending platforms at each floor. New elements must match materials, details, color, and dimensions of the existing fire escape.



A drop ladder, shown here, may be replaced with a swing stair, or vice versa, through approval at staff level.



Staff can approve horizontally or vertically extending a fire escape platform when material, details, color, and dimensions match the existing assembly.

Removing Fire Escapes

Staff can approve removal of an existing fire escape if it meets the following criteria:

Age and Significance

The fire escape **is not** original to the building or **is not** considered a significant architectural feature. Staff can help identify if your fire escape is a significant architectural feature. If original or considered a significant architectural feature, staff **cannot** approve removal but may suggest alternatives. Your proposal may also be presented to the full Commission for review at a public hearing. Contact LPC before filing your application.

Location

The fire escape **is not** located on a building within a historic district where fire escapes contribute to the special architectural and historic character. Staff can help you identify whether it is a significant architectural feature.



Before: Staff can approve the removal of fire escapes that are not original to the building, like the one seen here, which was added decades after construction.



After: In this case, removing the fire escape brought the building closer to its historic appearance.



These decorative fire escapes are considered significant architectural features of their buildings.

Installing Fire Escapes at Primary Facades

Fire escapes must not be installed on a primary facade if it is possible to install on a secondary or non-visible facade. If not possible, you must demonstrate that the new fire escape cannot be installed on a secondary facade due to interior or structural conditions. Interior conditions must not be the result of recent construction that could have been designed to avoid installation at the primary facade.

Staff can then approve installation of a new fire escape at a primary facade if it meets the following criteria.

Design

Simple and utilitarian in design.

Impact

Installation will not cause removal of, or damage to, significant architectural features of the facade.

Common Feature

Can be approved by staff only if fire escapes are a common feature of the historic district. Staff can help make this determination.

Installing Fire Escapes at Visible Secondary Facades

A new fire escape must not be installed on a visible secondary facade if it is possible to install it on a non-visible facade. If not possible, you must demonstrate that installation on a non-visible secondary facade is due to interior or structural conditions.

Installing Fire Escapes at Non-Visible Facades

Staff can approve the installation of a fire escape at a non-visible facade if it meets the following criteria:

Design

Simple and utilitarian in design.

Impact

Installation does not cause removal of, or damage to, significant architectural features of the facade.



Before: While fire escapes are considered a common feature in Tribeca South Historic District, this building did not have a fire escape at the time of designation.



After: A new fire escape was installed at the primary facade after it was determined that no other location was feasible.