

FAQ

Passive House and Other Deep Energy Retrofits

In 2009, LPC received its first application for a historic building renovation seeking to use the Passive House building standard for high performance in energy efficiency, very low heating and cooling loads, superior indoor air quality and comfort, and improved building resiliency. Many additional applications have followed in the years since, and although LPC does not substantively review much of the work that goes into these projects because it involves interior alterations, LPC staff has become very familiar with certain exterior components requiring specialized detailing, such as high-performance triple-glazed windows. Several of our designated historic landmarks have become Passive House certified, while countless others have made significant gains in their energy efficiency, demonstrating that historic buildings can be sensitively retrofitted to meet both historic preservation and energy performance goals. Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) will work with you to better understand your needs and goals, and guide you through our regulatory process on a path to identify an appropriate and effective solution.

What is the LPC review process for window replacements that need to meet Passive House standards?

For Passive House retrofit projects requiring extremely energy-efficient windows with triple glazing, very high insulation values, and no air leakage for which typical modern double-hung windows and retrofitted older windows cannot comply, the Commission has approved simulated double-hung windows (i.e., a casement lower sash set back from and below a fixed upper sash) for several distinct building types located in many historic districts. Following the 2019 LPC Rules amendments, these types of windows can now be approved at staff level and are no longer subject to the Public Hearing process in most cases. This change means many Passive House upgrade projects can be reviewed more quickly by LPC staff as long as other aspects of the proposal (i.e., new additions) also qualify for staff level review. Replacement casement, awning and hopper windows, and doors, can also meet the Passive House standard and be approved by LPC in most cases. See page 8 of the [Windows and Doors](#) chapter of our Permit Guidebook for these rules.

Note:

- If you are considering a historic building renovation using the Passive House standard or something similar, please identify this work in a cover letter or other application materials you submit through Portico, and speak to the Preservation Department staff member assigned to your application early in the process.

Is LPC review required for other types of work related to Passive House retrofit projects?

Yes. LPC permits are required for all exterior work other than minor general maintenance such as installing weatherstripping at windows and doors or replacing broken glass, and for some interior work (including work filed with the NYC Department of Buildings

While there are currently no special provisions or exceptions for reviewing Passive House retrofit projects, almost all interior work and most exterior work (e.g., installing high-efficiency heat pumps and renewable energy equipment like solar panels at rooftops) are reviewed and approved at staff level. Other exterior work, such as adding exterior insulation to historic masonry facades, has rarely been proposed to the Commission, and only approved at side and rear facades to date. Though not reviewed substantively by staff, some interior work (e.g., intensive insulating and air sealing) should be carefully designed by a professional with expertise in working with older buildings specific to our local climate to minimize or eliminate the risk of damaging the historic building envelope.