

City of East Lansing One Pager Plus

Handrails in Historic Districts

Why are handrails required now? Weren't handrail exemptions previously allowed in historic districts?

Under the old building code, the City had occasionally issued handrail waivers when the number of steps or height was close to compliance and would alter the historic nature of the structure. The building code no longer has the flexibility to allow these waivers.

When are handrails required for steps?

The building code has become more strict in recent code cycles, requiring many structures that previously did not require a handrail to require one now. The code specifically states:

"Every exterior and interior flight of stairs having more than three steps or four risers shall have a handrail on one side of the stairs and every open portion of a stair."

This includes the step onto the porch or stoop. The handrail must be placed between 30 and 42 inches from the walking surface, to ensure graspability by all.

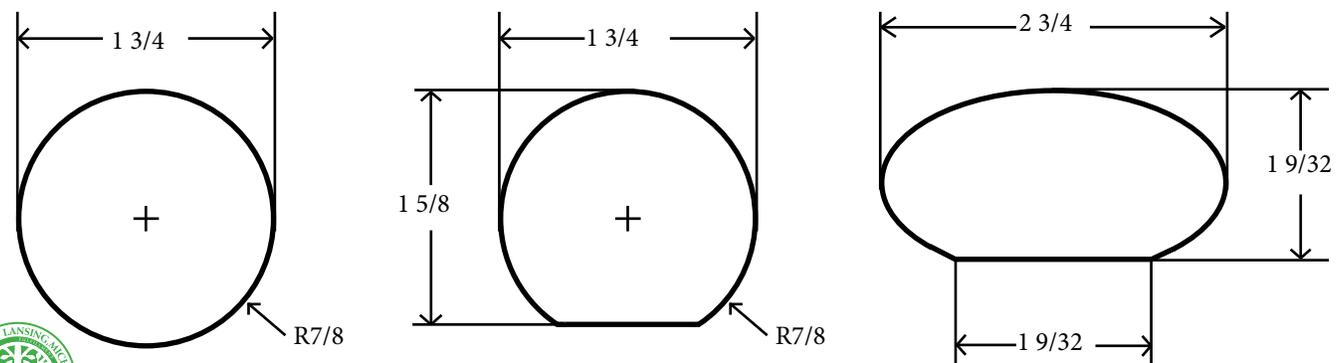
What qualifies as a handrail? How does it differ from a guardrail?

A handrail is a horizontal or sloping rail intended for grasping by the hand for guidance or support. A guardrail is a building component or a system of building components located at or near the open sides of elevated walking surfaces that minimizes the possibility of a fall from the walking surface to a lower level.

Are there design examples I can use?

Generally, handrails in East Lansing were utilitarian, simple designs. One of the keys to historic preservation is not creating a false sense of history, so new handrails should be simple, but well designed. Some examples and pictures are provided for reference. In terms of materials, wood is the most common, with metals common in mid-century modifications, but not as an original material.

HANDRAIL GRIP EXAMPLES

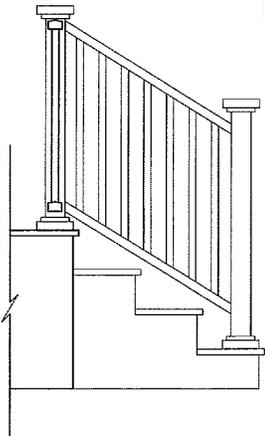


Handrails in Historic Districts (continued)

Architectural Railing Principles

1. Railing materials should be visually compatible with porch and stair components and architectural style.
2. Railings may be built out of wood, metal, stone, or , if appropriate, like material.
3. Railings should have both top and bottom rails.
4. Railings should be centered between columns or newels.
5. Unmodified 2x4 discouraged
6. Top rail should be comfortable to the human hand and it should shed water.
7. Bottom rail should shed water.
8. Bottom rails should clear the floor and stairs.
9. Balusters (spindles) should be centered on the rails and spaced no more than 4" clear opening.
10. Wood balusters (spindles) should be minimum 1.25"
11. Newell post should sit squarely on the top or in front.
12. Rail fasteners should not be visible.
13. Wood or metal should be painted within one year.

DO



DON'T

