



Architectural Review Board
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Applications to Change Roofing From Traditional Materials

Roof replacements that change a roof's original or traditional materials (such as slate or tile) to less expensive substitutes (such as asphalt) are generally considered to detract from the architectural style and character of the affected structure. Such changes are particularly disfavored when the materials sought to be replaced are characteristic of the type, style or vernacular of the affected structure or typical for the surrounding neighborhood. While no single building alteration will in itself normally have a major effect on the overall visual attractiveness and appeal of the surrounding neighborhood, every down-grade serves as a precedent for others to follow and can lead to piecemeal degradations of the neighborhood spaces that all city residents live in and share. To preserve the visual quality of Mount Vernon's neighborhoods and, where possible, to improve or restore it, and to maintain the property values of existing owners and the quality of life that those values reflect, even seemingly minor down-grades are disfavored.

Often a roof's original or traditional materials may seem to be failing when, in fact, the problems lie only or mostly at edges or at joints or flashing areas where larger fields of roofing come together. In these situations, the existing traditional roof can normally be repaired to effectively shed water at a cost that is less than the cost of totally replacing it with cheaper materials. This is, however, a determination that can only be made by qualified professionals having experience and expertise in the kind of roofing that needs repair. Persons who are in the business of selling replacement roof materials are often unwilling or unable to make the necessary evaluation.

In reviewing applications to change roofing from original or traditional materials to cheaper substitutes, applicants should be aware that the Board will consider:

1. The type, style or vernacular of the affected structure and the kinds of roofing materials that are characteristic for such structures.
2. The types, styles and vernaculars of the structures in the surrounding neighborhood and whether the proposed change will enhance or detract from the existing character of the neighborhood and its overall visual quality.
3. Whether the potential for repairing the existing roof and restoring it to a watertight condition has been evaluated by a qualified professional with expertise and experience in the type of roofing material that is asserted to need replacement.

4. Whether there are available modern non-traditional roofing materials that very closely resemble the original or traditional materials and are difficult to distinguish visually from them.
5. If financial hardship is asserted as the basis for deviating from the principles of normally strongly favoring retention of the original roofing or in-kind replacement, evidence documenting the asserted financial hardship should be supplied to the Board. The mere fact that replacement of a traditional material with a cheaper substitute “costs less” is not in itself a sufficient justification for approving a change.