New York Landmarks Conservancy

Common Bond

American Synagogue Architecture

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Maintenance

A preventive maintenance strategy based on annual inspections avoids costly crises.

Annual Inspection Reminder

A thorough annual inspection should be done by the building committee, custodian, and architect. Keep a written record of your findings. Early spring is best to allow for planning of projects to be done before next winter. If you have not done so, complete the inspection in these categories:

- **Public and fire safety:** look for loose roof and facade elements, unsafe steps and sidewalks, fire hazards, overloaded circuits, and poor wiring.
- **Exterior:** check for leaking roofs, flashing, and perimeter drainage problems; failing paint and caulking; and deteriorated masonry. Check whether pigeon control devices and screening are intact, especially on bell towers and steeples.
- **Structure:** inspect for sagging, rotted, or insect-infested structural members.
- **Use and operation:** identify defects and energy wastage in mechanical and electrical systems.
- **Decorative features:** look for soiled and damaged ornamental plaster, carved stone, woodwork, and other fixed or movable materials, finishes, and furnishings.

Rank problems by priority

1. Immediate—to rectify or prevent dangerous conditions
2. Urgent—to prevent rapid decay
3. Essential—to be done within five years
4. Desirable—to be done if financially possible

Determine causes and how to correct them. A good long-term working relationship with a preservation architect is most helpful. After the inspection, develop a timetable and budget for major repairs and preventive maintenance according to priority. Secure approvals, get estimates, begin fundraising, and prepare plans and specifications for major projects. Meanwhile, carry out preventive maintenance tasks on schedule. Keep a log book of complete maintenance and repairs, as well as observations made by custodians about conditions that need attention.

Major Repairs

Late spring through early fall is the best time for carrying out major exterior maintenance and repairs to the roof and perimeter drainage system, masonry, metalwork, woodwork, and stained glass. Summer is also the best time for carrying out repairs that would otherwise be disruptive, since the level of activity at most religious institutions is usually lower than at other times of the year. This may include major interior repairs and alterations that cannot be scheduled during the winter.

PREVENTIVE MAINTENANCE

- ☐ Clean rubbish and debris from doorways, stairs, under stairs, utility room, furnace room, radiators, heating equipment, and heat-producing equipment.
- ☐ Open crawl space and basement windows for ventilation.
- ☐ Keep gutters and storm drains clear of debris.
- ☐ Clean protected areas on exterior that collect dirt.
- ☐ Kill mold and mildew as soon as it appears.
- ☐ Remove vegetation that damages buildings or causes moisture problems.
- ☐ Perform touch-up painting and caulking of windows, doors, trim, and siding.
- ☐ Repoint eroded mortar joints and repair masonry.
- ☐ Patch bituminous roofs.
- ☐ Repair stained glass window vents.

SUMMER MECHANICAL SYSTEMS MAINTENANCE

- Fire extinguishers, sprinkler, and alarm system
  - ☐ Test and service as required.
- Air conditioning equipment
  - ☐ Service before using for summer.
- Heating system
  - ☐ Repair any fuel leaks, air leaks, or corrosion in boiler.
  - ☐ Check condition of motorized dampers that provide combustion air.
  - ☐ Repair any leaks in heating system pipes.
- Plumbing
  - ☐ Repair leaking faucets.
  - ☐ Repair or replace broken plumbing fixtures.
  - ☐ If you use well water, service well pump and water storage tank.
- Septic system
  - ☐ Pump out every four years.

Notes: