



## TOPSFIELD HISTORICAL COMMISSION

### WINDOWS AND SIDING REPLACEMENT: WHAT TO DO???

The Historical Commission strongly recommends that homeowners think twice before replacing windows or siding. Many builders and contractors, and even homeowners themselves, do not understand the major role that both windows and siding play in determining the historic character of the home. Manufacturers and building supply stores have vested interest in promoting replacement of older materials rather than restoration of existing materials. Repairing the old windows and siding may both save you money and increase the value of your home.

#### **Window replacement and repair**

Because of the rising cost of heating this winter, some Topsfield residents are considering ways to improve the energy-efficiency of their windows. Many in the building community advocate replacing old windows and storms with new thermopane sash, sometimes using vinyl-clad surfaces rather than wood. In many cases this may not be the best decision for a historic home. Please consider the following factors when making a window replacement decision.

- Old windows are a major part of the character and charm of an historic home. Where replacements are necessary, they should replicate the style and materials of the original as closely as possible.
- Old windows are more durable than new ones because they were made of harder wood than is readily available these days.
- Often drafty and loose windows only need simple repairs rather than total replacement. Be sure that this isn't true in your case.
- A traditional window with a good storm window or storm panel has roughly the same energy-efficiency as a double-glazed insulated window and can be bought for the same price as a lesser-quality double glazed window.
- A traditional window will often help to heat your home better than replacement windows, as double-paned insulated windows are designed to keep the sun's heat out of your house.
- Double-glazed windows have a shorter life span than single-glazed windows because the plastic sealant deteriorates.
- Often double-glazed windows are not available in the appropriate sizes or patterns for historic windows.
- Single-glazed windows are more easily repaired than double-glazed ones, where typically the whole sash must be replaced if a window is broken.

We recommend that you read the attached document prepared by the Cambridge Historical Commission. We concur with all their conclusions and recommendations.

*<http://www.cambridgema.gov/~Historic/windowguide.html>*

## Vinyl Siding: Not all it's cracked up to be

*“If you have any doubts about its effect, don't put it on your old house”*

Tom Silva, This Old House Magazine

### **Why is vinyl siding so common?**

- It is sold aggressively by siding salesmen, with compensation from the siding producers.
- Claims of low maintenance, improved utility costs, and long life are difficult to prove by the homeowner.
- It quickly covers the evidence of moisture problems in existing homes, although it may be in fact making them worse.

**Claim:** Vinyl is a “Lifetime Material.”

*Fact:* It commonly has a useful life of 10 to 20 years before repainting or repair is necessary. Matching for replacement is difficult, since there is fading over time.

**Claim:** Vinyl is “maintenance free.”

*Fact:* Industry organizations recommend, and many warranties require, annual cleaning with specific materials and techniques to eliminate mold, mildew and dirt.

**Claim:** Vinyl is damage resistant.

*Fact:* Although improved over time, current products are still susceptible to animal/bird damage and insect infestation. It becomes brittle in cold weather and can be warped by temperatures as low as 160 degrees (possible with sunshine on dark surfaces).

**Claim:** Vinyl is a “stable” material, unchanged by moisture or swelling.

*Fact:* Vinyl shrinks and expands dramatically with changes in temperature. If not properly installed, the siding will buckle and sag, giving a wavy appearance.

**Claim:** Foam-backed vinyl lowers heating costs.

*Fact:* The insulation is usually not significant (R2 to R3) and is on the *outside* of the air infiltration barriers (the wrong place for insulation).

### **Economics of Siding Replacement**

**Initial Costs:** The cost of a typical vinyl siding job is two to four times the cost of a high quality paint job. Even if vinyl siding were to look good for twenty years (unlikely), the initial cost comparison does not favor vinyl. If the clapboards or shingles have been damaged by long exposure without paint or if there is structural damage to repair, the best course of action is usually to remove the siding, repair the damage and replace with new siding. This cost is usually comparable to the cost of repairing the damage by replacing the siding with vinyl.

**Maintenance Costs:** A useful lifetime of ten to twenty years is the best that can be expected. After that time, fading or damage will require painting or replacement. During the same time period, a home with painted wood could have been repainted two or three times for the initial cost of the vinyl installation, resulting in a renewed appearance with all the trim in place and even offering the opportunity to change the color of the structure. When the calculation includes annual high pressure washing with approved materials, and a reasonable estimate of acceptable life, the lifetime costs of vinyl are not always lower than traditional materials.