DECKS, ROOF DECKS, + BALCONIES

BAR Review Levels

These levels of review are applicable in most cases. Please note that during the administrative review process, Staff may determine that a project requires Board review. Contact Staff at 703.746.3833 to confirm which level of review is required for your project. Also, contact Code Administration at 703.746.4200 to confirm building permit requirements.

NO BAR REVIEW	ADMINISTRATIVE (STAFF) REVIEW	BOARD REVIEW
Construction of decks not visible from the public right-of-way	N/A	Construction and replacement of decks, roof decks, and balconies visible from the public right-of-way
In-kind replacement of railings and posts on decks, roof decks, and balconies that comply with these guidelines		Construction and replacement of penthouse and stair structures
		Installation of new rooftop railings

Introduction

Although small rooftop platforms, such as historic widow's walks, have existed since the 19th century, they were limited in size and designed as integral architectural features. By contrast, the expansive decks and roof decks found on residential buildings today are largely a mid- to late-20th century occurrence. Unlike porches, which are integrated into the overall design of a building, decks are often constructed at a later date and their utilitarian design reflects this. The Board is cognizant that open air decks create an amenity and has approved the construction of open decks and rooftop decks, particularly when a property dates from the mid-20th century or later, or when they are minimally visible from the public right-of-way.

Balconies are another solution to add a small amount of outdoor open space where ground level open space may not be feasible. While decks are self-supporting, balconies are supported by the building wall. There is precedent for balconies within the historic district and the Board has approved them on historic buildings.

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Guidelines

- Roof decks on Early Buildings should only be approved when the applicant demonstrates that the proposed construction will preserve the building's historic roof form, significant architectural features, and historic building materials.
- Roof decks should not require the removal, alteration, or concealment of character-defining roof features, including cornices, parapets, chimneys, and original roofing materials.
- Roof decks, including railings and access stairs, should be minimally visible.
- Deck, roof deck, and balcony materials should be sympathetic to the building materials generally found in the historic district.
- For roof deck railings, cable, glass, and simple picket designs are preferred.
- Composite decking is not appropriate on Early Buildings.
- Unpainted pressure treated wood or vinyl are strongly discouraged on all buildings.
- The style and scale of the deck, roof deck, or balcony, including railing and columns, should be compatible with the building. Decks should be painted the predominant color of the building or the color of the trim.

Additional Information

- A BAR Permit to Demolish is required when construction of a deck or roof deck involves the demolition or capsulation of over 25 square feet of building roof or wall material.
- Decks, roof decks, and balconies must meet the Zoning Ordinance requirements for yard setbacks, open space and FAR. A plat of the property is required to evaluate compliance with applicable codes and ordinances.
- The Board reviews any fixed items, including stair enclosures, pergolas, and other roof structures, but does not review movable furniture.
- Elevated decks not over two feet in height are permitted in any residential yard, except the front yard.

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These are examples of decks, roof decks, and balconies found in the historic districts.