



**Flooding Adaptation & Building Elevation Design Guidelines**  
*Suggested practices for Historic Nantucket Buildings at Risk of Flooding & Sea Level Rise*  
*An addendum to “Building with Nantucket in Mind.”*

At the June 11, 2021 Nantucket Historic District Commission meeting, the [Resilient Nantucket: Flooding Adaptation & Building Elevation Design Guidelines](#) was unanimously adopted (4-0) by the Commission.

Nantucket Island is one of the nation’s largest National Historic Landmark Districts with over 1,000 pre-1860s structures contributing to its historical, architectural, and cultural significance. And yet, these irreplaceable resources are increasingly threatened by short- and long-term flooding caused by sea level rise. **Resilient Nantucket** not only provides suggested practices for the built environment, but it also addresses several priority actions identified in the Town’s MVP Community Resilience Workshop Report (2019) and the Hazard Mitigation Plan (2019.)

These guidelines include suggested practices for flooding adaptation and building elevation design details for Nantucket’s buildings and streetscapes at risk of flooding and sea level rise. The **Resilient Nantucket** addendum follows the recommendations and “best practices” for resiliency and flood mitigation strategies for historic buildings, as outlined by the National Park Service’s [Standards on Flood Adaptation for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings](#) published in 2019 and illustrated in 2021.

Properties that are 50 years old or older and which retain their architectural and historical integrity are considered **contributing** to the character of the Nantucket National Historic Landmark District are considered historic buildings/structures.

All structures on Nantucket Island are assessed as a **contributing or non-contributing** structure to the Nantucket National Historic Landmark District. Please refer to the 2012 Update to the [National Historic Landmark District Data Sheet](#). Any question as to the contributing status of a structure, please contact the Town’s Preservation Planner at [hbackus@nantucket-ma.gov](mailto:hbackus@nantucket-ma.gov).

For **contributing** properties at risk of flooding, treatments should be undertaken to avoid or minimize the impacts and to ensure the continued preservation of the property in its historic character.

If a **contributing** structure in Nantucket’s floodplain undergoes **substantial improvement** (under the Building Code) or damage (worth 50% or more of the structure’s market value), the structure must be brought up to code. However, the definition of **substantial improvement** exempts “any alternation of a historic structure, provided that the alteration will not preclude the continued designation as a historic structure.”<sup>1</sup> **This exemption can be interpreted as an exemption only from those flood mitigation activities that would preclude the structure’s historic designation (as recommended by the National Park Service.)** This exemption is only provided by the HDC through the review of a separate Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) for a **Historic Determination**. Upon review and approval of the proposed elevation project **and** the **Historic Determination**, a letter will be issued to the Building Commissioner, outlining the exemption and assertion that the historic structure will continue to be a historic structure after the proposed work is completed. It’s important to note that if a repair or improvement resulting in the loss of a structure’s historic designation, the structure would no longer qualify for the variance and would be required to meet the NFIP (National Flood Insurance Program) floodplain regulations.<sup>2</sup>

Please be advised that any owner of a historic building/structure that is seeking federal or state historic tax credits and planning to elevate the historic building/structure, must contact the [Massachusetts Historical Commission](#) early in the process.

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<sup>1</sup> Massachusetts Building Code Section R105.3.1.1

<sup>2</sup> FEMA – Floodplain Management Bulletin: Variances and the National Flood Insurance Program, page 21.



*The Elevation approach has the potential to change the architectural character of a property and its surrounding streetscape. Any elevation approach will require careful planning, so that the property retains as much of its integrity and original relationship to the neighborhood.*

**REQUIRED checklist for ALL ELEVATION PROPOSALS:**

- Like all building projects, ALL elevation proposals require HDC review for an approval of a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA).
- All elevation projects (regardless if historic or not) must demonstrate that the building is within the FEMA Flood Zone with a **Flood Elevation Certificate** defining both the **Base Flood Elevation (BFE)** and **Design Flood Elevation (DFE)**.
- All elevation proposals** must provide streetscape context, site design, foundation design, architecture and preservation guidelines in line with *“Building with Nantucket in Mind.”*
- All elevation proposals** must provide:
  1. documentation of existing building in its current state with “as-built” elevation drawings, floor plans, building sections, site plan, flood elevation certificate and photos of the exterior of the structure.
  2. Interior photos are highly encouraged, only if the interior floorplans are to be changed to accommodate building elevation.
- All elevation proposals** must retain the architectural context of the property and streetscape, and therefore the HDC **recommends low elevation projects (increase of 4’ or less)**, rather than high elevation (above 4’ feet.) Therefore, evaluating the streetscape for each elevation project is important to have a consistent approach to elevation throughout the historic district. The HDC encourages to minimize change of the exterior of the dwelling to only that height necessary to avoid flood hazard.
- ALL elevation proposals** will require the utilities to be relocated to at least the **Design Flood Elevation (DFE)**.
- NEW construction** will need to refer to **Chapter 11** of the *Resilient Nantucket* for the appropriate adaptation strategies consistent with the Nantucket National Historic Landmark District.

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To further understand definitions of terminology for flood adaptation strategies, please refer to Appendix A of the *Resilient Nantucket* document. Any question on the above requirements, please contact the Town’s Preservation Planner at [hbackus@nantucket-ma.gov](mailto:hbackus@nantucket-ma.gov).

