Inspection Checklist for Older Buildings

A Worksheet Approach for Property Owners:

Inspecting your building:

This checklist is intended as a guide for inspecting older buildings. Since all buildings are different, the checklist is general in nature and can be adapted to fit specific cases. It can be used for conducting annual building inspections or inspecting a property prior to purchase.

This checklist is not intended to take the place of an evaluation by a professional and if building faults are identified through use of this guideline, a Professional should be consulted for assistance in correcting the fault.

Roof:

The roof is typically the first line of defense against water infiltration and maintenance is critical. The following roofing materials can be found on older buildings. They are listed in order of durability, beginning with the most durable.

1. Slate

2. Copper

3. Tile

8. Tar & Gravel

4. Terne Steel - Terne is an alloy coating that was historically made of lead and tin used to cover steel, the ratio of 20% tin and 80% lead.

5. Wood Shakes

6. Wood Shingles

7. Galvanized Steel

8. Tar & Gravel

9. Asphalt Shingles

10. Asphalt Roll Roofing

Pitched Roof: commonly shakes or shingles.

Wood shakes or Shingles - are shingles missing or curling on the edges?

Asphalt Shingles - are shingles missing, curling on the edges or losing mineral coating (granules)?

Gutters: an essential part of protecting building walls and foundations from damage.

Are there loose, rotted or missing gutters or downspouts?

Are gutters clean and free-flowing?

Cornice (eaves):

Is paint peeling or blistering, especially on the underside?

General - too many layers of shingles? Consult with local building inspector if uncertain if over roofing is allowable.

Flat Roof: commonly tar & gravel or asphalt roll roofing.

Are there bubbles, blisters, or cracks in the membrane?

The roofing membrane should be tight to the deck and not move under foot.

Metal Flashing:

Is there loose, missing, or rusted sheet metal flashing at chimneys, valleys, ridges, parapet walls, roof penetrations or other roof terminations?

Structure:

Does the ridge of a pitched roof or any portion of a flat roof sag?

Some permanent deflection is normal, but excessive or progressive deflection should be checked by a structural engineer.

Are any of the exposed roof rafter split, cracked or broken?

Does the roof or floors visibly sag or slope?

Are bricks, stone or mortar cracked or missing at chimneys or parapets?

Are there cracks in the interior walls or exterior façade around doors and windows or in long stretches of walls?

Exterior Walls:

General: for all walls including clapboard, masonry, adobe and stucco:

Is the paint peeling, blistering or cracking (alligatoring)?

Is the wall out of plumb, unlevel or are there bulges?

Is wood trim sound, firmly attached and painted?

Are there open joints around door and window frames or woodwork?

Masonry Walls including Adobe:

Are there any major cracks in the masonry?

Hairline and horizontal cracks usually do not represent a problem. Vertical cracks through masonry units and mortar joints or diagonal cracks signal problems and should be checked by a structural engineer.

Are any masonry units missing, loose or deteriorating?

Is the mortar soft and crumbling?

Adobe is a very fragile material that is difficult to maintain. Consult with an experienced architect or contractor prior to undertaking repairs or improvements.

Foundations:

Is there vertical or diagonal cracking in the concrete or masonry?

Is the concrete or masonry spalling, crumbling or deteriorating?

Is the mortar in the masonry loose or crumbling?

Is there any wood, especially structural members, within 6" of the ground?

Is the basement leaking or flood during a rainstorm or when the storm sewer backs up?

Is there a backflow preventer in the sewer line to the street?

Windows:

Are all wood window components, exterior and interior, sound and painted?

Is any wood at the exterior sill, frames or sash decaying?

Is there evidence of excessive moisture penetration around the sash or at the sills on the interior?

Is the putty around the panes of glass firm and painted?

Do the sash operate smoothly?

Are interior or exterior storm sash available for use during winter months?

Attic:

Is there evidence of water leaks? Leakage very common at chimneys and eaves.

Are there signs of vermin infiltration (usually pigeons and bats)?

Is there insulation in the ceiling or roof rafters?

Is the attic vented?

Interior Spaces:

Is the plaster at the walls or ceiling damp, loose or cracked? Water damaged plaster below windows and diagonal stress cracks originating at the tops of window openings are very common.

Is there any evidence of water infiltration (stains) on the ceiling, around windows or on the lower walls?

Are walls bulging or out of plumb?

Does any portion of the floor sag? Some permanent deflection is acceptable, but excessive or progressive deflection may indicate structural failure or inadequate framing size and should be checked by a structural engineer.

Do floors deflect when walked on or loaded? Live load deflection can indicate undersized structural members and should be checked by a structural engineer.

Do doors open and swing freely on hinges? Binding may indicate uneven settling in walls or floors, or pressure being exerted on interior walls from roof structure.

Are stairs sound and stable with an appropriate handrail?

Basement and Crawlspace:

Do the walls and floors show signs of excessive moisture?

Is there evidence of periodic flooding?

Are there signs of vermin infiltration or termites?

Is there any wood, especially structural members, within 6" of the ground?

Are unheated basements and crawlspaces vented?

Are floors above unheated basements and crawlspaces insulated?

Plumbing:

Is there any evidence of leakage from supply or waste pipes?

What is the supply pipe material? Copper and Brass okay. Galvanized steel or iron will not last as long as copper or brass. Lead poses a potential health risk.

Are all faucets working properly?

Are all drains, including floor drains, working properly?

Heating and Ventilating:

Steam Heat:

Is the boiler tank leaking?

Is there evidence of leaking pipes? Look for stains and rot on floor around pipes. Leaking caused by rusted pipes, broken traps or valves and pipes clogged with mineral scale build-up.

Forced Air Heat:

What is the date of the last furnace inspection or service?

Are all belts tight and in good condition?

Do filters need to be replaced?

Does the motor and fan need to be oiled?

Are any registers blocked by furniture or inadvertently closed?

General:

Is heat distributed evenly?

Do thermostats work correctly to control room temperature?

Electrical:

Is the main electrical service to the building adequate? 100 amps is minimum by modern standards.

Is the insulation frayed on existing wires or are bare wires exposed in an unsafe location?

Is there any sub-standard surface mounted lamp cord or extension cord wiring?

Are all lights operated from a proper wall switch?

Building Grounds:

Do all downspouts have splash blocks to divert rain water away from the base of the building?

Do lawn sprinklers spray on the building?

Is there any vegetation contacting the walls or the foundation of the building? Vegetation can hold moisture in wood and masonry walls and foundations.

Does the grade around the building divert water toward or away from the foundation?