

# Historic Properties at Risk

## The Climate-Change Case for New National Standards

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### The Challenge

Although four standards for “treating” historic properties have governed historic preservation in the United States since 1992, those treatments -- **preservation, restoration, rehabilitation** and **reconstruction** – fall short of guiding communities whose historic resources face increasing threats from adverse storms, temperature change, precipitation variations, sea level rise and increased greenhouse gas emissions.

Climate change’s new realities warrant adding four new standards to the *Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties*: **Resist, Relocate, Relinquish** and **Remember**.

New realities require new thinking about how to steward our nation’s historic resources into an environment of increasing risk. Examples of how four new treatments of historic properties can work.

### Resist

#### Treatment

Engineering controls, e.g., flood-control levees and berms that balance resilience with preservation of the property's character-defining historic and/or architectural features. Ideally those controls are scalable, i.e., they can be strengthened apace with future increased risks, such as higher storm surges. The highest rating for governmental funding is assigned to

#### Example

A historic prairie farmstead gains protection from increasingly frequent and intense drought-induced wildfires by the addition of a sprinkler system within the farmhouse and outbuildings; the permanent removal of vegetation adjacent to historically sensitive components of the property; the temporary, seasonal reduction of such vegetation; construction of fire breaks at the perimeter of the property; and the addition of life-safety features to the property, e.g., redundant exit routes/driveways from the property for visitors and staff.



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\* Resilience Works, LLC advises clients on securing funding for flood-risk-reduction infrastructure projects.

## Relocate

### Treatment

Relocation that preserves the structural integrity of the property and positions it in a new, better-protected site that has a context similar to the original site.

### Example

Rising sea levels have washed away the land that once surrounded a historic seacoast lighthouse. Mitigation – sandbags, berms, a bulkhead – has become increasingly expensive and ineffectual. Therefore, the lighthouse is moved further inland to a site nearby. The ideal new site resembles the historic setting of the lighthouse, thereby preserving the “story” that the lighthouse offers to future generations of visitors.



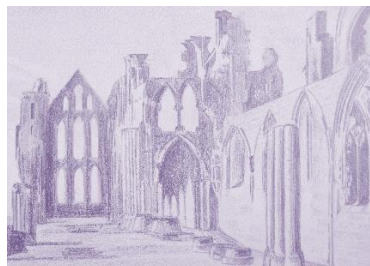
## Relinquish

### Treatment

Controlled abandonment of the property, including photographic and measured-drawing recordation of the property; ceremonial closure of the property to the public; removal and off-site curation of key components of the property; and installation of life-safety protective measures to prevent looting and personal injury. The photography and/or survey adheres to the standards for the Historic American Building Survey and/or Historic American Engineering Record.

### Examples

A 17<sup>th</sup> century indigenous village, no longer inhabited, has been devastated by a mudslide. Reconstruction would violate the religious belief of the recent inhabitants who view the property as a sacred site, being the burial grounds of their ancestors. The ruins are documented in their current, devastated state. The property is officially closed in a ceremony that highlights both the sacred nature of the site and its historical and architectural significance. Items are carefully removed for curation elsewhere. The property is secured against trespassers. The property – as ruins – develops a new historic significance.



Similarly, before a historic church is allowed to deteriorate in place, conservationists remove the colored-glass windows for safekeeping at a vocational education school that trains students in the techniques of creating, maintaining and restoring the lead caning and other structural elements of colored-glass windows.

## Remember

### Treatment

Photographic and measured-drawing recordation of the property, supplemented with narrative and other educational material to preserve the legacy of the property as it undergoes either gradual or sudden change. The photography and/or survey adheres to the standards for the Historic American Building Survey and/or Historic American Engineering Survey.

### Examples

A property located on a barrier island is documented so that its meaning to the community is preserved as the building continues to weather, disintegrate, erode and eventually disappear. The property reverts to its natural state. The local historic preservation society conducts an annual educational event to recall and honor the legacy of the property.



## **The Opportunity: Transformation and Transition**

Adapting to climate change and adopting new standards will be challenging. The National Park Service, which formulates the Secretary of the Interior's *Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties*, recognizes that reality. "The process of adaptation will not return us to the way things have been done before," Jonathan Jarvis, director of the National Park Service has stated.<sup>1</sup> But he emphasized to his staff, the process "will assist us in making choices in the face of uncertainty and change."

"The paths [that] climate change will take remain uncertain," Jarvis continued in his reminder to his staff, "so we must be open to the unexpected, search out new and useful ideas, and share the innovations we develop."

Among those useful ideas are the thoughts of William Solecki, professor and founder director, emeritus, CUNY Institute for Sustainable Cities. He has challenged practitioners and policymakers to shift their thinking about environmental change away from the static concepts of "resistance" and "resilience," which connote "bouncing back." The better structural and paradigmatic public policy responses that he recommends are embodied in the more powerful words "transformation" and "transition."<sup>2</sup>

New paradigmatic thinking comes from a prominent international influencer in the area of climate change, Henk Ovink, Special Envoy for International Water Affairs for the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Ovink is deeply involved in helping communities in his own country, the United States and elsewhere deal with the major climate change dynamic of too much unwanted water in many places and too little necessary water in other locations.

Ovink challenges audiences to understand that "climate change is not the threat; we are. Water can be the magnifier for disaster, the magnifier for wrong man-made decisions." Alternatively, says Ovink, climate-change induced water issues "also can be the convening power for transforming this change that can build a better world if we start to do that together."<sup>3</sup>



Collaboration is key. Addressing climate change, says Jarvis, the former director of the National Park Service, "will require a collaborative approach in order to be successful. This effort will include our international partners, as we learn from their work and perspectives, and share our own."

Collaboration in drafting, testing and codifying additions to the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties* will equip those who care *about* and care *for* our nation's historic build environment to adapt the new realities of climate change.

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Allen Kratz brings dual expertise in historic preservation and climate-change adaptation to the subject of new standards for caring for historic properties.

Two buildings in his hometown of Hoboken, New Jersey, are listed in the National Register of Historic Places and New Jersey Register of Historic Places as the product of his documenting their history: the former First Baptist Church (1891) and the Hoboken Free Public Library and Training School (1897). In Maine, he documented the history of a former woman-run summertime tea house (1907) in Christmas Cove, South Bristol.

He was a gubernatorial appointee to the New Jersey Historic Trust, which funds historic preservation planning and capital projects (2004-2009). He serves as a mayoral appointee to the Hoboken Historic Preservation Commission (2018-2022).

Allen Kratz worked at New York University's Institute for Public Knowledge as project manager for Rebuild by Design (2016-2018). The Rockefeller Foundation funded Rebuild by Design to champion innovative, community-focused resilience projects in seven communities affected by Superstorm Sandy in New York, New Jersey and Connecticut in 2012. He serves as a mayoral appointee to a citizens advisory committee for the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection's flood risk reduction project in Hoboken, Weehawken and Jersey City (2018- ). He oversaw the historic rehabilitation and dry-floodproofing of the National Register-listed Hoboken Public Library as board president (2014-2017). That project –and his research on the financing of other resilience projects -- are the subjects of Allen Kratz's presentations to graduate-level planning students and to public-policy professionals.

Allen Kratz wrote this essay to express his views, not those of his affiliations.

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<sup>1</sup> Jonathan B. Jarvis, Director, National Park Service, *Policy Memorandum 14-02*, issued to "all employees," February 10, 2014, at <https://www.nps.gov/policy/PolMemos/PM-14-02.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Willian Solecki, keynote address at Conference on Urban Resilience & Sustainability, Yale School of Forestry & Environmental Studies, November 4, 2016.

<sup>3</sup> Henk Ovink, "Welcome the Water: Climate-Proofing for Resilience," podcast by Bioneers, at <http://media.bioneers.org/listing/welcome-the-water-climate-proofing-for-resilience-henk-ovink/>, at 24 minutes, 30 seconds, October 2016.