

National Register of Historic Places

What is integrity?

To be listed in the National Register of Historic Places, a property must not only be shown to be significant but it must have historical integrity. Integrity is the ability of a property to convey its significance. The evaluation of integrity is sometimes a subjective judgment, but it is always grounded in an understanding of a property's physical features and how they relate to its significance.

Integrity is conveyed through a place's location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. Through a combination of these aspects of integrity, we can better understand a place.

All properties change over time. A property does not need to retain all its historic physical features or characteristics to tell the story of who lived there, what happened there, or when it was built. A property must retain the essential physical features or characteristics that enable it to convey its historic identity, as shown in the following examples.



Replacement materials are not dealbreakers

Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church of Burr Oak

Farmingham, WI, NR Ref. 100009482, listed 2023
Level: local; period: 1898; area: architecture

Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church of Burr Oak conveys the integrity that expresses its significance for architecture, despite two additions and modern vinyl siding.

“The building's integrity of design is somewhat diminished, though not entirely lost, due to the construction of the two symmetrical additions in 1964 and 2005. Despite these alterations, the original footprint and massing of the building is unmistakable as the later additions are lower in height and smaller in volume than the original portion of the building. The two additions do not detract from the distinctive massing or decorative Gothic Revival-style ornamentation on the original building. Similarly, the building's integrity of materials is somewhat diminished due to the installation of vinyl siding on the exterior of the church, installed in stages between 1996 and 2005. However, the exterior retains many of its original wood decorative elements, including window trim and cornices, in addition to retaining all of its historic stained-glass windows. In addition, although elements of the tower were modified in 2019 during the installation of vinyl siding, the tower retains its overall form and character-defining pinnacles and wood molding.” (Nomination, pp. 7-8.)

“Condition” and “integrity” are two different things

Harrison’s Guest House

Las Vegas, NV, NR Ref. 1500009, listed 2016

Level: local; period: 1942-1960; area: Black history, entertainment/recreation

Harrison’s Guest House is significant as an African American boarding house that provided accommodations for some of the mid-twentieth century’s leading African American entertainers in Las Vegas and on the Las Vegas Strip, including Nat King Cole, Pearl Bailey, and Sammy Davis, Jr. As in other cities in 20th century America, African Americans faced racial segregation as a matter of law and social practice.

“Despite several non-historic alterations to the building, including the carport and masonry wall additions, the Harrison’s Guest House retains integrity of location, setting, feeling, association, design, materials, and workmanship. It reflects its importance as the only known surviving example of an African American boarding house in Las Vegas from the segregation era.” (Nomination, p. 8.)



Change may be part of the story

Lawetlat’la (Mt. St. Helens)

Skamania and Cowlitz Counties, WA, NR Ref. 13000748, listed 2013

Level: state; period: myth age to present; area: Native American heritage

The historic view of Lawetlat’la (Mt. St. Helens) documents the eruption of May 18, 1980. The resultant crater, which dramatically altered its appearance, does not affect its integrity in terms of inclusion in the National Register. Despite its altered appearance, Lawetlat’la continues to be significant to several Native American Tribes. The mountain reflects important traditional cultural beliefs rooted in tribal history, and it continues to play a role in the cultural continuity of the Tribal communities that value the place.

“Living in close proximity to an erupting volcano ... has resulted in an intimate knowledge about the eruptive nature of the mountain, an oral history of eruptive events, an understanding of resilience to such events, and identification with the creative and destructive forces of nature and their cycles.” (Nomination, p. 18.)