

Title Window Shopping**Description** To repair or replace? With many windows, it becomes a matter of no new pain, no gain.**Topic** Windows**Author** Robin L. Barton**Magazine Issue** Habitat Magazine, April 2007 - Number 233**Article Type** Feature**Page Numbers** 18-26**Article ID** 3530**Abstract**

When it comes to replacing your windows, it's time to do a little window shopping. Questions you need to ask, types of windows to choose from, tax abatements you can receive, a walk-through of the installation – all in this article.

Article Text

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Susan Liddicoat, board president of a 31-unit co-op on Manhattan's Upper West Side, had always expected problems with her building. After all, the 100-year-old property, which became a co-op in 1921, still had its original windows – and they were long since due for replacement. Some of them weren't staying open; others were not closing properly. And they were all caked with multiple layers of paint. It was time for a change.

Liddicoat is not alone. Many buildings, converted more recently than hers, are facing similar problems, as the new windows the co-op or sponsor installed at conversion are now the old windows that are reaching the end of their useful lives.

“I am seeing people talking about replacement,” says Lynn Whiting, director of management at Argo. “Those windows were not expected to last for 40 years. I thought they would outlast my life, but that's not necessarily the case.”

And age problems may not be the only reason. Some new residents, who may have spent a great deal of money on their apartments and renovations, are requesting new windows. Since repair, replacement, and everything that goes with that – type, material, color, cost, dealing with contractors and shareholders – are the responsibility of the board, it might be time for you to do a little window shopping.

Now come the questions. Do you want aluminum or wood? Tilt-and-turn or casement? Do you need permission from the Landmarks Preservation Commission? And who's going to coordinate the contractors with the residents concerning getting access to everyone's apartment? Stumped? These and other queries are all part of the wonderful world of windows.

I'm Looking Through You

Your first step is to decide whether you need to repair or replace. Set up a window committee to look into the options. That's what Liddicoat's board did in 2002. Its committee included both board and non-board members. She says it was helpful to have them do the legwork and then make a presentation to the full board, which ultimately made the final decisions.

What a committee might discover is that having window problems doesn't necessarily mean that you need window replacement. You may be able to simply repair or refurbish them. The existing ones can sometimes be fixed by replacing balances to make the windows open and close more smoothly, redoing the caulking or installing thin sealant to reduce drafts. According to Anne Marie Bode, vice president at JBF Installations, a window service and installation company, taking that route may give your windows from five to ten more years of life, and it's cheaper and less disruptive than replacement.

How do you know if your building's windows should be repaired or replaced? You may consider hiring an architect or engineer to conduct a survey of the windows' condition. Joakim Aspegren, an architect and principal at ARC, says that he usually gets involved in a replacement project fairly early when he's asked to survey the level of deterioration. The architect or engineer can determine the number of windows with problems and their overall condition. He can then help the board decide whether to repair or replace. But such services are not inexpensive. Depending on the scope of the work, architects/engineers charge from \$175 to \$200 an hour for preliminary work; for more involved consultation on, say, a 600-window job, the overall project fee could run to \$25,000.

A big factor in making any of these decisions is the cost. What you do depends not only on the windows' condition, but also on your co-op's financial condition. Most buildings don't have the money in their reserves to pay for window replacement because, unlike with boilers and elevators, boards generally don't plan for window replacement, says Eric Lash, director of management at Alexander Wolf & Co. He says such work "falls under the radar."

Buildings generally replace all their windows at once because they get a better price that way. Even so, replacement projects aren't cheap. Liddicoat says that her co-op spent about \$245,000 on new windows and their installation – and that figure doesn't include the engineer's fee and the cost of a sidewalk bridge to protect passersby. The final figure: \$289,000.

Skimp Now, Pain Later

It may be expensive, but do not skimp. You don't want to install cheap windows that you'll only have to replace in five years. For the average price of a basic aluminum double-hung window – the most common type used in co-ops and condos – there are a wide range of figures: from \$350 to \$1,250 per window. A basic Pella window, which is aluminum on the outside and wood on the inside, runs from \$1,300 to \$1,400. The cost will go up depending on the size, style, color, and finish of the window and on any special features, such as laminated glass for sound reduction. Stephen Varone, president of Rand Engineering and Architecture, notes that a building could spend several thousand dollars on large, custom-designed windows.

Consequently, the building will have to find a way initially to foot the bill, even if the cost is ultimately passed on to the residents. Manager Lash says the most common way to pay is through an assessment. He's also seen buildings pay for such projects from their reserve fund, through financing, or a credit line or with a combination of these approaches. Assessments for window-replacement projects draw fewer complaints from residents than assessments for, say, new elevators. Every resident directly benefits from a window-replacement project, whereas those in first- or second-floor apartments don't benefit much from a new elevator as those on upper floors.

Liddicoat says that her board decided against an assessment, believing it was too much of a burden. And the building didn't want to deplete its reserve fund. So the project was largely financed through a new mortgage, which was also used to pay for the cleaning of the marble in the lobby, halls, and stairs. (The board ultimately had to raise the maintenance to cover the mortgage payments, however.)

Support System

Because a window-replacement project is a capital improvement, it may make your building eligible for a J-51 tax abatement. That would reduce the building's taxes by a percentage of the project's "certified reasonable cost." But qualifying for and getting J-51 is fairly complex. For example, the project is only eligible if the building has an average assessed value of \$40,000 per apartment and the average per-room sale price during the three years before the start of the project is 35 percent of the maximum mortgage amount of a single-family home eligible for purchase under Fannie Mae. So many high-end buildings won't be eligible. (For more information on J-51, call 212-863-5517 or go to <http://home2.nyc.gov/html/hpd/html/developers/j51.shtml>.)

Another issue to consider is cost savings through energy efficiency. There are windows designated energy efficient. Low-emittance (or "low-e") glass has a coating on it to reduce thermal activity – that is, the loss of heat through the window. Other high-performance glass has argon gas between the panes to improve its energy efficiency.

There are some downsides to getting such windows, though. The low-e coating reflects light inward, so at night you won't be able to see out the windows, warns Eugene Ferrara, president of JMA, an engineering and consulting firm. And the windows cost more than standard windows.

But if you do choose such windows, you may be eligible for a low-interest New York Energy Smart loan from the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA). (The loan program is set to end on April 30, 2007, but will be reviewed before that date and may be extended. For more information on the program, call 866-NYSERDA or go to the agency's site: www.nyserda.org/loanfund.)

Sound resistance is yet another option. Sound-resistant windows typically use laminated glass – two pieces of glass with plastic in between – which reduces sound transmission tremendously. But Dennis Gagne, vice president of sales for Pella Windows, notes that "where air travels, sound travels." So if you eliminate the drafts with basic new windows, you'll also eliminate

much of the sound transmission. Sound-resistant windows cost more than basic windows. (Note that fire-rated windows, which are able to hold up to heat pressure, are required in any windows in a property line wall and in stairwells.)

Most replacement windows can be expected to last 20 to 30 years. And all windows come with warranties from both the window manufacturer and the contractor that installs them. You will generally get a five-year warranty for the window and ten-year warranty for the glass. Some come with a ten-year warranty for the window itself, a two-year warranty for parts and labor, and a twenty-year warranty for the glass.

Typecasting

What type of window do you want? Having options is great but it makes picking appropriate windows for your building a challenge. That's where an architect or engineer comes in handy again. Boards will get lots of help from the window companies, but architects and engineers can act as "bull detectors" for the board and help them weigh the various options. Nonetheless, the board should do its own research and not take the professionals' word as sacrosanct.

When choosing replacement windows, you'll have to decide on four things:

Style. The double-hung window is the most common style used by co-ops and condos. Casements, which open inward like a door, are also popular. Tilt-and-turns, which tilt inward at the top for ventilation and turn inward on the side for cleaning, are another option. Casements and tilt-and-turns are popular because they provide an unobstructed view through solid expanses of glass. Horizontal sliders are another, less common option.

The safest course is to replace old windows with new ones in the same style and configuration as the existing windows. But some buildings do otherwise. For example, Robert Ecker, president of Ecker Window Corp., recalls that his company worked on one building that replaced sliders with double-hungs and another that did the exact opposite. Varone warns that changing the style or configuration of windows can create issues and require additional installation work. Also, doing that usually necessitates changing the existing window openings, so you'll need a permit. Otherwise, such replacement projects don't require city permission.

Landmarked structures must use replacement windows in keeping with the character and architecture of the building. If your co-op or condo is a landmark, you'll need a permit from the Landmarks Preservation Commission. Varone has found that the Commission is "pretty consistent and reasonable" in what it requires.

Despite the age of Liddicoat's co-op, it is not a landmark building but it does face many of the same issues. For example, her board wanted replacements that would fit with the character of the building. The original ones had "historic detailing," such as six panes in the top sash of its double-hung windows, she says. However, the board didn't choose replacement windows with that design. They didn't like windows with "phony panes," she explains, and the real thing was "outrageously expensive." Instead, they chose standard double-hungs, although they did chose

higher quality windows than the engineer recommended. The board felt it was “important to have the best windows they could afford,” she says.

Composition. The windows in fairly old buildings were made of wood with single-paned glass. These days, most choose windows that are made of aluminum with double-paned glass. Many prewar buildings opt for windows that are aluminum on the outside and wood on the inside, says Gagne. He also notes that you rarely see vinyl windows in New York City.

Classification. The American Architectural Manufacturers Association classifies windows into four main categories: residential, commercial, heavy commercial, and architectural. Residential-class windows are the lowest end and are used mainly in suburban houses. Commercial and heavy commercial windows are the most commonly utilized in the city’s co-ops and condos.

Special features. You can get windows with special features. For example, many windows are available in custom colors. But since such colors are more expensive, most buildings do what Liddicoat’s did and choose from one of several standard hues.

The Choice, the Results

Once the board has chosen the replacement windows, the architect or engineer develops drawings and specifications for the windows. Besides selecting the type of window and manufacturer the board wants, it can also set performance parameters and let the contractors select windows that meet those requirements. Then the board should bid the project out, which can take six to eight weeks.

Make sure the contractor has insurance and a good reputation, says JBF’s Bode. Get references and check them, and go to other buildings to see their work. The architect or engineer who prepared the specifications can analyze the bids to ensure the building is getting what it needs and what it asked for. Liddicoat says that the engineer her board used helped them understand the bids and interview the contractors.

Once the job is laid out and the contractor is hired, your next step is to coordinate the access to each apartment. Generally, your managing agent handles this, but for smaller, self-managed buildings without an agent, this becomes more of an issue.

After the windows finally arrive, the process picks up speed. A crew of five or six men can install about 30 or 40 windows a day, says Evan Ross, vice president of Ross Window. Installation can take longer if the window frames need to be replaced, while installation in landmarked structures, or where more carpentry work is involved, can take even longer. For example, Liddicoat’s board wanted to retain the moldings on the inside of the windows, which made the installation harder. She says it took about one day per apartment, although the larger apartments took longer. Surprisingly, weather isn’t as much of an issue as you’d think. Ecker says the company installs windows year-round and is only prevented from doing so by extreme cold, snowstorms, driving rain, and/or high winds. However, caulking must be done at certain temperatures, so this step may need to be done when it’s warmer.

Buying good quality windows is useless if they're installed improperly, says Ferrara. So have your architect or engineer oversee the installation, he advises. Aspegren says he'll monitor the work as it progresses to make sure the windows are installed correctly and immediately address any problems that arise.

Through a Glass, Brightly

Let's face it: installation is messy, horrible, noisy, and it involves a lot of dirt and dust and unpleasantness. So expect residents to complain about the noise and the mess, Lash warns. They may also complain about any interior follow-up work that needs to be done, such as patching, plastering and repainting, he adds. That's why communication is important. You can head off such complaints by telling residents what's going to happen and when and letting them prepare themselves and their apartments.

But don't forget that a window-replacement project affects everyone in the building – and that cuts both ways. Everyone benefits but everyone is also inconvenienced. And the smooth installation of new windows requires universal cooperation.

New windows generally make apartments quieter, warmer, and cleaner, says Ecker. So going through this process is worth it in the end. Bottom line: have patience. Replacing your building's windows is going to take longer and cost more than you expected, says Liddicoat. Varone agrees, calling such projects the “biggest hurry up and wait” jobs they do. In fact, it's all just a pane in the glass.