



# Old House Inspection Worksheet

The following is an exterior check-list and guide that homeowners can use to diagnose and address potential home repair issues. Look at each side of the house, from the roof to the foundation and to the surrounding yard. Describe clearly damaged areas and note areas of concern to monitor – a “watch list.” Annual checks help prevent costly future repairs.

## **ROOF**

- Pitched Roofs:** This is the critical first line of defense against water infiltration. Check for areas of loose, damaged, deteriorating, or missing roof covering. Check asphalt shingles for curled edges or loose mineral coating. If possible, determine if there is more than one layer of shingles. (2 layers max.) Check for missing or loose slates. Observe the ridge to make sure it does not have noticeable sag. Any deflection should be checked by a structural engineer.
- Flat Roofs:** Check for bubbles, blisters, or cracks in the membrane. Roofing membranes should be tight and not move underfoot. Check for any other tears, holes or breaks in the uniform surface that would compromise the integrity and weather/moisture resistance of the roofing material.
- Flashing:** Check flashing at valleys, ridges, and chimneys to make sure it is secure and free from damage and deterioration.
- Chimney:** Look to see if bricks, chimney caps, and mortar joints appear to be loose or are damaged and/or missing. Have a professional check your flue(s) and fire box(es)
- Gutters & Downspouts:** Check to make sure every part is connected – gutters to fascia/gutter boards; downspouts to underside of gutters, elbows, walls; look for dents and damage that would inhibit water flow. Check to make sure gutters are clean, free-flowing and slope toward the downspouts. Leaf guards can help keep downspouts clear of leaves and debris. Downspouts should be directed at least 3 ft. away from the foundations.

## **EXTERIOR WALL SURFACES**

- Masonry:** Check for damaged or missing bricks, stone, concrete, etc. Check for crumbling/missing mortar joints; different mortar colors could indicate improper mortars. Look for large cracks – vertical or diagonal cracks could signal structural problems. Look for powdery white deposits (efflorescence). This can indicate excess moisture in the masonry.

- ❑ Shingles, Clapboards, Half-Timbering & Trim: Check for loose, cracked, rotted or missing wood boards and trim. Make sure wood trim is sound and firmly attached. Check the paint condition for blistering, peeling, chipping, and cracking (alligatoring). Check for any wall insulation. Plugs in the siding indicate blown-in insulation. If painting is needed, select colors and color schemes that are appropriate to the style of the house and the character of the neighborhood.

## **WINDOWS**

- ❑ Glass & Glazing: Look for cracked, broken, ill-fitting or missing glass panes. Check to see if there is missing glazing compound or caulk. Note if there are gaps between the glass and wood sash frame that could let in moisture.
- ❑ Window Sashes & Sills: Window sills are especially prone to damage. Check to ensure that window sills are properly attached and the wood is not split or rotted. Check for blistering or peeling paint. Check to see if window sashes (parts that hold the glass) are plumb (straight). Check to see if sash weights are missing or off-balance. This could prevent windows from operating smoothly.
- ❑ Energy Efficiency: Check if exterior or interior storm windows exist and fit properly. Check to see if doors and windows are caulked and have weatherstripping to reduce air infiltration. Check to make sure window locks create snug fit and that the sashes close tightly against each other.

## **PORCHES**

- ❑ Wood: Look for damaged or missing porch steps, porch deck, ceiling boards and trim. Check for sagging and loose boards. Make sure to inspect the condition of paint or stain. Porch decks are especially prone to weathering and deterioration.
- ❑ Structure: Look for broken, deteriorating, loose, or missing ceiling rafters, floor joists and columns. Note the areas that require a simple re-nailing. Especially note beams, joists and columns that may require a total replacement. Check to see that the porch structure has not pulled away from the exterior walls or shows movement away from its foundations.
- ❑ Railings/Balustrades: Check to see that there are no missing balusters, and that existing balusters are securely fastened to top and bottom rails. Railings should be securely attached to house or step structure. For *wood railings*, check to see if paint is peeling, blistering or missing. For *iron/metal railings*, look for areas of missing paint, soft metal or separation of soldered joints; check to ensure that nails or screws have not rusted beyond usefulness.
- ❑ Stairs: Check to see that foundation, risers, treads and wingwalls are securely fastened, treads are level, and risers are of equal height to meet current building code. Stairs should be secured to the house. *Masonry stairs* – check to see that there is no missing brick and that mortar joints are property filled. *Wood stairs* – check to see that there are no large gaps, deteriorated or missing wood.

## **FOUNDATION**

- ❑ **Masonry:** Check for loose, damaged or missing bricks or stones, deteriorating mortar joints, and bowing of walls. Openings for old coal chutes, windows, electrical service, etc. should be properly sealed and weathertight. Check for vertical or diagonal cracking.
- ❑ **Window Wells:** Check for loose, deteriorating, or missing bricks and mortar joints. Check for any crumbling concrete side walls. Check to see if the top protective course or cap is intact. Check to see that walls are not bowing and that drains are clear and clog-free. Clean out any leaves and debris.

## **DRIVEWAY & SIDEWALKS**

- ❑ **Pavement:** Check length, depth and source of cracks and spalling (*flaking off of surface material due to moisture*) for sandstone and concrete, and depressions in asphalt to determine if replacement is necessary (*Rule of Thumb for replacement: 1" depth, ¼" width, or 50% of the surface*). Check to see that paved slabs are level and have not separated either vertically or horizontally more than 1". Paved areas should ideally be 2" below window wells.
- ❑ **Drainage:** Drives should be pitched 1/8" to ¼" per foot away from the building to ensure correct flow of water run-off; check drains and drain covers for damage. Underground storm water draining ensure that entire catch basin system is tied into storm sewer and working.

## **GARAGE**

- ❑ **Roof:** As with houses, check for areas of loose, damaged, deteriorating or missing roof covering; check on top of flat roofs for covering condition and any sagging or pooling water.
- ❑ **Cladding:** *Masonry* - check bricks and stone for face damage and ensure that all are in place; mortar joints and caulking – how and what are they filled with, any missing areas; *Shingles & Siding* - check for loose, cracked, rotted or missing wood and caulking, corner boards, and trim; damage from blast-stripping; *Paint/Stain* – check for blistering, chipping, and cracking; If painting is needed, check colors and color schemes that are appropriate to and coordinate with the style of the main house and the character of the neighborhood.
- ❑ **Walls, Studs & Joists:** All framing members should be plumb and free of damage, warping and deterioration.
- ❑ **Floor:** Check for cracks, holes, uneven surfaces, and spalling of concrete. Measure length, depth and source of damage to determine if replacement is needed.

## ATTIC

- ❑ Moisture: Check for evidence of water leaks especially around chimneys and at eaves. Notice discolored or darkened wood members. During a heavy rain, check areas where leaks have occurred previously to determine if water infiltration is still occurring.
- ❑ Insulation: Check to see if there is any insulation, the type, the thickness (R value) and where it is located. Insulation should be either between roof rafters or floor joists, but not in both areas.
- ❑ Structure: If attic is unfinished, check rafters to make sure they are intact, plumb and not bending or sagging. Check to make sure floor joists do not deflect when walked on. Any movement should be checked by a structural engineer.
- ❑ Ventilation: Check to see if there is attic ventilation – ridge vents, gable vents, attic fans, operable windows.

## YARD

- ❑ Fencing: Check to be sure that fencing material is securely attached to posts; posts are straight and set into a footer if necessary; what is the condition of paint or stain.
- ❑ Drainage: After a heavy rainfall, look for flooding in your and adjacent yards. Check the grade around house foundation to see if it diverts water away from or toward the foundation. Grades should always slope away from the house.
- ❑ Plantings: A good rule of thumb is: ½ the diameter of shrubs at maturity should be the distance from the house foundation. Trees should be trimmed so that overhanging branches do not come in contact with the roof structure. Ivy, vines and other growth that can climb and root into building materials and/or harbor insects and rodents should be removed from all building structures.
- ❑ Electrical Service: Check fixtures and outlets for waterproof construction and proper connections. Note any overhead wires that are sagging and not at proper clearance heights.

Please contact the Columbus Landmarks Home Preservation Program with any questions/concerns, for a *free* site visit, or for referrals of qualified contractors. Phone: 614-221-4508; Email: [skeeney@columbuslandmarks.org](mailto:skeeney@columbuslandmarks.org); Website: <https://www.columbuslandmarks.org/home-preservation-program/>

Resources: National Park Service Preservation Briefs  
Fast Facts About Building Inspections, Judith Kitchen  
State Historic Preservation Office – Ohio History Connection  
Utah Division of State History  
Cleveland Restoration Society