

HABITAT Bricks & Bucks

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A “Master Plan” Speeds Window Replacements

By Bill Morris

➤ **THE CONDO BOARD** at a World War I-vintage building on Park Avenue was getting ready to tackle mandated Local Law 11 facade work – including some intricate repairs to its polychromatic terracotta decorative flourishes. The board also wanted to replace the building’s aged, mismatched windows. Since the building sits in the Park Avenue Historic District, the board hired Bertolini Architectural Works to run the project and facilitate dealings with the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC).

“Initially the board thought they were responsible for replacing windows,” says Eric Vonderhyde, a partner at the Bertolini firm. “We talked to the LPC to see what they would be willing to accept. We got approval for full aluminum window frames with a grid pattern (on the glass).”

When the 15-story building was erected in 1915, the window frames were made of wood and the glass was arrayed in what’s known as a “muntin grid” – six small panes over six small panes in each window opening. Some of those original wooden frames and their 12-pane windows had been replaced with aluminum frames and more modern glass when the building was converted to a condominium in the 1980s. The LPC’s approval meant the board could put aluminum frames in all openings, with a single pane of glass adorned with an applique that mimicked the appearance of the original multi-pane windows.



Then the board got a pleasant surprise. “Roll forward four months,” Vonderhyde says, “and it turns out the proprietary lease says that the board is not required to replace windows, only to maintain them.”

After working with manufacturers to get the best prices on acceptable materials, the board and its architect went back to the LPC to apply for what’s known as a “master plan,” a single set of standards for all future window replacements. Whenever a unit-owner decides to replace his or her windows, compliance with the master plan results in speedy approval from the LPC.

A window-replacement master must first be approved by the full LPC. Once in place, according to LPC guidelines, master plans “establish standards and criteria for future window replacement and repairs so they can be approved by the Commission’s

staff, rather than the full Commission. Applicants are encouraged to establish master plans for window repair and/or replacement that will occur over time. To be considered, a master plan must set standards for future changes and identify those standards by detailed drawings.”

“Any time you have a building where it’s the shareholders’ or unit-owners’ responsibility to replace windows,” says Vonderhyde, “you get a master plan so that you have one standard of materials and quality for all future installations. This streamlines the process. The turnaround time for LPC approval is very quick. A master plan is the way to go.”

Rather than spreading the cost of each window replacement to the condo association, the replacements will be pay-as-you-go for each unit-owner. Definitely a win for the condo board. ■