Old Orland Historic District

FOUNDATIONS

Old Orland building foundations range from cement block and formed concrete to bricks, to stones like lannon stone and limestone. Regardless of material, the purpose of all foundations is the same: to carry the weight of the building down into the soil and spread that weight out so it does not exceed the bearing capacity of the soil.

Builders were careful to set the footings of foundations below the frost line to help ensure that walls would stay sound and that different parts of a building would not settle at different rates, or that they would not be heaved and cracked by freezing soil.

On some buildings, the foundations rose only slightly above the ground level and often were covered by the building's siding. On others, higher foundations became part of the building's visual character.

As maintenance or rehabilitation of buildings move forward in Old Orland, the following tips will help the foundation continue its job.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Watch for areas where a build-up of soil, old plantings, or paving materials may have created a slope that lets water flow toward the foundation rather than away from it. If there is such a condition, slope the soil or paving material so that there is a positive slope away from the foundation.

2. Be sure that downspouts are either connected into underground drain lines or that they empty onto splash-blocks that carry water away from the building. If the building has underground downspout drains, be sure that both the downspouts and the drains are clear of obstructions and free-flowing. If they leak or are plugged up, they can concentrate water around the foundation to the extent that the soil liquefies and loses its bearing capacity, possibly resulting in settling or cracking of the foundation.

3. Avoid piling mulch, firewood, or other materials against foundation walls, and be sure that vines and plantings don't grow on or too close to the foundation. All of these can cause moisture retention in the foundation wall. A space of at least a foot from plantings or other materials will help provide air circulation to keep the foundation wall dry.

4. Avoid cutting openings in foundation walls to create basement windows or doors. If such openings are necessary, get good advice from an engineer or other professional about how to do this work without weakening the foundation.

5. Avoid painting or stuccoing the exterior of a foundation. Doing so can significantly change the appearance and character of your building, and these treatments can trap moisture behind them, possibly causing deterioration of the foundation material.