



What's in a Window? Three Decisions That Matter Most

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Choosing replacement windows for a condominium property involves more than selecting a style or price point. The right windows can improve comfort, reduce drafts, support energy efficiency, preserve curb appeal, and help protect long-term property value. For Massachusetts condominium communities, window decisions may also need to account for association rules, historic district requirements, building design, and board approval procedures.

When evaluating window options, we encourage homeowners to focus on the following key decisions:

1. Frame and Sash Material

Window frame and sash materials affect appearance, cost, durability, maintenance, and energy performance. The best choice often depends on the building's design, the association's standards, and any local requirements.

Vinyl windows are often an economical option and are commonly used in residential settings because they can provide good energy performance with limited maintenance. Wood windows are typically more expensive, but they offer a traditional appearance and may be required in historic districts or buildings with specific architectural standards. Aluminum windows are generally strong and durable, but they may offer lower energy performance unless designed with thermal breaks. Fiberglass or composite windows can provide many of the benefits of vinyl with added strength and a higher-end appearance, though usually at a higher cost.

2. Efficiency

The glass package is one of the most important parts of a window. Double-pane and triple-pane glass can improve comfort and energy performance compared with older single-pane windows. Low-E coatings help reduce heat transfer and limit ultraviolet light that can fade furnishings. Argon or krypton gas between the panes can further improve insulation. When comparing products, ask the vendor for the NFRC label, which provides standardized ratings for U-Factor, Solar Heat Gain Coefficient, Visible Transmittance, Air Leakage, and Condensation Resistance.



- **U-Factor** measures how well the window keeps heat from escaping. Lower is better, especially in Massachusetts' heating climate.
- **Solar Heat Gain Coefficient (SHGC)** measures how much solar heat enters through the glass. The right number may depend on window orientation and whether the goal is to reduce summer heat gain or capture winter sun.
- **Visible Transmittance (VT)** measures how much natural light passes through the glass. Higher values generally mean brighter interiors.
- **Air Leakage (AL)** measures how much air can pass through the window assembly. Lower is better for draft control.
- **Condensation Resistance (CR)** indicates how well a window resists interior condensation. Higher is better.

ENERGY STAR and NFRC resources can help homeowners compare products and identify windows that are appropriate for the local climate zone. For condominium properties, it is also important to coordinate with the board or management company before ordering, since many associations have rules governing exterior appearance, approved materials, and installation procedures.

3. Window Operation

How a window opens affects price, ventilation, accessibility, egress, maintenance, and the overall look of the building. Double-hung windows, with two sashes that move up and down, are a common and cost-effective choice for many condominium properties. Sliders open side to side, picture windows do not open, and casement or awning windows crank outward. Casement and awning windows can provide strong ventilation and a larger open area, but they may cost more and include additional moving parts that require maintenance over time. Before selecting an operating style, confirm that the window meets the property's functional needs and any association or code requirements.

With the right guidance and a little planning, homeowners and boards can select windows that balance performance, appearance, budget, and community standards. If your association is considering window replacement or you have questions about an upcoming project, we are here to help you evaluate the options and make informed decisions for your property.

Prepared in collaboration with Anthony Distefano, President of Precision Door and Window.