

The Review Process

There are three levels of scrutiny possible for exterior projects: no review, staff review, and full Historic District Commission public hearings. The purpose of the review process is to determine whether or not to issue a Certificate of Appropriateness. This certificate is required to obtain a building permit for work on properties within the Historic District or otherwise designated. For projects that do not require a building permit, the Certificate is required in order to seek tax credits or other public reimbursements. See below to understand what level of review your project requires and to understand the procedure for that review.

No Review Required

A number of projects are specifically exempt from review. These are as follows:

1. Repair or replacement in kind, so long as you are not seeking tax credits and except when replacing non-conforming materials or features that exceed 25 percent of the total exterior.
2. Ordinary maintenance and repair
3. Storm/Screen windows or doors
4. Gutters and downspouts
5. Site work and appurtenances including driveways, walkways, terraces, garden furnishings, play sets, etc
6. Painting and new paint colors
7. Window boxes
8. Temporary Signs (see the Sign Ordinance for definition)
9. Mechanical equipment such as chillers, condensers, and heating units
10. Material changes to flat roofs
11. Chimney Caps

You can determine whether your project requires a building permit by contacting the Public Works Department at 886-8618.

Review by Staff

In an effort to streamline the review process, staff can review and approve the following types of projects, eliminating the need to appear at a public hearing. If staff cannot approve the project, the application will be heard before the full HDC.

1. Repairs or replacements in kind where the applicant is seeking tax credits
2. Dumpster enclosures
3. Fences, gates, and arbors
4. Awnings, except those that function as signs which require a public hearing

Staff Review Procedure

1. You must submit three completed copies of the Application Form for a Certificate of Appropriateness signed by the applicant and the owner of the property in conjunction with three copies of all other supporting materials, including a detailed description of the work to be performed with labeled and dated, current photographs of the property. Note that in some cases manufacturer's specs, product information, elevations, or other technical or descriptive information may be required. Refer to design guidelines for your type of project further in this document for project specific requirements
2. Staff will review the application and either:
 - a. Issue a stamped Certificate of Appropriateness just as the full HDC does.
 - b. Schedule the application for a hearing before the HDC if they are unable to approve it. See HDC Review Procedure step #2

Review by full HDC at a public hearing

This category includes alterations, new construction, and moving or demolishing structures or their appurtenances in the historic district or on qualified outlying properties. Plans reviewed include proposals to changes exterior surfaces including walls, windows, roofs, and chimneys. Changes to accessory features like stone walls, garages, and sheds are also included. If the project requires a building permit and is not listed above as eligible for staff review full HDC review is necessary. Applications must include ten copies of the application and all supporting materials.

1. Applications for a Certificate of Appropriateness should be submitted to the Planning Department, which will in turn determine if the application is complete. All complete applications shall be forwarded to the EGHDC
2. Any accepted application shall be filed with the EGHDC by the last business day of the month in which it was submitted and placed on the following month's agenda.
3. The EGHDC shall approve, approve with conditions or deny an application and issue all of its decisions in writing.
4. The rejection of an application may be appealed to the Zoning Board of Appeals.

Applications for a Certificate of Appropriateness shall contain information which is necessary to evaluate the proposed construction, alteration, repair, removal, relocation or demolition including but not limited to plans, drawings, and photographs as required in the Commission's Rules. Incomplete applications shall be returned to the applicant within seven (7) working days of receipt of the Planning Department. Requirements for specific types of work can be found in the appropriate sections of this document.

If a project requires zoning relief, it may be presented at a conceptual phase to the Historic District Commission before seeking zoning variances.

GENERAL STANDARDS

There exist two sets of General Standards, one local and one federal. These overlap and express many of the same sentiments. The EGHDC cites one or more of the local standards in each decision it makes on an application. The federal standards, called the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation*, apply in cases where the applicant is seeking some form of federal money, be it a tax-credit or a Community Development Block Grant.

Local Standards

1. Original materials and architectural features shall be maintained or repaired whenever possible rather than replaced.
2. If existing materials have deteriorated beyond repair the new materials shall match the originals in composition, design, texture and other visual qualities.
3. Replacement of missing architectural features shall be based on research knowledge – demonstrated by the applicant – of their original appearance, substantiated by historical photographs, drawings, or other evidence.
4. All proposals for additions and architectural changes shall be appropriate to the original design of the building or to later changes which have historic significance of their own.
5. New construction includes substantial additions or modifications to the exterior of existing buildings. The design of new construction need not be an exact or modified copy of historic styles and could be totally different in concept. However, all proposals for new construction shall be compatible with the surrounding buildings in size, scale, materials, and siting, as well as with the general character of the historic district.
6. Every reasonable effort will be made to protect archaeological resources, such as historic foundations or Native American sites, which are known or are likely to exist in the vicinity of a project.
7. Exterior siding must be appropriate for the building to which it is applied. Vinyl and other modern composition sidings which may damage historic buildings are not appropriate and shall not be approved.
8. Original window sashes can usually be repaired and retained. In the event that a window sash must be replaced, the replacement shall match the original in size, operation, materials, configuration, number of lights, muntin width and profile. Window manufacturers today offer a wide variety of factory made windows appropriate for installation in historic buildings. Storm windows of appropriate design are also available and should be installed to be as unobtrusive as possible.
9. Demolition – either partial or total – shall only be acceptable provided it would significantly benefit the Town, would serve the greater interest of the community as a whole, and there are no available alternatives to demolition. Demolition shall not result in a significant threat to or loss of an historic and or architectural resource to the Town, State, or Nation.
10. In reviewing all applications for Certificates of Appropriateness, in light of these standards the Commission shall weigh into its findings a building's historical and architectural value.

Federal Guidelines

1. The property shall be used for its historic purpose or be placed in a new use that requires minimal change to the defining characteristics of the building and its site.
2. The historic character of a property shall be retained and preserved. The removal of historic materials or alteration of features and spaces that characterize a property shall be avoided.
3. Each property shall be recognized as a physical record of its time, place and use. Changes that create a false sense of historical development, such as adding conjectural features or architectural elements from other buildings, shall not be undertaken.
4. Most properties change over time and those changes that have acquired historical significance in their own right shall be retained and preserved.
5. Distinctive features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a historic property shall be preserved.
6. Deteriorated historic features shall be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of the deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature shall match the old in design, color, texture, and other visual qualities and where possible, materials. Replacement of missing features shall be substantiated by documentary, physical or pictorial evidence.
7. Chemical or physical treatments, such as sandblasting, that cause damage to historical materials shall not be used. The surface cleaning of structures, if appropriate, shall be undertaken using the gentlest means possible.
8. Significant archaeological resources affected by a project shall be protected and preserved. If such resources must be disturbed, mitigation measures shall be undertaken.
9. New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction shall not destroy historic materials that characterize the property. The new work shall be differentiated from the old and shall be compatible with the massing, size, scale and architectural features to protect the historic integrity of the property and its environment.
10. New additions and adjacent or related new construction shall be undertaken in such a manner that if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment would not be impaired.

GETTING STARTED

Before beginning a project on your home or property, whether or not you must appear before the EGHDC for a Certificate of Appropriateness, take time to think about your needs and your goals for the alterations of the property. Let the following sampling of statements and questions assist in guiding you through your planning and construction.

1. Study the physical form of your house carefully and establish when it was built, its style, and its most important architectural features.
2. Analyze the craftsmanship of your house. Are clapboards intact under a layer of siding? How were the wood brackets on the porch made?
3. Check for structural soundness. Early homes last a long time if they have been properly maintained. Rotted or otherwise deteriorated sills are often a problem and should be repaired before beginning other work.
4. Search for old photographs, postcards, advertisements, or newspaper clippings, which may give you additional information about your house and its previous occupants. Land and tax records filed at Town Hall are another valuable source. The East Greenwich Preservation Society may also have information or old photographs which they would be happy to share with you.
5. Don't rush. Live in your house and understand how it works, what its problems are, and what interior space you require.
6. Study your utility systems – plumbing, heating, and wiring. Measure your space. Then begin to make plans for work.
7. Develop a plan for repair and restoration. A step-by-step approach will save you both time and money.
8. Do as much work as you can yourself – scrape paint to check paint color and to prepare the surface, sand clapboards, prepare the work area for your electrician or plumber.
9. Don't hesitate to consult professionals when needed. Professional advice will save you problems and expense in the long run.
10. Keep the original materials of your house wherever possible.
11. Retain any architectural details removed while work is in progress. If you don't put them back in place, at least save them in a dry storage area for some future owner who may want to put them back.
12. Do not "back date" your house. For example, do not put small Colonial style 12 over 12 sash windows on a Victorian house.