

Applicant Guide: Navigating the Historic District Commission Review Process and Checklist

Introduction: The Requirement for a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA)

Protecting the architectural integrity of our historic resources is a collaborative effort between property owners and the municipality. Pursuant to Connecticut General Statutes Section 7-147s(b), property owners within the boundaries of a historic property must obtain a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) before undertaking work that alters the exterior appearance of their structures.

To ensure compliance with these preservation standards, the municipality and its officials—specifically the Building Official—are legally prohibited from issuing permits until a COA has been granted. This restriction applies to:

- **Building permits** for the erection of a building or structure or for the alteration of an exterior architectural feature.
- **Demolition permits** for the demolition or removal of a building or structure.

By requiring this certificate before a permit is issued, the Commission ensures that all changes remain consistent with the unique character of our historic districts.

Step 1: Determining if Your Project Requires Commission Review

The first step in your project planning should be determining whether your proposed work falls under the Commission's jurisdiction. Many minor improvements do not require formal review.

Projects NOT Requiring a COA

You do not need a certificate if your project meets any of the following specific exemptions:

- **Routine Maintenance:** Repairs and upkeep that involve no changes in material, design, or texture.
- **Lack of Public Visibility:** Proposed changes that are not open to view from a public street, way, or place – if the vegetation were removed.
- **Distance:** Changes that fall beyond the 400-foot boundary of a Historic District. The 400 foot boundary starts at the center of the street.
- **Color:** Painting a house a different color.

Projects Requiring a COA

A certificate is required if your project meets the following criteria:

- **Visible Alterations:** Proposed alterations that involve a change of materials, design, or texture, provided they are visible from a public way (if vegetation were removed) and are located within 400 feet of a Historic District which is measured from the center of the street.
- **District Construction/Demolition:** Any proposal for construction or demolition activities located within the Districts.

Step 2: Preparing and Filing the Application

Once you have determined that a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) is required, the administrative process begins. You will need to complete the application form, gather supporting documents (such as brochures, material samples, and/or photographs), and submit your packet to the Building Department, Attn: Historic District Commission.

- **Obtaining and Submitting Forms:** Application forms can be downloaded online via the Town of Suffield Web Site or picked up in person at the Building Department. Completed applications may be submitted one of three ways:

Mail (Suffield Town Hall Attn. H.D.C. % Building Dept, 83 Mountain Rd, Suffield, CT 06078)

Email (HDC secretary or chairman) *need to add an email??*

Hand delivery (Suffield Town Hall 83 Mountain Rd. Suffield, CT lower I, Building Dept. dropbox).

- **Filing Fee:** To be considered complete, your application must be accompanied by a \$50 filing fee, payable check or cash, which covers the legal notice posting in the local newspaper. Check written to: Town of Suffield Memo: COA application
- **Submission Deadline:** The Commission operates on a monthly schedule. To ensure your application is placed on the upcoming agenda, your completed form and fee must be submitted no later than nine days prior to the scheduled meeting (held on the first Monday of the month).

Step 3: The Public Hearing and Commission Review

The Historic District Commission reviews all applications during a public hearing, normally held on the first Monday of each month. You are strongly encouraged to attend the meeting at which your application is reviewed. While attendance is not mandatory, your presence allows the Commission to ask clarifying questions, which often prevents project delays.

Step 4: Obtain a Signed Certificate of Appropriateness from HDC after approval.

Summary Checklist for Applicants

To ensure a smooth application process, please follow this chronological workflow.

A. Applying for a Certificate of Appropriateness

- ☐ Obtain the application form online or from the Building Department.
- ☐ Complete each section with a full description written in the “Describe Nature of Work” section.
- ☐ Before you submit your application, decide on all the details of your proposal. Know what types of materials you will use and how the finished project will look.
- ☐ Provide supplemental visual examples including drawings, plot plan, elevation drawings, hard line drawings, photographs, manufacturer cut sheets and architectural style drawings (drawings do not need to be stamped by architect or engineer). Some of these visual examples of your plans should be a part of your application and each example is critical in helping the Commission understand your proposal. Professional drawings are not always required, but all visual images should be clear and detailed. It is also helpful if you provide photographs of the property as it is currently. If you are restoring it to an earlier time period, it is helpful to provide photos from that time.
- ☐ **ALL information should be included with the completed form when you submit your application.** Remember to include details such as *siding, trim work, corner boards, hardware, masonry, gutters, railings, stairs, lighting, decking, fencing and retaining walls*. Please indicate on the plans where these items will be located as well as information detailing their construction.
- ☐ Scans, photos, drawings, files can be emailed or clear printed copies can be submitted.
- ☐ Have a Zoning Enforcement Officer sign off as indicated on application.
- ☐ Submit the completed form, supporting materials and the \$50 fee (check to: Town of Suffield) at least **nine days before** the HDC meeting (first Monday of the month). You'll receive a copy of the agenda in advance of the meeting.

B. Presentation to the Historic District Commission

- ☐ Be sure that you and/or your contractor will be available for the Historic District Commission meeting date and time. At least one representative is recommended to be present during the meeting, prepared to present your information to the Commission. Remember to bring material samples, etc. for your presentation to facilitate clarity and understanding.

The Commissioners will have reviewed your application prior to the meeting so they have time to prepare any questions. We look forward to working with you to preserve the historical fabric of our community.

If you are ever in doubt regarding the necessity of the certificate, we recommend an early consultation with the HDC Chairman via email (john.schwemmer@gmail.com) to streamline your project's approval. Please allow 24 hours for him to respond.