

Local Historic Districts in New Haven

What you need to know about Local Historic Districts in New Haven:

- what is the New Haven Historic District Commission?
- what is a “Certificate of Appropriateness”?
- what architectural changes require a Certificate of Appropriateness?
and what architectural changes do not?
- what is the procedure for obtaining a Certificate of Appropriateness?

In accordance with state enabling legislation, the New Haven Board of Aldermen has established three local historic districts within the city: the Wooster Square Historic District (1970), the Quinnipiac River Historic District (1977) and the City Point Historic District (2001).*

About Local Historic Districts

The legislation that enables municipal governments within the State of Connecticut to establish local historic districts specifies that the purpose in doing so is to “promote the educational, cultural, economic and general welfare of the public through the preservation and protection of the distinctive characteristics of buildings and places associated with the history of or indicative of a period or style of architecture of the municipality, of the state or of the nation.” Two-thirds of the voting property owners must indicate their support before an area may be designated a local historic district.

Local Historic Districts differ from National Register Historic Districts in that local districts provide greater protection for the designated properties. Once a local historic district is established, an historic district commission is appointed to review and act upon applications from property owners who wish to make exterior architectural changes.

** Property addresses for buildings within these districts may be found in the New Haven Land Records, Volume 2427, pages 763-766; Volume 2751, pages 29-32 and Volume 5844, pages 44-50, respectively.*

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What is the New Haven Historic District Commission?

The New Haven Historic District Commission is made up of eight members (five regular and three alternate), each of whom is appointed by the Mayor for a five-year term. The Commission's primary objective is to preserve and protect the distinctive architectural character of New Haven's historic districts.

In order to meet this objective, the Commission reviews applications that property owners within a local historic district are required to file before certain architectural changes can be made. Such modifications include any physical alteration to the exterior of a building that is visible from a public way (street, sidewalk or body of water). The permit, called a "Certificate of Appropriateness," must be obtained before any alteration, building addition, new construction or demolition work can be started.

What architectural changes require a Certificate of Appropriateness from the Historic District Commission?

Examples of work on a building located within a local historic district that require a Certificate of Appropriateness include:

- *masonry replacement and repointing*
- *building additions, including rooms, roofed porches, dormer, skylights, chimneys and outbuildings*
- *site improvements, such as fences, walls, walks, steps, driveways, parking areas, satellite dishes, TV antennas, solar panels, permanent signs, patios, decks, outbuildings and outdoor lighting fixtures*
- *addition, removal or replacement of any architectural detail or ornament*
- *partial or entire window, storm window, door and storm-door modification or replacement (except exact replacement)*
- *addition, removal or replacement of window shutters*
- *extensive or total replacement of any siding or roofing materials, whether similar to or different from the original*
- *building demolition and building replacement*

More than 360 architecturally significant properties are under the protection of the New Haven Historic District Commission.

What architectural changes do not require a Certificate of Appropriateness?

Examples of work on a building located within an historic district that do not usually require a Certificate of Appropriateness include:

- *any work not visible from a public way*
- *routine maintenance that does not involve a change in materials, design or texture*
- *re-roofing with the same materials presently visible*
- *painting and paint color*
- *interior alterations*

What is the procedure for obtaining a Certificate of Appropriateness?

A Certificate of Appropriateness application form, with instructions for its completion and design review guidelines for prospective building alterations, may be obtained from the Board of Zoning Appeals.

Applications should include architectural drawings, as well as photographs or other illustrative material that will assist the Commission in determining the impact of the proposed change(s) to a building's historical appearance.

A plot plan of the property is also helpful, as are samples of materials to be used and manufacturers' specification sheets for items such as windows, doors or fences.

If an applicant is not certain that a Certificate of Appropriateness is needed, or if the proposed architectural changes are complex ones, then the property owner may request an informal meeting with the staff of the City Plan Department.

Applications must be submitted at least three weeks prior to a regular Commission meeting. Once the Board of Zoning Appeals has received a completed application form, it is scheduled for presentation to the Commission. An application for a Certificate of Appropriateness requires proper legal notification and a public hearing.

What happens at a Commission meeting?

A Commission meeting generally consists of two parts: a public hearing and a public meeting. During the public hearing a property owner has the opportunity to present his or her proposal. Members of the public are permitted to speak either in favor of or in opposition to an application. During the public meeting, Commission members will discuss and vote on specific work proposals.

If the Commission votes to deny an application, written notice will be sent to the property owner, along with an explanation as to why the application was denied. The Commission can also approve an application with the addition of certain stipulations. If the applicant does not wish to comply with the stipulations, he or she may reapply with a modified design proposal. The applicant may also appeal the Commission's decision in Superior Court.

The New Haven Historic District Commission meets regularly on the second Wednesday of each month at:

New Haven City Hall, 165 Church Street, New Haven at 7:00 p.m.

For more information about The New Haven Historic District Commission, contact:

New Haven City Plan Department

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WEB www.cityofnewhaven.com/govt/gov40.htm



Photograph by David Barone

Willis Bristol House 584 Chapel Street

Located in the Wooster Square Historic District, this striking 1845 residence with Islamic Revival detailing is part of an architecturally distinguished group of buildings that have been preserved with guidance from the New Haven Historic District Commission.