

General Information for Groton Historic Districts* Regulations

Any proposed changes to buildings and landscaping within the districts, which require a public hearing, must obtain a **Certificate of Appropriateness**, from the Historic Districts Commission (HDC) to begin the proposed work. The Certificate of Appropriateness becomes part of your property file and **is required to obtain a building permit within the districts.**

*There are three historic districts in the Town of Groton.

Application Process

Applications for a Certificate of Appropriateness are available at the Land Use Department, located on the upper level of the Town Hall. An application is attached to this document. The application should include the following:

- ☐ A complete application will consist of all proposed work itemized and thoroughly described.
- ☐ The application fee, which is used to provide public notice in the Groton Herald.
- ☐ The following items should be included if needed, to convey the proposed work:
 - Historic photos, if available, are appreciated.
 - Site plan or hand drawing (if applicable).
 - Scaled plans and elevations of additions or new construction.
 - Details/profiles of moldings, cornices, etc. and their sizes and locations in the project.
 - Thorough description of the materials to be used.
 - Chosen manufacturer catalog cut sheets for proposed items to be used (windows, doors, lighting, etc.).
 - Paint chips or color charts for paint color changes.
 - Please include labeled photos of existing conditions.

The Commission normally meets on the third Tuesday of the month at 7:30 PM. The meetings are open to the public. Any town resident is entitled to appear and be heard on any matter before the Commission before it votes on an application. The agenda for each meeting is posted on the town's website.

A notice will be published in the local newspaper and Town Hall informing the public of a public hearing. The notice must appear in the newspaper two weeks prior to the hearing. Application submissions should be made with the notice deadline in mind. The Land Use Dept. (978-448-1109) will provide the submission date.

Definitions Regarding Your Application:

Public Way—Any portion of a property within the districts that is viewable from a town road or street is considered visible from a public way and subject to HDC review.

Public Hearing—A public hearing is required when proposed exterior changes, visible from a public way, could impact the character of the districts. At the hearing, the Commission will discuss the application with the applicant or their representative, listen to comments from abutters or other concerned citizens, and take a vote on the application.

Informal Discussion—Any person is welcome to attend a meeting to inquire about changes to your property that might require HDC approval. The board will advise you on your proposal and what materials to bring to a hearing if one is required. The requirements for a public hearing are not necessary for this kind of meeting. However, notifying the Land Use Department (978-448-1109) of your intentions is important so you can be placed on the meeting's agenda.

Replace In-Kind—Items which are replaced with the same item, size, materials, color, etc. are to be considered a replacement in-kind and not subject to HDC approval. Occasionally, a project may have previously been completed without historic districts standards. An example would be the installation of vinyl fencing. Please contact the Commission for an informal determination if you're unsure what constitutes a replacement in-kind.

Public Versus Private Facades and Spaces—There are instances where rear facades and yards are visible to the public. The Commission shall work with the applicant on spaces which are normally considered private rather than public in order to accommodate contemporary usage and needs in such a way which does not negatively impact the districts.

The Public Hearing

The Commission will discuss the application with the applicant or their representative, listen to comments from abutters or other concerned citizens, and take a vote on the application. Owners who have hired architects, designers or contractors are urged to have them present at the hearing. An application may be continued until the next meeting if the Commission deems it necessary (incomplete submission, or to perform a site walk, etc.). The Commission can issue a certificate with open items pending. The applicant must present those open items to the board at a future meeting.

The Commission must make a determination within 45 calendar days from the date on which the application was received, unless the applicant waives that requirement in writing.

A property owner, or their agent, cannot receive a building permit unless an HDC Certificate has been issued, or the applicant has a letter from the Commission stating that the changes involved are not subject to the Commission's jurisdiction.

The Town of Groton Building Commissioner and/or a member of the Historic Districts Commission shall have the right to inspect the project to certify compliance with the conditions set forth in the Certificate issued.

General Guidelines for Exterior Characteristics

The following guidelines are intended to assist in facilitating a smooth review process; individual applications may involve considerations beyond the scope of these guidelines.

Foundations—In new construction, foundation height and materials should be consistent with those typically found in other buildings of the same architectural style, and in harmony with foundation heights in the neighborhood. The foundation height of an addition should redefine that of the existing foundation as closely as possible.

Garage Doors—Garage doors which are replaced, must be replaced with doors which have applied panels, not molded panels. Note: Molded panel doors are not allowed in the districts.

Landscaping and Hardscaping—Changes to walks, walls, driveways (including material changes), retaining walls, fences (no vinyl fences), beds, sheds, and tree removal, etc. that are visible from a public way require HDC approval. Please note that no additional driveway spaces can be added without prior approval. Detailed landscaping plans need to be submitted to the HDC.

Lighting—Lighting additions and light fixture changes, including architectural and landscape lighting, are subject to the HDC review.

Masonry—Masonry features that are important in defining the building's character should be identified, retained and preserved. Such elements include but are not limited to chimneys, walls, walkways, cornices, hood molds, columns, door pediments, joints and bonding patterns.

Character defining masonry elements should be repaired rather than replaced. If replacement becomes necessary or an addition is added to the structure, the original should be replicated, matching the original design and materials as closely as possible. Alternate materials will be considered on a case-by-case basis, keeping in mind the historical significance of the existing masonry.

Painting previously unpainted masonry structures or applying stucco or other veneers to previously uncoated structures is not appropriate and will not be approved. Similarly, removing paint from a masonry building that has been historically painted is not appropriate. Flue style chimneys not original to the house can be considered for removal when no longer functioning.

Mechanicals—Placement of mechanicals such as heat pumps, gas tanks and air conditioner units, which can be viewed from a public way, must be screened with fencing or shrubs and are subject to HDC approval. Solar panels will be approved on a case-by-case basis.

Paint—Paint and stain colors are associated with particular architectural styles and periods. A hearing is not required to repaint a structure in a color matching the existing shade. A hearing will be required to change a paint or stain color on a building, trim, doors or detail elements. Sample paint chips should be submitted with the application. If the colors are deemed appropriate, the paint color(s) will become part of the Certificate of Appropriateness.

Roofs—Alterations that radically change, damage or destroy the roof's defining characteristics are not appropriate. New additions such as skylights, antennas or mechanical equipment should be installed in such a manner as to not be visible, or at least screened from the public way. Repairs to the roof should include limited replacement in-kind, or replacement with compatible substitute materials.

If roof replacement is necessary, the same materials as the original, or a compatible substitute material should be used. Architectural grade asphalt shingles are acceptable in the districts.

Shutters—All existing shutters and their hardware should be retained and preserved. If replacement becomes necessary, replacement shutters should match the original in terms of size,

scale, detail, thickness and hardware.

Siding and Trim—Original wood siding should be retained whenever possible. Deteriorated sections should be repaired or replaced in-kind.

Vinyl and metal siding are not allowed in the districts. Composite materials that are indistinguishable from natural or traditional products are considered acceptable.

Signage—Permanent and temporary signs need to be approved. All signs regarding businesses in the historic district are subject to HDC approval. A program in conjunction with the Groton Historic Commission encourages specific signage regarding the history of a home.

Windows—Windows should be replaced with windows that replicate the size, design configuration and hardware of the existing windows. Either 'simulated' or 'true divided' lights are required to maintain the historic appearance of an exterior divider through the glass and should match the existing lights (grille, muntin) pattern. Grilles between the glass without an exterior applied grille are not allowed. Storm windows may be added and should match the color of the window or house trim, or be painted to match. The use of unfinished aluminum is not allowed.

We hope you find this document helpful. Please contact the Historic Districts Commission if you have any questions.