

## **Common Questions About The Charlotte Historic District Commission**

### ***What is the Charlotte Historic District Commission?***

The Charlotte Historic District Commission is a body of citizens appointed by the Mayor and City Council to administer the Local Historic District Program, as outlined in the Charlotte Zoning Ordinance. Its responsibility is to encourage the preservation of historically and architecturally significant areas of Charlotte through the application of the terms of this ordinance. Majority of HDC members have proven expertise in an area relating to the Commission's responsibilities. By law, all designated local historic districts have at least one representative on the Commission. The HDC and its staff work with all business and property owners in historic districts to ensure that new development and improvements to existing properties can occur while maintaining the overall design integrity of the district.

### ***How is a local historic district designated?***

Historic districts are designated by an act of City Council through the rezoning process, after public review and comment. All affected property owners will have an opportunity to make their feelings known to Council well before a vote is taken. In addition, the City is required to solicit the comments of the State Historic Preservation Office prior to a City Council vote, in order to ensure that the proposed district meets the criteria outlined in state law.

### ***What does it mean to own property in a local historic district?***

Property owners in local historic districts are required to contact the HDC office before undertaking any exterior changes to existing structures, or before beginning any project involving new construction or demolition. The Commission or its staff will review the project. If it meets the terms of the ordinance and current HDC policy, a Certificate of Appropriateness will be issued. A building permit for exterior work cannot be issued in an historic district without a Certificate of Appropriateness.

### ***What is required in an application to the Historic District Commission?***

Application requirements vary, depending on the nature and complexity of the proposed project. The Historic District Commission staff is available to help anyone with the application process.

### ***How are minor projects managed?***

The HDC staff may approve certain minor projects in order to avoid unnecessary delays for smaller scale projects. Administrative approvals are available for specific kinds of work, provided staff determines that the proposal follows current HDC policy. Minor projects include fencing, signage, replacement windows and doors, small-scale rear additions, rear yard decks and patios, retaining walls, driveways, walkways, some tree removal, storm windows and doors, shutters, and rear yard accessory buildings in certain locations.

### ***Over what things does the Commission have review authority?***

Under current local law and HDC policy, the Commission reviews new construction, additions, demolition, setbacks, handicap access facilities, porch enclosures, chimneys, shutters, gutters, substitute siding, accessory buildings, placement of satellite dishes and antennae, placement of HVAC compressors, fencing, major tree removal, significant or permanent landscape features, parking areas and driveways, paving, signage, replacement roofing, replacement windows and doors, storm windows and doors, and the painting of unpainted masonry.

***What about routine maintenance?***

The Historic District Commission does not review repair and maintenance projects, as long as no material or design changes are made. For instance, the replacement of an asphalt shingle roof with a new asphalt shingle roof would not require HDC review. However, the replacement of a slate roof with an asphalt shingle roof would require the approval of the Commission.

***How long does it take to have projects reviewed and approved?***

Administrative approvals usually take only a few days, and often less if needed. Projects that require full HDC approval can take up to thirty days, since the Commission meets monthly. Occasionally, large-scale development projects can take longer, but this is extremely rare except for demolition or major new construction.

***What happens if one chooses to disregard the Commission's review process?***

All property owners in historic districts are required to consult with HDC staff before beginning any exterior project, and receive any necessary approvals prior to commencing work. When Commission staff learns of a project that is underway without HDC approval, every attempt is made to contact the property owner and rectify the situation as quickly as possible in a mutually acceptable manner. The Historic District Ordinance provides enforcement procedures, which are used only when all reasonable efforts to rectify a violation have failed.

***What about projects that are underway at the time a local historic district is established?***

Projects holding a valid building permit at the time a local historic district is established are grandfathered.

***Does the HDC require restoration of a property?***

No. The Historic District Commission only gets involved when you decide to do something to your property. The Commission will not cause you to initiate a project.

***Does the HDC require museum quality restorations?***

No. The purpose of Charlotte's historic district program is to ensure that changes that are made are compatible with the neighborhood. The Commission recognizes that these are living, vital neighborhoods, and does not want to inhibit that spirit in any way.

***How do I get in touch with the Commission's staff?***

If you have any questions at all, please feel free to contact John Rogers or Wanda Birmingham of the Historic District Commission staff at 336-2302 or 336-5994. You may also write the HDC at:

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