

## HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### 1. What is the difference between a local historic district and a national register district or place?

***Local Historic Districts:*** A Local Historic District (LHD) consists of a contiguous area of buildings and structures that represents either a distinct period of significance in the community's history or the evolution of the community over time. CGS, Section 7-147b defines the historic district as "an area, or a cluster of related buildings, or objects and structures, in a compatible setting which, taken as a whole, visually expresses styles and modes of living representative of various periods in American History." In general, an LHD is an area with clear boundaries enclosing a contiguous set of historically or architecturally significant structures that are related through proximity, ownership, history or use and that together tend to visually represent the community's heritage.

The LHD is different from a National Register or State Register historic district in that it provides for the local review of any exterior work that is visible from a public street, place or way. Properties within the LHD are subject to review, regardless of the age or condition of the specific building or structure. There are exceptions which include properties owned by higher education institutions and state owned properties.

Norwich has two local historic districts that were recognized: the Norwichtown Historic District in 1967 and the Little Plain Historic District in 1969. Local Historic Districts are not to be confused with National Register Districts; although both are automatically listed on the State Register of Historic Places, they are structured and reviewed differently.

***National Register of Historic Places:*** The National Register of Historic Places is the official list of the nation's buildings, sites, and structures that have a high degree of physical integrity and a documented level of historical or architectural significance. Authorized by the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 and administered by the Department of the Interior through the National Park Service, the National Register of Historic Places is a national program to identify, evaluate, and protect America's historic and archeological resources. There are currently more than 80,000 listings on the National Register of Historic Places, representing 1.4 million individual buildings sites, structures, objects, and districts.

Properties may be nominated to the National Register either individually or as part of a National Register Historic District. Nominations are processed through the State Historic Preservation Office of the Connecticut Commission on Culture & Tourism (CCT) using a standard format and must demonstrate that the particular resource has integrity of location, design, materials, setting, workmanship, feeling, and association. In addition, the nominated property or

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resource must meet one or more of the specific National Register criteria at the local, state, or national level.

Listing on the National Register of Historic Places entails no obligations on the part of private property owners. There are no restrictions on the use, treatment, transfer, or disposition of private property. The National Register does not require public access and does not automatically result in any local preservation designation. Owners of National Register-listed properties may be eligible to apply for grants or tax credits through particular state and federal programs, subject to the availability of funding.

The National Register is used by state and federal agencies to evaluate the potential risk of adverse impact on historic properties that may result from federally or state-funded, licensed, or permitted projects. In Connecticut, the Connecticut Environmental Protection Act (CEPA or Public Act 82-367, Section 22a-15 through 22a-19) also provides a mechanism through the Superior Court to prevent the “unreasonable destruction” of National Register-listed resources.

National Historic Landmarks are nationally significant historic places designated by the U.S. Secretary of the Interior because they possess exceptional value or quality in illustrating or interpreting the heritage of the United States. Today, fewer than 2,500 historic places bear this highest distinction. Working with citizens throughout the nation, the National Historic Landmarks Program draws upon the expertise of National Park Service staff to nominate new landmarks and provide assistance to existing landmarks.

In Norwich there are 26 properties individually listed on the National Register. In addition to individual properties, there are eleven historic districts and each contains many properties.

### **2. What is the difference between the Norwich Historic District Commission and the Norwich Historical Society?**

The Norwich Historic District Commission and the Norwich Historical Society are not the same entity; they are separate organizations.

The Norwich Historic District Commission is comprised of volunteers appointed by the city council. It was established by ordinance of the city council to ensure the protection and preservation of buildings and places of historic interest within the city. The Commission is empowered to review and approve plans for construction, reconstruction, or restoration of any building or structure within a designated historic district in order to determine the appropriateness of any and all changes that are visible from a public street or way.

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The Norwich Historical Society is a private not-for-profit organization that seeks to preserve, protect, and promote the rich history of Norwich, CT. They do have historic preservation programs, but they are not a City commission.

### **3. What determines whether or not a building is historic?**

Generally speaking, a building must be at least 50 years old and retain a majority of its original features. Association with a significant individual or event is also a consideration.

### **4. What is a Certificate of Appropriateness?**

A Certificate of Appropriateness, or COA, is a letter from the Historic District Commission authorizing the Building Department to permit the property owner in the local historic districts to proceed with the changes or improvements indicated in the COA application.

No building or structure shall be erected or altered within a local historic district until after an application for a certificate of appropriateness as to exterior architectural features has been submitted to the historic district commission and approved by said commission.

Per statute (7-147d (b)), no demolition permit for demolition or removal of a building or structure within a local historic district shall be issued by a municipality or any department, agency or official thereof until a certificate of appropriateness has been issued.

### **5. When Is a COA Required?**

Any project on a property within a Local Historic District that involves changes to the exterior of said property that is visible from any street or public way requires a COA. For more details please refer to the document: Definitions of Work Requiring a Certificate of Appropriateness. Note: Some items may not require a Building Permit but still meet the definitions and require a COA. If it is determined that the project involves routine maintenance or repair using authentically compatible materials, the Commission may find that a COA is not necessary.

### **6. Who May Apply for a COA?**

The property owner or authorized representative must apply for the property and project being considered. The COA is issued to the named applicant only and is not transferable.

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### **7. Where Can I Obtain a COA?**

A property owner who wishes to begin a project must complete an application for a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA), which can be obtained from the Chairman of the Historic District Commission, online at the Historic District Commission's webpage on the City of Norwich's website, or the Building Department. Once the COA is approved and a building permit is obtained, the project may proceed.

### **8. What Items Should I Include with Application?**

In addition to a properly completed COA application form you should include a written description of the project, appropriate photographs, drawings, quotes or scope of work from contractors, sketches and relevant samples of construction materials. Please note that it is possible for a COA to be denied if the Commission has not received enough information to make an informed decision.

### **9. What is the COA Application Hearing Process?**

Once the application is received by the HDC Chairman you will be notified of the public meeting date. A Public Notice must be printed in the Norwich Bulletin and posted online at the City website within five business days of the meeting. Applicants are invited to present their application to the Commission during the public hearing. Your application will be presented at the public hearing of the HDC which meets on the third Wednesday of the month at City Hall. Following approval by the Commission, the COA is filed with the City Clerk and Building Department where a permit may be issued if required.

### **10. How long is a COA Valid?**

A COA is valid for six months. That time period may be extended by action of the Historic District Commission prior to the expiration of the COA. Extensions cannot be provided after a COA has expired; a new COA application would be necessary.

### **11. Can I Modify, Change, or Add to an Active COA?**

Modifications, changes or additions to an active COA must be brought before the Historic District Commission during a regular meeting to approve the request. In cases where the modification, change or addition would require a separate Building Permit, you may need to file a separate COA application.

### **12. What is the Inspection and Review Process?**

The Building Inspector will inspect construction related to a Building Permit including the work approved in the COA. The Historic District Commission may inspect and review construction, changes, or improvements related to a COA.

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This oversight remains in force regardless of whether or not a building permit is required.

### **13. How can I contact the Historic District Commission with questions?**

Please email the Commission at [hdc@cityofnorwich.org](mailto:hdc@cityofnorwich.org) with any concerns or questions. We check the email during the work week Monday- Friday daily.

### **14. What are some Resources Available to Historic Homeowners?**

#### ***Preservation Connecticut***

Preservation Connecticut is a nonprofit organization, originally named Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation, established by special acts of the State Legislature in 1975 and 1985 to preserve, protect, and promote the buildings, sites, and landscapes that contribute to the heritage and vitality of Connecticut communities. For more resources for historic house homeowners, please visit Preservation Connecticut's website: [www.preservationct.org](http://www.preservationct.org)

Preservation Connecticut  
940 Whitney Avenue Hamden, CT 06517  
Phone: 203-562-6312  
Email: [contact@preservationct.org](mailto:contact@preservationct.org)

#### ***The State Historic Preservation Office***

The State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) administers a range of federal and state programs that identify, register and protect the buildings, sites, structures, districts and objects that comprise Connecticut's cultural heritage. It seeks new opportunities for collaboration on restoration and community revitalization.

The SHPO Office has information about financial incentives such as the Historic Homes Rehabilitation Tax Credit; please visit their website for more information.

State Historic Preservation Office  
450 Columbus Boulevard, Suite 5, Hartford, CT 06103  
Website: <https://portal.ct.gov/DECD/Services/Historic-Preservation>