



## OWNING A HOME WITHIN CHAPEL HILL HISTORIC DISTRICTS



Photo by Heather Slane

For Property Owners, Prospective Buyers, and Realtors of Properties within the Chapel Hill Historic Districts:

*NOTE: It is strongly recommended that realtors or sellers of a piece of property within any officially designated historic district in Chapel Hill make this brochure available to the buyer preferably well before or at very least at the closing of said property.*

Welcome to Chapel Hill's historic districts! You are choosing to live in one of Chapel Hill's oldest neighborhoods that dates to the years when this town was just beginning. The designated Historic Districts in Chapel Hill are:

- Franklin-Rosemary
- Cameron-McCauley
- Gimghoul

The Town has designated these neighborhoods as historic districts because they embody important elements of social, economic, political, or architectural history, as well as to promote the stabilization and enhancement of property values. These areas are rich in the events and stories about people that helped build our town, our state, and our nation (yes, we have had presidents live in our historic districts as

well as statesmen, authors, etc.). All of this is expressed in the buildings, walkways, and sites that witnessed these people and events within the historic districts.

Living in one of our historic districts means being a part of our community's history. The ambience and imagery of our districts helps shape these stories and events and gives them context. As a resident of the district, you will learn and share in the importance of maintaining the physical context of these districts for generations to come.

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# HISTORIC DISTRICTS

## What Is a Local Historic District?

Local historic districts are areas designated to protect and conserve the built heritage and character of Chapel Hill.

## What if I want to make changes to the exterior of my house?

Any changes to the exterior of properties within the local historic districts require a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA). Those making exterior changes to their buildings are encouraged to first contact the Chapel Hill Planning Department at 919-698-2743 or [planning@townofchapelhill.org](mailto:planning@townofchapelhill.org).

Applicants are required to demonstrate that the proposed scope of work complies with the Chapel Hill Historic District Design Principles & Standards. Minor work items, such as replacing asphalt roofing or new gravel driveways, may be administratively approved by staff; however, other work items, such as constructing a new house or addition, will require review and approval by the Historic District Commission (HDC). The detailed requirements for securing a COA are contained in the town's Land Use Management Ordinance (LUMO) 3.6.2.

A COA must be obtained before changing any exterior portion of any building or other structure. Changes that are made prior to obtaining a COA approval may result in the property owner having to undo some or all those changes because they are found to be incongruous with the historic districts. This can be both expensive and time consuming. After-the-fact permits, for which a COA is applied for after the work is done, may be subject to a penalty of two times the amount of the application fee.

## What is the process for a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA)?

### 1. Application Filing

It is strongly encouraged that applicants reach out to Planning Department staff to discuss their scope of work prior to submitting a COA application. Staff can provide guidance on adhering to the Chapel Hill Historic District Design Principles & Standards, discuss the COA process,

and provide recommendations on your application. To apply for a COA, please visit: [townofchapelhill.org/government/departments-services/planning/overlay-districts](http://townofchapelhill.org/government/departments-services/planning/overlay-districts).

Please see the Planning Department fee schedule for application costs: [townofchapelhill.org/government/departments-services/business-management/fee-schedules/planning-fee-schedule](http://townofchapelhill.org/government/departments-services/business-management/fee-schedules/planning-fee-schedule).

### 2. Application Review

Minor works may be reviewed by staff; however, major works are reviewed by the Historic District Commission (HDC). In both cases, staff or the HDC will take into account the historical and/or architectural significance of the structure under consideration as well as the exterior form and appearance of any proposed additions or modifications to that structure. They will apply the Chapel Hill Historic District Design Principles & Standards to ensure that the proposed work is not incongruous with the special character of the historic district.

### 3. What are the Chapel Hill Historic District Design Principles & Standards?

This document specifies specific criteria for ensuring that changes to the exterior of sites and buildings are not incongruous with the special character of the districts. The document is an extremely good reference for any homeowner contemplating changes to their property. These standards encourage design, whether contemporary or traditional, that is harmonious with the character of the historic district thus helping to maintain the specialness of these properties. It is available on the Town's website: [townofchapelhill.org/government/departments-services/planning/overlay-districts](http://townofchapelhill.org/government/departments-services/planning/overlay-districts).

### 4. Application Approval

Minor works can typically be approved by Planning Department staff within two weeks of application submittal.

For those applications that require HDC review, the Commission must make a decision by the end of the next commission meeting following 90 days after the application is filed, or within such time consented to by written notice



Photo by Angela Stiefbold

from the applicant, the Town Manager, or the HDC. The HDC shall either approve the application, approve the application with conditions, or deny the application.

Applicants will be notified of staff's or the HDC's decision in writing. If the application is denied, the notice shall include the reasons for denial. The decision may be appealed to the Board of Adjustment. A new application for the same property may be submitted only if substantive changes in plans are made for the proposed construction, reconstruction, alteration, restoration, or moving.

## What if I want to demolish or remove a structure on my property?

Demolition or removal also requires a COA. The HDC cannot deny an application for a COA to demolish a building or structure; however, the Applicant may have to wait up to a year for demolition. During this period, the commission may negotiate with the owner and other parties to preserve the building. If the commission finds that the building has no particular significance or value toward maintaining the character of the historic district, it may authorize earlier demolition.

## What if I have additional questions?

Please contact the Chapel Hill Planning Department at 919-968-2743 or [planning@townofchapelhill.org](mailto:planning@townofchapelhill.org). You can also visit the Historic District webpage at: [townofchapelhill.org/government/departments-services/planning/overlay-districts](http://townofchapelhill.org/government/departments-services/planning/overlay-districts).

