

# What You Need To Know About Local Historic Districts

Introduction and Permit Application  
Requirements

City of Detroit  
Historic District Commission

Coleman A Young Municipal Center  
2 Woodward, Suite 808  
Detroit, MI 48226

[http://www.detroitmi.gov/Government/Boards/  
Detroit-Historic-Commission-FAQs](http://www.detroitmi.gov/Government/Boards/Detroit-Historic-Commission-FAQs)

Ms. Jennifer Ross: [rossj@detroitmi.gov](mailto:rossj@detroitmi.gov)  
Ms. Audra Dye: [dyea@detroitmi.gov](mailto:dyea@detroitmi.gov)

*Mayor Mike Duggan*

*Detroit City Council  
Brenda Jones, President  
George Cushingberry Jr., President  
Pro Tem*

*Janee L. Ayers  
Scott Benson  
Raquel Castaneda-Lopez  
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Ms. Dye: [dyea@detroitmi.gov](mailto:dyea@detroitmi.gov)



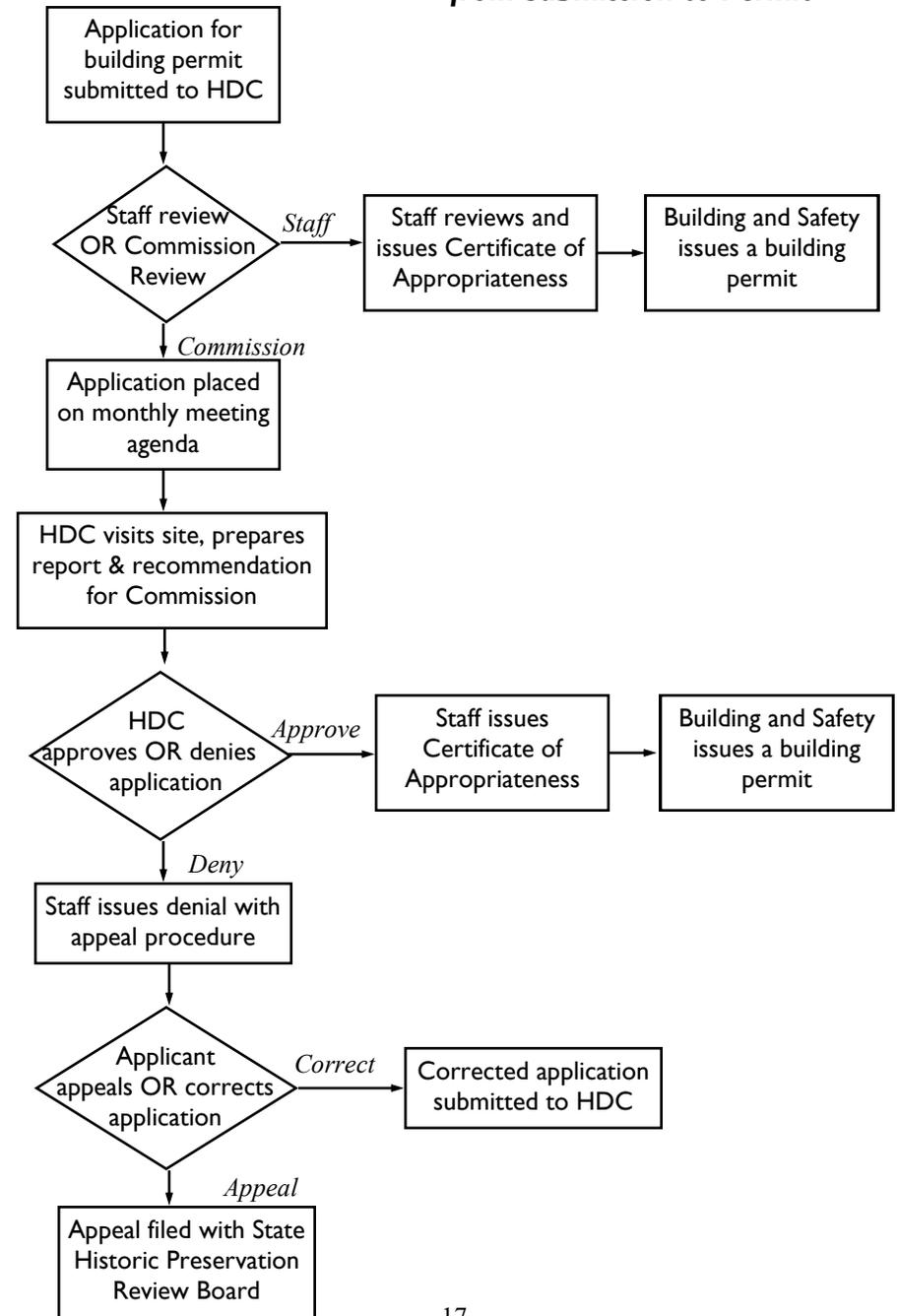
## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Who is the Historic District Commission	3
Benefits to Living in a Historic District	3
Frequently Asked Questions	4
Contact Us	4
What Requires Review	5
Application Requirements	6-9
Staff Approval List	10-13
2016 Meeting Schedule and Deadlines	14
Secretary of the Interior Standards for Rehabilitation	15
Historic District Guidelines	16
Flowchart for Application Approval	17

The Detroit Historic District Commission was formed by Detroit Ordinance 161-H in 1976. Its purpose is to ensure the preservation of historically and culturally significant areas of the City which are designated by the City Council as Historic Districts. Citizen members of the Commission are appointed by the Mayor and the Commission is staffed by the City of Detroit Planning and Development Department.

A building permit is required for any exterior changes to a building or site in a designated or proposed historic district. The Historic District Commission administers a building permit application review procedure and may approve or deny based on the appropriateness of the proposed work. Building permits are issued by the Buildings, Safety, Engineering & Environmental Department upon approval by the Historic District Commission. In addition to permit application reviews, the Commission is also involved in other matters concerning historic properties, preservation programs, and designation of proposed districts.

## Building Permit Application Process from Submission to Permit



## HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION GUIDELINES

The Detroit Historic District Commission has established guidelines to assist homeowners, residents, and contractors when planning projects that will affect the exterior of a historic property. These guidelines act as a starting point for alterations and consider protection of the historic property, preservation of a building's integrity and education in regard to the history of the city. Based on research regarding the city's past, the guidelines do not prevent alteration, but assist in keeping a neighborhood's character intact. The following list of guidelines are available from the Historic District Commission staff.

- Antenna and Satellite Dish
- Fence and Hedge
- Glass Block Basement Windows
- Masonry Cleaning
- Security Bar & Lighting
- Signs and Awnings

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## WHO IS THE HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION?

The Commission is made up of seven Detroit residents who are appointed by Mayor Duggan. These dedicated volunteers are generally residents of historic districts and represent such professions as architects and realtors. They generally meet the second Wednesday of the month beginning at 5:30 PM, to review applications for building permits in historic districts. A call to the Commission office can confirm meeting times and application deadlines

The Purpose of Historic Preservation in the city of Detroit is to:

- Safeguard the heritage of the city by preserving areas in the city which reflect elements of its cultural, social, spiritual, economic, political, engineering or architectural history;
- Stabilize and improve property values in such areas;
- Foster civic beauty and community pride;
- Strengthen the local economy; and promote the use of historic districts for the education, pleasure and welfare of the citizens of the City of Detroit.

## BENEFITS OF LOCALLY DESIGNATING HISTORIC DISTRICT

- Preserve Detroit's neighborhoods, housing stock, and history for future generations of Detroiters.
- May qualify to apply for federal historic tax credits.
- Regulation of exterior changes in neighborhoods including window replacement, ensuring new construction and additions are compatible, and the historic character of houses and grounds is maintained.
- Prevention of property neglect and demolition by the use of the *demolition by neglect* portion of the ordinance that requires owners to repair their properties before they reach such a state of disrepair that they have to be demolished.

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### What can I do to the inside of my house?

The Commission does not regulate changes to the interior of a house, unless the interior change affects the exterior appearance.

### How do I know what colors to paint my house?

The Commission has a publication called *Detroit Historic Districts Style and Color Guide* that gives the acceptable colors depending on the style of the house. Color charts and instructions are provided by the Commission staff.

### Does the Commission review what I do to the back of my house?

The Commission is required to review **all** exterior changes, including those not visible from the street. The **entire** house, garage and yard contribute to the historic character of the district.

### How does the Commission decide whether to approve my project?

The Commission is required to use “The Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation and Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings” when deciding whether work is appropriate in a historic district. The Standards are listed on page 15 of this brochure.

### How can I find out more?

Contact us:

Jennifer Ross, 313-224-8907  
rossj@detroitmi.gov

Audra Dye, 313-224-6543  
dyea@detroitmi.gov



## “THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR’S STANDARDS FOR REHABILITATION AND GUIDELINES FOR REHABILITATING HISTORIC BUILDINGS”

- 1) A property shall be used for its historic purpose or be placed in a new use that requires minimal change to the defining characteristics of the building and its site and environment.
- 2) The historic character of a property shall be retained and preserved. The removal of historic materials or alteration of features and spaces that characterize a property shall be avoided.
- 3) Each property shall be recognized as a physical record of its time, place, and use. Changes that create a false sense of historical development, such as adding conjectural features or architectural elements from other buildings, shall not be undertaken.
- 4) Most properties change over time; those changes that have acquired historic significance in their own right shall be retained and preserved.
- 5) Distinctive features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a historic property shall be preserved.
- 6) Deteriorated historic features shall be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature shall match the old in design, color, texture, and other visual qualities, and where possible, materials. Replacement of a missing feature shall be substantiated by documentary, physical, or pictorial evidence.
- 7) Chemical or physical treatments, such as sandblasting, that cause damage to historic materials shall not be used. The surface cleaning of structures, if appropriate, shall be undertaken using the gentlest means possible.
- 8) Significant archeological resources affected by a project shall be protected and preserved. If such resources must be disturbed, mitigation measures shall be undertaken.
- 9) New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction shall not destroy historic materials that characterize the property. The new work shall be differentiated from the old and shall be compatible with the massing, size, scale, and architectural features to protect the historic integrity of the property and its environment.
- 10) New additions and adjacent or related new construction shall be undertaken in such a manner that if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment would be unimpaired.

For more info: <http://www2.cr.nps.gov/tps/care/index.htm>

**Meeting and Application Deadline  
Schedule for 2016**

<b>APPLICATION DUE DATE</b>	<b>MEETING DATE (2nd Wed. of each month) No Regular Meeting in January</b>
Monday, January 25	Wednesday, February 10
Monday, February 22	Wednesday, March 9
Monday, March 28	Wednesday, April 13
Monday, April 25	Wednesday, May 11
Monday, May 23	Wednesday, June 8
Monday, June 27	Wednesday, July 13
Monday, July 25	Wednesday, August 10
Monday, August 29	Wednesday, September 14
Monday, September 26	Wednesday, October 12
Monday, October 24	Wednesday, November 9
Monday, November 28	Wednesday, December 14

All Commission meetings are held in the Coleman A. Young Municipal Center beginning at 5:30 PM, unless otherwise noted.

Applications must be received in the Commission office at 2 Woodward, Suite 808, **by 5 PM on the due date.**

**Historic District Commissioners**

<b>Devan Anderson, Chair</b>	
<b>Kenneth Sanders</b>	<b>Richard Hosey</b>
<b>James Hamilton</b>	<b>Dennis Miriani</b>
<b>Lauren Hood</b>	<b>Alease Johnson</b>

**What Requires Review**

<b>Call the Commission before:</b>
Changing paint colors
Removing large trees, shrubbery, plantings
Installing new or replacement fencing
Replacing roofing, flashing, gutters
Reconstructing areas of masonry walls, chimneys, floors, porches, etc.
Installing new storm and security doors, installing new storm windows
Reconstructing all or part of a porch
Installing new doors, garage doors, security doors
Installing or replacing signage, including awnings
Cleaning the building
Demolishing all or part of a building, including garages
Constructing a new building or addition
Installing new or replacement storm windows
Removing, repairing, or replacing existing windows; installing new windows

<b>Go ahead with your project if:</b>
Painting in the same colors in the same location
Trimming or pruning trees, shrubs, plantings
Repairing a few sections of fence with like materials and sizes
Repairing <b>a few</b> shingles, flashing, gutters with like materials
Replacing <b>a few</b> panes of glass with matching glass, switching seasonal storms/screens
Tuckpointing <b>small areas</b> of mortar with matching mortar
Installing or removing <b>existing</b> storms and screens for the season
Replacing <b>small deteriorated areas</b> of siding with identical materials and sizes
Repairing existing doors with identical materials
Putting out or removing cloth awnings on existing frames for the season.

**The above lists are NOT all inclusive. If you do not see your project on these list, CALL THE COMMISSION!!!**

## **Application Requirements**

*Applicants must submit one complete set of information in a digital format.*

### **New Construction / Additions (including garages):**

- A completed City of Detroit Building Permit Application
- A completed *Historic District Commission Application for New Construction or Additions*. Both pages **must** be submitted.
- One (1) set of scaled and/or dimensioned drawings on 11"x 17" paper, one (1) set of blueprints, and a thumb drive with the information saved as a PDF that includes:
  - site plan showing all changes and landscape features, including location of construction fencing if applicable;
  - floor plans
  - elevations
  - sections and other details as needed
  - material samples and colors for roofing, siding, and trim
  - brochures showing materials and design for windows, doors, garage doors, exterior lighting, and fencing
  - the timeline for the project including a start date, exterior completion date, landscaping completion date, and occupancy

### **Door & Garage Door Replacement (Security Doors)**

- A completed City of Detroit Building Permit Application
- A detailed description of existing doors including materials, and a statement of why repair is not possible and why replacement is necessary
- Brochures showing materials and design of doors

### **Paint Color Change**

- A completed City of Detroit Building Permit Application
- Samples of the proposed paint color (i.e., paint chips) and a list of locations where paint color will be applied (photographs and/or diagrams may also be used)

### **Porch Reconstruction and other Repairs (Satellite dishes)**

- A completed City of Detroit Building Permit Application
- A detailed description of the proposed work including:
  - description of existing materials and colors
  - a description of which components will be retained or repaired
  - a statement of why the components being replaced cannot be repaired
  - a description of the proposed replacement materials and colors

29. *The installation of new light fixtures* under the condition that they are compatible with the building's historic appearance in scale, style and finish and meets the district's Elements of Design.
30. *The installation of potted/moveable plants.*
31. *The installation of a new dumpster enclosure* under the condition that the location, dimension, and materials conform to the Detroit City Code/Zoning Ordinance.

20. *Erection/installation of canvas awnings or canopies* at a new location provided that the new awning or canopy is not plastic or vinyl coated or does not appear to be so; the color is appropriate to the trim colors on the building; and installation meets the terms and conditions of the Commission's *Signs and Awnings Guidelines* and the *City of Detroit Zoning Ordinance: Article XIV. General Development Standards*.
21. *The renewal of seasonal outdoor café plans* with the condition that the future application does not change from a plan that the Detroit Historic District Commission approved and no complaints were received about the seasonal outdoor café plan during the previous season.
22. *A change in street furnishing and/or materials* that does not change the location of the barrier, barrier style, and meets the *Detroit Historic District Commission Color Guide*.
23. *Erection of temporary event tents* for a period of fifteen (15) days, with one renewal per calendar year.
24. *Removal of landscaping* that is located in close vicinity to an historic building to the extent that it is damaging/has the potential to damage the historic building.
25. *Installation of new cellphone antennas and associated equipment* at a building rooftop provided that the new cellphone antennas and associated equipment is finished the same color of the exterior surface to which it shall be affixed and it is minimally-visible from the direct right-of-way.
26. *Installation of new metal or wood hand railing at existing porches* under the condition that such work does not result in the removal/replacement of existing historic age fabric and the new railing is compatible in design, dimension, and finish color to existing porch's historic appearance.
27. *The replacement of non-historic age asphalt roof shingles* with new asphalt shingles under the condition that the design, dimension, profile, and color of the new/replacement asphalt shingles are compatible with the district's Elements of Design and the building's historic appearance.
28. *The installation of a new hand railing at porches* under the condition that they are compatible to the building's historic appearance and do not result in the removal of historic fabric.

#### **Roof Replacements (Historic Roof Materials)**

- A completed City of Detroit Building Permit Application
- Material samples (for asphalt shingles a 3"x3" piece is sufficient)
- A description of existing roofing material and color (provide a sample if possible)
- A detail description of proposed work, including related work such as gutters, soffit and fascia
- A completed *Historic District Commission Application for Replacement of Historic Roofing* (both pages must be submitted) which includes:
  - written justification of why the historic roofing material needs to be replaced
  - two (2) estimates of the cost to repair the existing roof
  - two (2) estimates of the cost to replace with the same material
  - two (2) estimates of the cost to replace with new imitation of the original material (synthetic slate or tile)
  - two (2) estimates of the cost for asphalt shingle replacement

#### **Roof Replacements (non-Historic Roof Materials)**

- A completed City of Detroit Building Permit Application
- Material samples (for asphalt shingles a 3"x3" piece is sufficient)
- A description of existing roofing material and color (provide a sample if possible)
- A detailed description of proposed work, including related work such as dormers, gutters, soffit and fascia

#### **Fence, Paving, Walls, Landscaping Installation/Removal**

- A completed City of Detroit Building Permit Application
- A scaled and/or dimensioned site plan showing:
  - the existing lot lines
  - the existing buildings
  - the location and dimension of existing and proposed sidewalks, driveways, fencing (including height), landscape materials, and other landscape features
- Material and color samples for fencing, walls, paving
- Brochure(s) showing fencing other manufactured landscape items proposed
- In cases of removal include a detailed justification of why the item(s) need to be removed

### **Demolition (including partial demolitions)**

- A completed City of Detroit Application for Building Permit
- A structural assessment report of the property, completed according to the Commission's template. The assessment must be completed by a licensed structural engineer.
- Detailed justification stating why building or portion of building needs to be demolished
- A detailed description of what will happen to the site after the demolition occurs
- In cases of partial demolition, include elevation showing the building and surface treatments to newly exposed walls

### **Sign Installation/Replacement**

- A completed City of Detroit Application for Building Permit #4;
- Scaled and dimensioned drawings of signs including photo simulations
- In cases where signs will be attached to the building, include the entire building elevation
- Color and material samples
- In cases of replacement, a detailed description including the colors, materials and location(s) of existing signs and justification of why the signs need to be replaced

### **Building Cleaning**

- A completed City of Detroit Building Permit Application;
- A detailed description of the cleaning method, including the names of chemicals and the pressure of any washes or applications
- Brochures for cleaning agents, and
- A description of the surface treatment after cleaning

### **Replacement of Historic Siding Material**

- A completed City of Detroit Building Permit Application
- A brochure or other information giving the color, materials, and dimensions of the proposed replacement siding
- A completed *Historic District Commission Application for Replacement of Historic Siding* (both pages must be submitted) which includes:
  - written justification of why the historic siding material needs to be replaced

9. *Replacement of an existing fence* provided the type, materials, and height match the existing fence, OR meets the *Fence and Hedge Guidelines*.
10. *Replacement of an asphalt shingle roof with a wood shingle, tile or slate roof* provided the owner or contractor can substantiate that wood shingles originally existed on the roof.
11. *Installation of gas or electric lamps* in the tree lawn of the Indian Village Historic District, provided the lamps match the standard lamp in the district.
12. *Reconstruction of existing porches*, provided the materials and design match the existing materials and design, and that the colors meet the *Detroit Historic Districts Style and Color Guide*.
13. *Change of paint color(s)*, provided the new color(s) meets the Detroit Historic Districts Style and Color Guide.
14. *Installation of a temporary, chain link construction fence* for a period that does not exceed nine (9) months.
15. *The installation of glass blocks to replace basement windows* with the following conditions: (a) the windows are recessed to the location of the existing basement windows; (b) screening or grates are provided to cover the glass block; (c) the windows are no larger than 36" wide by 24" high; and (d) openings with glass block on the front or visible from a side street shall be screened with foundation plantings that cover the windows. The installation should meet the *Glass Block Installation Guidelines*.
16. *The removal of dead, diseased or damaged trees* with a written statement from a professional service or arborist.
17. *A change in walkway or driveway material* that matches the same width and length, and meets the districts' elements of design.
18. *Erection of a fence and or hedges at a new location* provided the type, materials, and height conform to the *Fence and Hedge Guidelines*.
19. *Installation of a sign or canvas awning at a new location* provided it conforms with the Historic District Commission guidelines on *Signs and Awnings*

**LIST OF WORK ITEMS  
THE STAFF OF THE DETROIT HISTORIC DISTRICT  
COMMISSION CAN APPROVE**

Note: all other types of work must go before the Commission at their monthly meeting.

1. *Gutter and downspout replacement*, provided that: (a) quality materials like copper are not being removed and replaced, and (b) the design of gutters and downspouts closely resembles the original, and the routing of the downspouts is either the original or not so placed as to be intrusive in the design of the building, and (c) the colors meet the terms and conditions of the *Detroit Historic Districts Style & Color Guide*.
2. *Masonry cleaning*, provided that the application meets the terms and conditions of the Commission's policy on Exterior *Masonry Cleaning Techniques*.
3. *Re-roofing of an asphalt shingle roof* with new asphalt shingles, provided that the shingles are of a color and texture resembling historic roofing materials used in the district and/or on the building in question, where that information is known.
4. *Window and/or door replacement*, provided that the design and material (s) conforms with the original, and the color conforms to the *Detroit Historic Districts Style & Color Guide*; where the existing door or window is not original to the structure, the replacement should be compatible with the architectural design of the structure.
5. *Storm window and/or door installation* provided that (a) mullions, muntins, and meeting rails of storm windows conform with those of the prime window, and the design of the storm door reflects the design of the prime door, and (b) if aluminum or vinyl storm windows and doors are used, the color is appropriate under the *Detroit Historic Districts Style & Color Guide*.
6. *Window or door boarding*, provided that (a) the boarding up of window (s) and/or door(s) is temporary and for the protection of the building.
7. *Replacement of the fabric of existing canvas awnings*, provided that the new canvas is not plastic or vinyl coated or does not appear to be so; and where the color is appropriate to the trim colors on the building
8. *Antenna and Satellite dish installation*, provided that the design and location meets the guidelines in Historic District Commission *Antenna and Satellite Dish Guidelines*.

- two (2) written estimates from different companies of the cost to repair and paint the existing siding
- two (2) written estimates from different companies for the replacement and painting of the siding in matching materials
- two (2) written estimates from different companies for the replacement of the siding with an alternate (synthetic) material
- detailed photographs showing deterioration of the original siding

**Window Replacement (Historic Windows)**

- A completed City of Detroit Building Permit Application
- A completed *Historic District Commission Application for the Replacement of Historic Windows* (all pages must be submitted) which includes:
  - written justification of why the historic windows need to be replaced
  - a brochure or other information giving the color, materials and configuration of the proposed new replacement windows;
  - two (2) written estimates from different companies of the cost to repair and paint the existing windows
  - detailed photographs showing deterioration of the window interiors

Per Resolution 98:02, Adopted 3-11-98  
Effective 6-1-98, Amended 1-8-03 & 7-18-13



Turn to Page 14 for the Meeting  
Dates and Application Deadlines.