

***Wenham Historic District Commission  
Guidelines  
Application Review Process***

***Introduction***

At the Town Meeting on March 18, 1972 the voters of the Town of Wenham passed a By-law establishing an Historic District along Main Street from Beverly to the Hamilton town line.

The By-law also established a Wenham Historic District Commission to exercise the powers and duties granted in Chapter 40-C of the General Laws of the Commonwealth. Under the rules of the Commission property owners in the Historic District are required to present plans to the Commission before undertaking certain changes in the District. These guidelines are offered by the Commission to aid homeowners and other people when preparing plans to submit to the Commission. They suggest several items that should be considered by persons preparing such plans in order to insure some degree of consistency among plans and to avoid time-consuming delays for the property owner and the Commission. These guidelines also describe the application and approval procedures.

***Purposes of Design Review***

The purpose of the design review is to promote the educational, cultural, economic and general welfare of the public through the preservation and protection of the distinctive characteristics of buildings and places significant in the history of the Town of Wenham or their architecture, and through the maintenance and improvement of settings for such buildings and places and the encouragement of design compatible therewith.

All design reviews will be based upon the *Historic District Guidelines* dated 1999, available at the Wenham Town Hall (Building Inspector), and upon the *Zoning By-Laws of the Town of Wenham*. Applicants are advised to follow those guidelines when designing.

***Review Criteria***

All new construction and signs and modifications to existing, which can be seen from the public way, must be submitted to the Historic District Commission for Review. New construction and modifications to existing structure, which cannot be seen from the public way, do not need to be submitted to the Historic District Commission for review.

Repairs to or replacement of existing structures or signs, which have the same design and use the same materials as the existing structure, do not need to be submitted to the Historic District Commission for review.

### ***Application Process and Design Review Process***

All applications are first submitted to the Building Inspector. The Building Inspector refers all applications for construction in the Historic District to the Historic District Commission, for design review, recommendations and approval. The Historic District Commission is required to acknowledge the receipt of all applications within 14 days. If the proposed application meets with the approval of The Historic District Commission, a Certificate of Appropriateness is issued. A copy of the Certificate of Appropriateness is given to the Building Inspector. The Building Inspector may then issue a building permit.

The Historic District Commission typically reviews applications in open meetings, at which applicants are urged to attend. The Historic District Commission encourages meetings with potential applicants before an application for a Certificate of Appropriateness is submitted.

The intent of this guideline is to help applicants understand the permit process and the requirements for supporting documentation that is to be submitted to The Historic District Commission for review.

### **Application and Reviews Steps**

1. Formal application: This begins with submission of the required form plus appropriate supporting information, to the Building Inspector. The necessary form and information may be obtained from the Office of *the Building Inspector*, located in the Wenham Town Hall. Applicants will find it beneficial to consult with the Historic District Commission prior to submission of the formal application. - The Historic District Commission may be contacted through its Chairman or Secretary by way of the Building Inspector's Office at the Town Offices.
2. Submittals Required with Application: It is essential that sufficient information be submitted with the application so that the Historic District Commission can have a comprehensive understanding of the proposed construction or modification. This will enable the Historic District Commission to make a more informed decision. Two sets of design documents and specifications must be submitted with the application.

The Historic District Commission requires 2 copies for its review. If the applicant meets with the Historic District Commission prior to formal application for a special permit, 2 copies must be provided directly to the Historic District Commission prior to the meeting. When meeting with the Historic District Commission following formal application, the applicant should check to ensure these copies have reached the Historic District Commission, and if necessary supply additional copies.

The submitted documents must show location and scale of the proposed construction or addition and relationships to existing and proposed project components. Depending upon the scope and nature of the proposal, the following design documents and specifications are required.

Construction plans at a scale no smaller than 1/8" = 1 ft, preferably 1/4" = 1 ft. Preferably plans should be prepared by an architect who is knowledgeable of architectural detail, sizes of units, structural detail and conformity within an Historic District.

Plans submitted should show a dimensional relationship within a boundary or existing structure or both, with identification of the compass points and scale of the plan (i.e., plot plan).

The more complete the presentation is to the Commission, the more expedient the Commission can be in processing the application for Certificate of Appropriateness.

Alterations to plans or proposed work after the Commission has responded favorably on the original proposal and issued a Certificate of Appropriateness, will require a resubmittal of the change for reapproval by the Commission.

#### Special Permits for Signage

Applications for special permits for signage will include the items listed in the signage guidelines section.

#### Exceptions

Proposed work of minor detail may not require plans; however, a clear and complete description will be necessary for the Commission to properly evaluate the proposal.

#### Photographs

Proposed work such as changes in the design of a doorway or changes in the design of a sign may be illustrated with a photograph of an existing design, provided dimensions are provided with the photograph to clarify the relationships.

Information, drawings, etc. not included with the formal application may be given directly to the Historic District Commission. Applicants are fully responsible for assuring that all information has been prepared and submitted at least 7 days prior to formal review by the Historic District Commission. Failure to submit sufficient information may delay or make impossible the preparation of recommendations by the Historic District Commission, and thus may delay action by the Building Inspector.

3. Meetings: The Historic District Commission meets the third Thursday of every month. Applicants shall notify the Historic District Commission Chairman of readiness for review and a meeting time will be mutually agreed upon. Applicants are advised to attend. Meetings will be held at the Wenham Town Hall unless agreed otherwise.

4. Historic District Commission Response: In order to resolve design concerns that are identified, the Historic District Commission will generally make specific suggestions to the applicant prior to formal consideration. It is not the Historic District Commission purposes to provide the actual design. However, the Historic District Commission can, based upon the judgment of its members choose to recommend against granting a Certificate of Appropriateness for any of the following reason.

- Insufficient information to adequately evaluate the design or design intent
- Poor overall design quality.
- Incompatible design elements.
- Inappropriate design concept or design treatment.
- Other identified issues.

If the Historic District Commission approves the proposed construction, a Certificate of Appropriateness will be issued. The Building Inspector receives a copy of the Certificate of Appropriateness. The Building Inspector may then issue a building permit for the construction. If the proposed construction is not approved, recommendations by the Historic District Commission, which it believes could make the proposal acceptable, will be given to the applicant and the building inspector for consideration. A written statement of the Historic District Commission findings will be forwarded to the applicant following the date of Historic District Commission review.

### ***Zoning and Code Compliance***

Applicants have total responsibility for compliance with all applicable standards of the *Zoning By-Laws of the Town of Wenham* and all other federal, state and local codes and ordinances including, but not limited to, securing necessary building permits, utility connections, agreements for service, certificates of insurance, bonds and other requirements.

## ***GENERAL GUIDELINES***

### ***OVERALL DESIGN***

Although there may be an unlimited number of ways, to preserve, restore or recreate the abundance of architectural styles existing in the District, there are some ways that are more effective--and possibly simpler--than others in retaining the appropriate character of the District and of each building. There are a few basic rules for the owner to follow when ideas are being formed and are being translated into documented plans. Architects experienced in Historic District work apply these as a matter of course and when extensive remodeling or new work is contemplated, the Commission urges owners to seek professional assistance in order to enhance their property and, at the same time, avoid costly errors and unnecessary delays.

- Changes to existing buildings should be directed toward retaining or restoring the original design. This is of great importance when changes are proposed to houses and buildings having considerable historic value. The Commission will ask owners to provide full information concerning the proposed changes. Such information could include references to similar restoration or changes in other Historic Districts or locations, publications, Historical Association records, etc.
  
- Changes to existing buildings or plans for new buildings should be consistent with the style of the period in which they were built or are proposed to emulate. Proposals for new structures should recognize and accommodate the period styles of buildings nearby and they should not detract from the architectural harmony of their surroundings. Unity of style and design should be maintained or restored.
  
- Architectural details and building materials should fit the period and style of the original building. Use of materials and changes in design that are alien to the original style may be sufficient reason for the Commission to deny a certificate of appropriateness.
  
- Mixing of design features from several periods or use of details from earlier periods should be avoided. Attempts to make a building look older than it really is often produce an unattractive hodgepodge that can detract from the character of the Historic District.
  
- Artificial, quaint or "cute" design features should be avoided, particularly those that tend to conform to architecture from another place or period; i.e., design styles appropriate for Williamsburg may be inappropriate for New England.

### ***DOORS, WINDOWS, ETC.***

- "Openings" of a building should be viewed from the perspective of the total structure--or wall--as well as individually. "Openings" in this sense usually are doors, windows, or other apertures.
- In most buildings along the Historic District, the original design created a simple, harmonious pattern by using consistent proportions in window spacing, the subdivision of window panes, the locations of doors, and the division of glass panes in doors. Also, the trim and frames of windows and doors, and the size, style and location of shutters and blinds are other factors.
- Proposed treatment of "openings" will be of particular interest to the Commission with the objective of preserving or restoring such features consistent with the original or period design. Changing such openings to accommodate today's standard size units is not appropriate for many buildings in the District and owners should be aware of this when preparing plans.

### ***NEW CONSTRUCTION AND ADDITIONS***

Additions to existing structures and new construction will be evaluated according to appropriateness of size and shape in relation to the land on which it will be located and to the other buildings, structures and sites in the vicinity. As authorized by law, the Commission may impose dimensional and setback requirements in addition to those required by applicable town by-laws.

New additions or alterations to historic buildings or sites should be done in such a manner that if they were to be removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the original building and site would not be impaired.

### ***BUILDING USE***

Where possible, the original use of each building should be continued since this usually assures preservation of its distinctive architecture. Where original purpose use is not feasible, the Commission will expect that new use will preserve existing exterior features.

Changes in use of buildings in the District will not be considered as sufficient justification for changes in exterior design.

### ***FENCES--WALLS--GATES, ETC.***

Fences can be erected for utilitarian and/or aesthetic reasons. Selection of fence type should consider its comparability with the site, building and neighborhood. Since fences create visual and physical boundaries, they should be used to provide continuity of design within a site or setting and they should not interrupt or bisect such identities.

Where certain types of fences are required for safety or protection, the Commission will ask for evidence that thorough consideration has been given to a wide range of wood, stone, brick, and concrete fences or walls before application for a certificate of appropriateness is submitted.

Many types of wire fencing are inappropriate for most locations in the Historic District. However, the Commission will consider such use where an area, not prominent from the public way, is to be enclosed or where filtration of sunlight to adjacent property is an important factor.

### ***SIDING***

1. The siding on any existing structure in the district shall be replaced, if necessary, with siding which matches the material, exposure, profile and texture of the original siding or another siding deemed appropriate for that period by the Commission. When existing siding materials are sound or repairable, replacement is not recommended.
2. Artificial siding is unacceptable in the Historic District.
  - A. Exception: The Commission prefers the use of siding materials which are authentic and that match other examples of authentic, original siding found throughout the District. However, the Commission may consider the use of artificial siding under the following circumstance:
    1. On new construction, which is physically and visually independent from all other, existing structures.
    2. On facades not visible from the public way.
  - B. Artificial siding will only be considered by the Commission when the following criteria is met:
    1. The applicant must present sufficient evidence as to why authentic siding should not or cannot be used for this particular application.
    2. Actual samples of the kind of artificial siding to be used must be presented to the Commission, including details of all window and door casings, corner boards, fascia, soffit, and eave details.
    3. Only those kinds of artificial siding will be considered that match the texture, profile, density and exposure of other natural and original siding materials found in the district. Artificial masonry siding is not acceptable.

### ***GUTTERS AND DOWNSPOUTS***

1. The gutters and downspouts on any existing structure in the district shall be replaced, if necessary, with gutters and downspouts which match the exposure and profile of the original gutters and downspouts. Particular attention should be given to matching all original details with special attention given to the way the gutters return at the corners.
  - A. Exceptions: The Commission prefers the use of materials, which are authentic, and that match other examples of original gutters and downspouts found throughout the district. However, the Commission may consider the use of gutters and downspouts made from alternate materials under the following circumstances:
    1. On new construction which is physically and visually independent from all other existing structures.
    2. On existing structures only when the original gutter and eave details match the profile of the artificial gutter and eave details and the end result will be relatively identical to the original conditions.
  - B. Gutters and downspouts made from alternate materials will only be considered by the Commission when the following criteria is met:
    1. The applicant must present sufficient evidence as to why authentic gutters and downspouts should not or cannot be used for this particular application.
    2. On existing structures the applicant must provide detailed drawings and photographs showing both the original or existing gutters and downspouts and the proposed artificial gutters and downspouts. Particular attention must be given to showing new and proposed profiles and returns. The appropriate alternative materials must be painted to match the texture of other painted trim on the structure.
    3. Actual samples of the new gutters and downspouts must be presented to the Commission for evaluation.

### ***SKYLIGHTS***

Skylights within' our District visible from the public way will require an application for approval. Our Commission recommends designs of flush types only that parallel the slope of the roof and conform to both size and geometric proportions with respect to the roof.

***SOLAR COLLECTORS (Active and Photovoltaic)***

Solar collectors within the District, visible from the public way, will generally be discouraged. Consideration of an alternative non-visible location should be thoroughly reviewed before making application. Our approval, preceded by a public hearing, will be required for all visible installations. Our Commission will judge applications on the following criteria:

1. Flush to roof mounting.
2. Minimum number of panels or size-relative to the roof area.
3. Color of frames and panels to blend with color of roof.
4. Relative effect to period of dwellings
5. Location and geometry relative to roof area.

***SATELLITE DISH ANTENNAS***

The Historic District Commission must approve the location of a satellite dish antenna.

***WINDMILLS***

Construction or installation of windmills within our District will generally be considered inappropriate.

***TOWERS***

Towers for transmission purposes will also be considered inappropriate.

***ONE-OF-A-KIND STRUCTURES***

Structures proposed within the District, which do not presently conform to existing types of architecture or design-are considered inappropriate, as they will create a negative impact upon the District.

***DUMPSTERS***

The use of dumpsters within the district on a permanent basis is discouraged. If, because of the nature of a particular business, the use of a dumpster is absolutely necessary, the Commission requires that the dumpsters be placed at the rear of the premises, concealed from the public's view. Consideration should also be given to cleanliness, the control of odors and the impact on neighbors, even though this largely falls under the jurisdiction of the Board of Health.

If the dumpster location must be visible from the street, the dumpsters shall be enclosed with a structure which contains both lockable doors, walls and a roof. Detailed plans of the proposed structure must be submitted to the Commission for its approval. The Commission must also be convinced that all efforts to find a location not visible from the street have been exhausted.

Temporary dumpsters which are used for construction demolition are permitted provided that they remain clean and orderly while in use and that they are removed immediately when either filled or when no longer needed.

Temporary dumpsters should be located as far from the street as possible and when the opportunity presents itself, they should be concealed from public view.

## ***DEFINITIONS***

Preservation is the process of sustaining the form and extent of a structure essentially as it now exists. Preservation aims at halting further deterioration and providing structural stability but does not contemplate significant rebuilding.

Restoration is the process of accurately recovering the form and details of a property as it appeared at a particular period of time by means of removal of later work and the replacement of missing original work.

Reconstruction is the process of reproducing by new construction The exact form and detail of a vanished structure, or part thereof, as it appeared at a specific period of time. Reconstruction should be undertaken only when the property to be reconstructed is essential for understanding and interpreting the value of a historic district and sufficient documentation exists to ensure an exact reproduction of the original.

Rehabilitation is the process of returning a property to a state of utility, through repair or alteration, which makes possible an efficient contemporary use. In rehabilitation, those portions of the property which are important in illustrating historic, architectural, and cultural values are preserved or restored.

## ***EXCLUSIONS***

Changes made to the following items or under the following circumstances do not require application to the Commission for a certificate of appropriateness:

1. Terraces, walks, driveways, sidewalks and similar structures, or any one or more of them, provided that such structure is substantially at grade level.
2. Storm doors and windows, screens, window air conditioners, lighting fixtures, antennae (except satellite dish antennae) and similar appurtenances, or any one or more of them.
3. The color of paint.
4. The color of materials used on roofs.

5. The reconstruction substantially similar in exterior design of a building, structure or exterior architectural feature damaged or destroyed by fire, storm or other disaster provided such reconstruction is begun within one year thereafter and carried forward with due diligence.

### ***THOUGHTS ABOUT HISTORIC BUILDINGS AND DISTRICTS***

- Perpetuate original use of the building. When original purpose is not feasible, find use that will preserve the exterior features.
- Preservation is aimed at giving buildings a longer life without making marked changes in them.
- Restoration is preferable to reconstruction; restoration deals with replacing parts or bringing out the original design.
- Modified or new construction should be in harmony with the surrounding buildings and area.
- Avoid destroying or modifying existing buildings of later periods to emphasize or spuriously match those of an earlier date.
- Avoid artificial, quaint or cute features, particularly those that tend to "conform" to the architecture of another period or a different geographical area.
- Unity of style and design should be maintained or restored.
- Sometimes it is difficult to conceive of groups of buildings as symbols, when the individual parts are in themselves not always identifiable as of substantial historic and architectural interest, although together, they provide a character which symbolizes a place or an era.
- Historic preservation is concerned with only a small part of history, relating to a small place, its people and the houses they have used.

"The past is not the property of historians; it is a public possession. It belongs to anyone who is aware of it and it grows by being shared."

## ***SIGNAGE GUIDELINES***

### ***APPLICABILITY***

All permanent outdoor signs and window signs must be approved by the Historic District Commission.

All signs that are fixed in place, including decals, product signs, logos and window signs shall be considered permanent signs.

Moveable signs such as sandwich board signs, "open" signs, flags and banners which are not permanently installed or fixed, but remain in place more than 4 weeks as advertising for businesses, events or services, with permanent locations, shall be considered permanent signs and must be approved by this Commission.

No existing sign shall be redesigned or altered in any way without the approval of the Commission.

Every existing sign shall be maintained in good condition so that it continues to meet all the requirements of the original approval.

### ***Permitted Government or Special Signs***

Any sign owned and installed by a governmental agency, or required by any law, governmental order or regulation is not subject to this by-law. However, the Commission would like to review all signs being installed by government agencies and work with those agencies to install signage which best conforms to the character of the district.

Signs mounted on registered motor vehicles or carried by hand are not subject to this by-law.

### ***APPLICATION***

All persons desiring to erect a sign shall apply to the Building Inspector for a building permit.

All applications for permits shall include, at least

- a. A drawing to scale of the proposed sign including size, shape, lettering, the means of suspension and the material used to build the sign.
- b. A plot plan and a sketch of the building facade indicating the location of the proposed and any existing signs.
- c. A description of any planned scheme to provide lighting for the sign.

The Building Inspector will forward all applications for signage within the Historic District to the Historic District Commission for review.

## ***GENERAL SIGNAGE GUIDELINES***

Signs **will** be considered appropriate when, in the opinion of the Commission, they conform to the character of the District and are harmonious with the District as a whole, and with their immediate surroundings.

### ***PERMANENT SIGNS***

#### *Residential*

Permanent signs in the residential part of the District shall be limited to one sign no greater than two square feet.

#### *Business*

Permanent signs in the business part of the District shall be limited to seven square feet for each business.

In the case of a business complex housing more than one business the following signage is permitted.

- A. One street side sign not to exceed seven sq. ft. to identify the complex itself.
- B. Individual businesses within the complex identified at street side with 12" x 36" signs arranged vertically in a single structure.
- C. Each business within the complex may have one 2 sq. ft. sign located at the doorway for business identification.

Exception: In the case of a hardship created by poor visibility, or a confusingly designed building or building complex, the commission may increase signage limits at their discretion on a case-by-case basis.

When any establishment either moves or goes out of business, all signage must be removed within three working days.

### ***ILLUMINATION***

No sign shall be illuminated between the hours of 12:00 midnight and 6:00 a.m., except signs on premises open for business.

Exterior illumination of signs shall be provided by a shielded, incandescent light directed solely at the sign, and be steady and stationary.

No internal illumination of a sign is permitted except upon issuance of a special permit by the Historic District Commission.

***SIGNS CANNOT INTERFERE WITH TRAFFIC OR BLOCK A PUBLIC WAY***

No sign, including window displays, or their illuminators shall by reason of its location, shape, size or color interfere with traffic or be confused with or obstruct the view or the effectiveness of any official traffic sign, traffic signal or traffic marking. No red or green lights shall be used on any sign if, in the opinion of the Building Inspector with the advice of the Chief of Police, such lights would create a driving hazard.

No sign shall be placed in such a way that it blocks pedestrian or auto traffic.

***CONSTRUCTION***

No sign shall be painted directly on the exterior surface of any wall. All exterior, attached signs, except awning signs, shall be painted, posted or otherwise securely affixed to a substantial intermediary removable surface and such surface shall be securely affixed to the wall of the building.

***RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS***

Two signs identifying churches, synagogues, and other similar religious uses are permitted on each street frontage, one of which may not exceed 20 square feet in area and the other of which may not exceed 10 square feet in area. One sign may be a standing glass protected sign used for notices and announcements of events at the religious institution.

***SIGNS AT GASOLINE FILLING STATIONS AND GARAGES***

Gasoline filling stations and garages may divide the one wall sign affixed to the front wall of the building to which they are entitled as herein above provided, into separate wall signs indicating the separate operations or departments of the business, provided however, that the total of the square feet of the separate signs shall not exceed the maximum square feet permitted under these guidelines for a single wall sign on such wall. In addition, one sign indicating the brand of gasoline being sold may be erected of such type, in such location, and in such manner as the Historic District Commission may allow by special permit. The standard type of gasoline pump bearing thereon in usual size and form, the name or type of gasoline and the price thereof shall not be deemed to be a sign within the meaning of this by-law.

***PROHIBITED SIGNS***

The following types of signs are prohibited.

- a. Signs which incorporate in any manner flashing, moving or intermittent lighting, excluding public service signs showing time and temperature.
- b. Wind signs, including banners, pennants, spinners, streamers, and other wind actuated components.
- c. String lights used in connection with commercial premises with the exception of temporary lighting for holiday decoration.
- d. Signs erected so as to obstruct any door, openable window or fire escape on a building.
- e. Billboards or non-accessory signs.
- f. Internally or backlit signs

### ***TEMPORARY SIGNS***

The following signs may be erected temporarily without the approval of the Commission:

Special-Event signs: One sign may be erected four weeks before the event. It must be removed within three working days following the conclusion of the event, and will be limited to six square feet.

Real Estate For Sale signs: One sign may be erected and limited to six square feet and must be removed within three working days after the sale.

Signs to advertise or direct people to limited retail sales or private sales, such as yard sales and auctions may be erected one day prior to the sale. These signs will be limited to six square feet and must be removed the following day after the sale. Temporary business or retail signs must be located within the property on which the business is located. These signs may not be located on public or other private property.

Advertising signs for services: Signs for advertising contractor work such as builders or painters, should be limited to six square feet in area, with only one sign permitted on the property at any one time and must be removed when work is completed. If the length of time the sign will be in place is anticipated to exceed or does exceed six months, an application for a Certificate of Appropriateness must be submitted.

Political signs: Political signs cannot exceed two square feet in area and may not be placed on public property. Political signs may not be displayed longer than two months prior to an election and must be removed within three working days after the election.

Holiday Signs: Signs advertising holiday events must be removed within 3 days after the holiday.

Exception: Signs, which do not conform, to the above guidelines must be presented to and approved by the Commission on a case by case basis. Applicants must present scaled drawings of these signs to the Commission prior to fabrication as well as prior to erection. Scaled drawings must be professionally drawn and show the size, shape, finish, materials and the actual layout of the sign, including the exact words and exact lettering style to be used.

### ***BANNERS***

Banners over Main Street are currently permitted at a single location at the South Hamilton end of the street. The content of the banners is approved by the Board of Selectmen. However, If a banner over Main Street is to be erected at any location other than the South Hamilton end of the street, approval of the Historic District Commission must be obtained.