

Old Lyme Historic District Sculpture Policy

Context

The residents of Old Lyme have a shared commitment to preserving the unique character of Old Lyme. Perhaps nothing so unites the residents as the desire to insure that, as their community grows, it retains as many as possible of those qualities that led them and/or their ancestors to select it as a place to live. Old Lyme has benefited from the many small decisions that contribute to its sense of place.

The Historic District is an essential component of this commitment. Located in the center of Old Lyme, the District today is a pleasant mix of traditional and modern houses, churches, schools, art galleries, inns, a library, a firehouse, the Town Hall, the Lyme Academy College of Fine Arts, the Lyme Art Association, the Florence Griswold Museum, and business establishments.

The character of the village exists because:

- The original plotting of the land created widely spaced houses and structures. It provided considerable space for expansion behind the houses (space for a wide variety of rich and interesting ancillary buildings). Visually this adds considerable interest and depth to the Town of Old Lyme.
- As in many New England villages, the houses on Lyme Street represent a broad spectrum of styles, sizes, and acreage. The juxtaposition of many styles of architecture (versus domination by one style or another) is a special characteristic of Old Lyme. The Historic District's eighty properties include at least eight different styles.
- It is fair to say that while the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries gave the Historic District many of its memorable structures, the twentieth century filled the village with new trees. While Old Lyme may never regain the rich canopy of elms that dominated Lyme Street; the village today has a variety of beautiful trees contributing to its striking appearance. At the same time, the lawns and plantings are simple, partially reflecting the reliance on well water.
- Another element is the fact that the Lieutenant River can be easily viewed or accessed from many points within the Historic District: Lyme Street closely parallels the river. These views and access points are breathtaking and include: the Ferry Road Bridge, Lieutenant River Lane, Town Hall, the Bow Bridge, and the Florence Griswold Museum property.

Current Situation/Precedent

Under Connecticut law concerning Historic Districts, “buildings” are defined as any combination of materials forming a shelter for persons, animals, or property. In addition to dwellings, barns, stables, shops, garages and other large buildings, the following are considered buildings requiring a Certificate of Appropriateness:

- Pool houses and pool accessories
- Garden structures of all kinds, including play and tree houses
- Well houses and dog houses
- Enclosures to screen trash and refuse

Under Connecticut law concerning Historic Districts, “structures” are defined as any combination of materials, other than a building, affixed to or resting on, the land, and including-but not limited to-swimming pools, parking areas, roads, signs, fences, walls, sidewalks, lights and lamp posts. (*reference page 10, Historic District Handbook*)

The Old Lyme Historic District Commission has clarified the criteria for judging the appropriateness of certain structures such as: a) fences and stone walls, b) driveways, roads, parking areas and walks, c) lights, d) mailboxes, e) permanent signs, f) temporary signs, g) nonprofit event signs, h) contractors’ signs, i) political signs, j) open and closed signs, and k) landscaping. (*reference pages 10 to 12, Historic District Handbook*)

The Historic District Commission has also identified a series of structures which are not permitted in the Historic District (*reference page 15, Historic District Handbook*):

- Above-ground swimming pools
- High diving boards and similar pool equipment
- Display of items (other than flowers) for sale by private individuals
- Business establishments are allowed to display merchandise outdoors only after securing specific permission and only for short periods of time
- Newspaper tubes
- Television dishes
- Storage or sale of boats, trailers, motor homes, RVs, trucks and automobiles within view from Lyme Street.

Sculpture Policy

During the second half of 2007, the Historic District Commission addressed a sculpture policy for the first time. The Commission led a discussion on how sculpture might fit within both the character of Old Lyme and the special characteristics of the Historic District. This discussion took into account Old Lyme's distinct role in American Impressionist art (both a century ago and today) and the many museums, art galleries, businesses, and residents that are associated with the Old Lyme Art Colony and this rich body of American art.

We sought input from representatives of the Florence Griswold Museum, Lyme Academy College of Fine Art, Cooley Gallery, a resident sculptor, and street property owners. After careful consideration, the Historic District Commission decided on the following policies.

Residences and Businesses: Sculptures are permitted behind the main house or an ancillary building if they are not visible from Lyme Street.

Art Galleries: An established art gallery (at least one year old) may hold a sculpture exhibit on its property for as long as six weeks if it obtains a Certificate of Appropriateness (in effect permission of the HDC). Such permission must be obtained at least two months in advance.

Non Profit Organizations: Nonprofit organizations may set up a temporary exhibit for up to 6 weeks. A permanent sculpture garden or exhibit must be screened from Lyme Street by either landscaping or a change in elevation. Such screening must be consistent with the Old Lyme Historic District Commission's criteria for judging (on a case-by-case basis) the appropriateness of certain structures and landscaping. A Certificate of Appropriateness must be obtained from the Historic District Commission. The screening must also be reviewed by the Old Lyme Tree Commission.

In each of these cases, any one installing sculpture(s) should respect the views of his or her neighbors.