

Historic District Commission

Frequently Asked Questions

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1) Certificate of Appropriateness, CofA

a. What is a Certificate of Appropriateness?

A Certificate of Appropriateness is necessary for all buildings or structures within the Old Lyme Historic District if they are to be erected, altered, removed or demolished. Such a certificate is necessary whether or not a building permit is required. The purpose is to protect the integrity of the Historic District.

b. When do I need a Certificate of Appropriateness?

Also see "What is a Certificate of Appropriateness". No exterior changes may be made to buildings or structures in the Historic District without a Certificate of Appropriateness. It applies, but is not limited to, the following: Building additions, outbuildings, swimming pools, driveways, parking lots, signs, fences, walls, hedges, walkways, lighting, propane gas tanks, etc. Prior to submitting formal requests, applicants are encouraged to discuss projects on a preliminary basis at a regular Commission meeting.

c. When do I NOT need a Certificate of Appropriateness?

A Certificate of Appropriateness is not required for repair or replacement of previously existing features or paint colors. However, please contact the Historic District Commission prior to doing any work if you are not absolutely sure whether or not you need a Certificate of Appropriateness.

Although not necessarily requiring a Certificate of Appropriateness (in many cases a phone call may be sufficient) the Commission should be consulted about the following:

- Air Conditioners
- Aluminum or vinyl siding (not permitted on buildings of historic importance)
- Dumpsters
- Benches
- Fireplaces and cooking facilities (outdoor)
- Garden and architectural ornaments (including sculptures)
- Gutters and downspouts
- Exterior lights and lanterns
- Oil and propane tanks
- Security system signs
- Shutters (blinds)
- Skylights, roof windows and solar-heating panels
- Storm and screen doors and storm windows
- Antennas
- Utility boxes and meters
- Ventilating fans

- Window boxes and planters

d. **How can I get an application form for a Certificate of Appropriateness?**

An application form can be obtained from the Planning Commission's office at Town Hall, 52 Lyme Street, or downloaded from the Town's web site, www.oldlyme-ct.gov (select "Boards and Commissions" and then "Historic District Commission").

e. **How long does it take to get a decision regarding a Certificate of Appropriateness application?**

The Commission has sixty-five (65) days from the date the formal application is received in which to render its decision, although in practice most questions are resolved well before that.

f. **What does it cost to get a Certificate of Appropriateness?**

For signs, fences, walls, hedges, walkways, lighting, propane gas tanks, etc. ("Form A"): \$25.00
For building additions, outbuildings, swimming pools, driveways, parking lots, etc. ("Form B"): \$50.00

g. **What determines if a Certificate of Appropriateness is approved or not?**

Most applications the Historic District Commission is asked to consider may be reduced to a single question: *Is a given action likely to enhance - or at least preserve - the qualities that identify Old Lyme and that set it apart from other Connecticut towns?* If, in the opinion of the majority of the Commission, the answer appears to be "No" then the Commission has no choice but to reject the application as "inappropriate" but if the answer appears to be "Yes" then the application is considered to be "appropriate".

In considering an application for a Certificate of Appropriateness, the Commission has no requirements as to specific architectural form or style and it has no mandate to favor the past over the present. Indeed, minute by minute the present is becoming the past. The Commission recognizes that change is inevitable and in many cases desirable, and it asks only that new structures or artifacts introduced into the Historic District and all changes to structures already existing, be appropriate, be competently designed and show respect both for their immediate neighbors and for the District as a whole.

h. **How can I appeal a Certificate of Appropriateness decision?**

Any person aggrieved by any decision of the Commission may appeal to the Superior Court within fifteen days of receiving written notification of the decision.

2) Legal Notices

a. **What is a Legal Notice?**

In most cases, a "Form B" of an application for a Certificate of Appropriateness requires a Public Hearing. A Public Hearing enables neighbors and others to express their views and comments on a proposed alteration (e. g. for building additions, outbuildings, swimming pools, driveways, parking lots, etc.). Legal notices are to be prepared for Public Hearings and publicized in a newspaper in the area not more than 15 or less than 5 days before a Public Hearing.

b. **Where can I find and review Legal Notices?**

The Historic District Commission publicizes Legal Notices in the Main Street News not more than 15 or less than 5 days before a Public Hearing, which take place during a regular Historic District Commission

meeting. Legal Notices are also publicized on the Town's web site (www.oldlyme-ct.gov) and sent out via regular mail to abutting neighbors.

c. **How can I comment on a Legal Notice?**

Public hearings are open for the public to attend. Letters may be sent in advance to the Historic District Commission, 52 Lyme Street, Old Lyme, CT 06371. Application materials are on file and available for inspection at the time of the Historic District Commission hearing or by calling 434-1605 ext. 224 for an appointment at the Memorial Town Hall.

3) **The Old Lyme Historic District**

a. **What is the Old Lyme Historic District?**

The Historic District is basically "Lyme Street" in Old Lyme. It runs from #1 McCurdy Road at the Town Green on the south end of Lyme Street to the Town Green at the north end, forking left to #2 Sill Lane and right to #1 Rose Lane off the Boston Post Road.

b. **Can I get information about properties in the Historic District?**

The Historic District Commission is currently in the process of compiling information on all the properties in the District. Let us know your interest and we will see if we can help.

c. **Can I get a plaque to mark my house as being "historic"?**

The Old Lyme Historic District Commission has inaugurated a plaque program to acknowledge historic buildings in the District. Buildings constructed prior to the outbreak of World War II in 1939 are eligible. The 16" x 13" white oval plaques cost \$100 plus tax and contain the name of the original owner or the structure's purpose (Grange Hall, etc.) and the approximate date of construction. An Historic Plaque application may be obtained from the OLHDC by calling 434-1605 ext 224, or from the HDC's web page.

4) **Historic District Commission, HDC**

a. **How can I contact the Historic District Commission?**

Call Town Hall at (860) 434-1605, ext 224 or send email from the Town's web site, www.oldlyme-ct.gov (select "Boards and Commissions" and then "Historic District Commission").

b. **Who is a member of the Historic District Commission?**

The Commission is composed of eight residents of Old Lyme appointed by the Town's Board of Selectmen. Current member list can be viewed on the Town's web site.

c. **Can I attend Historic District Commission meetings?**

Yes the Historic District Commission's meetings are open to the public. Regular meetings are held at the Lyme Academy College of Fine Arts, 84 Lyme Street, the first Monday of each month (second Monday if the first Monday is a holiday) at 9.00 am. Meeting agendas are posted on the Town's web site and in Town Hall.

5) **Examples**

a. **Can I put up a temporary sign for an event or a real estate listing?**

Yes, but there are several limitations, please refer to the Historic District Handbook or contact the Historic District Commission for details.

b. **What are examples of what is not permitted in the Historic District?**

- 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.