

1.3 The Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) review process

Before the City can issue a building permit for exterior changes to buildings within a Historic District or landmark site, the St. Charles Zoning Ordinance requires the Historic Preservation Commission to review the proposed work and issue a “Certificate of Appropriateness” (also known as a “COA”).

- A **Certificate of Appropriateness (COA)** is a form issued to certify that the exterior work planned for a building’s rehabilitation or new construction meets the criteria of the Historic Preservation Ordinance. As a part of making this determination, the Historic Preservation Commission will consult this document.
- A **Building Permit** is a separate form and type of review which ensures the project complies with Life Safety Codes, Building Codes, and Zoning Codes. A Building Permit which includes exterior work to a structure in the Historic District cannot be issued until a COA has been issued for the project.

A building permit and COA approval are required for both big construction projects (new buildings, demolition, building or porch additions) and smaller renovation projects (re-roofing, siding, window or door replacement, installation of signs or fences).

Painting, minor maintenance work, and landscaping does not require a building permit and therefore does not require a COA approval.

The following sections discuss:

- How to Apply for a COA
- Documentation Required for COA
- Criteria used by the Historic Preservation Commission when reviewing a COA

Points to remember about the COA process

- Consider a Preliminary Review with the Historic Preservation Commission to receive informal feedback before investing time or money on planning a project. The Commission is available to provide guidance and assistance.
- Always check with the Building and Code Enforcement Division in the early stages of the planning process. They will inform you of the requirements applicable to your particular project, whether or not a building permit is required, and whether or not a review by the Historic Preservation Commission is required. Some contractors may not be aware of the Historic Preservation requirements.
- Do not start demolition and do not order any materials until a COA has been reviewed and approved.

How to apply for a COA:

1. **Consult with the Historic Preservation Commission early in the design process to receive informal feedback and technical assistance (recommended).** This is highly recommended for significant projects, such as new construction or a large building addition. Assistance is available to help owners or other applicants plan and design projects or improvements to meet the design guidelines. The Commission can direct you to resources that may save you time and money. To schedule a design consultation with the Commission, call (630) 377-4406.
2. **Determine if a Building Permit is required.** Contact the Building and Code Enforcement Division of the Community Development Department at (630) 377-4406. Any work that requires a Building Permit and involves the exterior of a building will require a COA approval.
3. **Apply for a Building Permit for the project.** Documents submitted with the Building Permit Application will be forwarded to the Historic Preservation Commission. Your permit will be scheduled for review by the Historic Preservation Commission at the next meeting. Applicants are advised not to purchase building materials until a COA and Building Permit have been approved.
4. **Attend the Historic Preservation Commission meeting (recommended).**
 - Applicants are invited to attend to present information, ask questions, and respond to questions from the Commission. The representative attending the meeting should be familiar with the project, including both the existing building/structure and the proposed construction methods and materials. The attendee may be the property owner, architect, contractor, or for large projects, all parties involved.
 - At the meeting, the Commission will review the Building Permit/COA application for compliance with the review criteria contained in the St. Charles Zoning Ordinance, including recommendations of this document.
 - If there is a conflict between your plans and the Design Guidelines, the Commission can offer advice on how to modify them to meet the intent of the guidelines. Exceptions to the recommendations of the guidelines can be made by the Commission if applicants demonstrate that the proposed work will be appropriate based on historical evidence and/or documentation in the context of the particular structure.
 - Should additional information be requested that would require further research or documentation, a decision on the COA approval may be tabled and considered at a future meeting when the information is available.
5. **The Commission votes on the COA.**
 - The Commission may approve a COA for the project as presented; approve a COA for the project with conditions; or recommend to the City Council denial of a COA. Applicants have the option of making changes to the plans to respond to Commission comments and returning for a review at a future meeting.
 - The Historic Preservation Commission can only recommend denial of a COA to the City Council. If the COA is recommended for denial and the applicant wishes to pursue the project as proposed, the COA request will be forwarded to the Planning and Development Committee of the City Council for further review. The Committee will review the COA request, the Historic Commission recommendation, and the meeting minutes to make a determination.
5. **Pick up the Building Permit and sign the COA form.** Once the COA is approved, a copy of the approval form will be forwarded to the Building and Code Enforcement Division. When the Building Permit is issued, you will be asked to sign the COA form to confirm that you understand what was approved and to acknowledge any conditions listed on the form.
6. **Start work on the project.** If your plans change while work is in progress, contact the Building and Code Enforcement Division and the Historic Preservation Commission **BEFORE** undertaking a change or departure from the COA or Building Permit.

Remember, Help is Available – All property owners are encouraged to contact the Historic Preservation Commission at any time to informally discuss a potential project. **And Thanks!** – Improvements are constantly taking place in historic districts thanks to the efforts of property owners and residents. The City and the Historic Preservation Commission appreciate your interest in improving your property.

Documentation for COA review:

The follow can either be included with the Building Permit Documents or be provided at the Historic Preservation Commission meeting when the project is discussed:

- ◆ **New construction (including garages) or extensive renovation:** A complete set of plans and specifications are required. Plans drawn to scale, including a site plan showing all existing and proposed improvements. Provide specifications on plans and/or samples of all exterior materials (siding, roofing, doors, windows, ornamentation). Provide photographs of the lot and any existing buildings on the lot or adjoining lots.
- ◆ **Building additions, alterations, porches, etc:** Scaled drawing of each elevation, showing how the project relates to the existing structure, with specifications on plans and/or samples of all exterior materials. Photographs of the existing building.
- ◆ **Window, Door, or Siding Replacement:** Photos or other documentation on existing materials, condition, age, and reason for replacement. Specifications/product information and images/details of on proposed materials (type/design /dimension). A site visit may be requested if documentation is inconclusive on the condition of existing materials.
- ◆ **Fences:** Scaled drawings and a plat of the survey showing the proposed location of the fence, height, style, material, thickness or spacing and what the fence will look like. Photographs of the property.
- ◆ **Sign or awning permits:** Scaled elevation drawings showing the size of the sign face and lettering, and/or an image with the sign digitally superimposed on a picture of the building or site. Specifications for all sign and awning materials. Information on any proposed sign or awning illumination, including fixture details.
- ◆ **Parking areas, driveways, or parking lots:** A plat of survey showing the location and layout of the parking lot and landscaping. The drawings shall clearly indicate the dimensions of the parking stall(s) drive aisles, and setbacks.
- ◆ **Demolition:** Photographs of the building proposed for demolition along with a statement describing the reasons for the demolition and proposed use of the site.

Criteria used by the Historic Preservation Commission for COA Review

The Historic Preservation Commission is guided by the following criteria when determining whether to approve or to recommend to the City Council denial of a Certificate of Appropriateness:

1. Significance of a Site, Structure or Building

All properties within Historic Districts and landmark sites have been surveyed for architectural and/or historic significance. Properties within districts are classified as one of the following:

Significant to the Historic District	(Least Flexibility with Review Criteria)
Contributing to the character of the Historic District	
Non-contributing to the Historic District	(Greatest Flexibility with Review Criteria)

The classification of an individual property determines the flexibility with which the Historic Preservation Commission can apply the standards of the Historic Preservation Ordinance. Survey information on individual properties is available for review in the Planning Division.

2. General Architectural and Aesthetic Guidelines

- a Height: The height of any proposed alteration or construction should be compatible with the style and character of the structure and with surrounding structures.
- b Proportions of the Front Facade: The relationship between the width of a building and the height of the front elevation should be compatible with surrounding structures.
- c Proportions of Windows and Doors: The proportions and relationships between doors and windows should be compatible with the architectural style and character of the building.
- d Relationship of Building Masses and Spaces: The relationship of a structure to the open space between it and adjoining structures should be compatible.
- e Roof Shapes: The design of the roof, fascia and cornice should be compatible with the architectural style and character of the building and with adjoining structures.
- f Scale: The scale of the structure after alteration, construction or partial demolition should be compatible with its architectural style and character and with surrounding structures
- g Directional Expression: Facades in historic districts should blend with, and reflect, the dominant horizontal or vertical expression of adjacent structures. The directional expression of a building after alteration, construction or partial demolition should be compatible with its original architectural style and character.
- h Architectural Details: Architectural details, including types of materials, colors and textures, should be treated so as to make a building compatible with its original architectural style and character, and to enhance the inherent characteristics of surrounding structures.
- i New Structures: New structures in an historic district shall be compatible with, but need not be the same as, the architectural styles and general designs and layouts of the surrounding structures.

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*Criteria for COA Review - Continued***3. Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation**

- a Every reasonable effort shall be made to provide a compatible use for a property that requires minimal change to the defining characteristics of the building, structure or site, and its environment, or to use the property for its originally intended purpose.
- b The distinguishing original qualities or historic character of a building, structure or site, and its environment, shall be retained and preserved. The removal or alteration of any historic materials or distinctive architectural features should be avoided when possible.
- c All buildings, structures or sites shall be recognized as physical records of their own time, place and use. Alterations that have no historical basis, or which seek to create an earlier appearance, shall be avoided.
- d Most properties change over time; those changes that have acquired historic significance in their own right shall be retained and preserved.
- e Distinctive stylistic features, finishes and construction techniques or examples or skilled craftsmanship, which characterizes a building, structure or site, shall be preserved.
- f Deteriorated historical 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 missing features shall be based on accurate duplications substantiated by documentary, physical or pictorial evidence, and not conjectural designs or the availability of different architectural elements from other buildings or structures.
- g The surface cleaning of structures, if appropriate, shall be undertaken using the gentlest means possible. Sandblasting and other physical or chemical treatments which will damage the historic building materials shall not be used.
- h Significant archaeological resources affected by a project shall be protected and preserved. If such resources must be disturbed, mitigation measures shall be undertaken.
- i New additions, exterior alterations or related new construction shall not destroy historic materials that characterize a property. Contemporary design for the new work shall not be discouraged when such alterations and additions are differentiated from the old, and are compatible with the massing, size, scale, color, material and character of the property and its environment.
- j 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.

4. Code Conflicts

Where there are irreconcilable differences between the requirements of the building code, life safety code, or other codes adopted by the City and the requirements of this Chapter, conformance with those codes shall take precedence, and therefore the Historic Preservation Commission shall approve a Certificate of Appropriateness. In so doing, however, the Historic Preservation Commission shall be obligated only to approve those portions of the proposed work that are necessary for compliance with the applicable codes, as determined by the Building Commissioner or Fire Chief.