



CHAPTER



## THE DESIGN REVIEW PROCESS

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**T**he *Design Guidelines* contained in this manual (Section IV) and the West Chester Historic District Zoning Code (Appendix C) form the basis for the review of applications that come before the HARB and Borough Council. The ordinance requires that “No permanent sign or other structure within the West Chester Historic District may be constructed, altered or otherwise changed, in whole or part, nor may the exterior architectural character of any structure be altered until after an application for a building permit has been fully reviewed by the Historical and Architectural Review Board (HARB), recommended for a certificate of appropriateness by the HARB and approved by the Borough Council.” Additionally, “No structure within the West Chester Historic District may be demolished or removed, in whole or in part, until after the application for a building and/or demolition permit has been reviewed by the HARB and approved by the Borough Council.” These provisions apply “to all land, buildings and structures which are viewed or may be viewed from a public way within the boundaries of the West Chester Historic District.” The HARB is an advisory board to Borough Council, and all HARB recommendations for a Certificate of Appropriateness require approval by Borough Council. Likewise, Borough Council may overturn the decisions of the HARB upon appeal by the applicant.

The design-review process consists of the following steps:

- Pre-application review (optional)
- Application submission
- HARB review
- Borough Council review

Generally, the design review process takes about one month to complete, and applicants must consider this timeframe when planning and scheduling their projects. For projects involving significant changes to structures within the Historic District, such as major facade alterations, construction of additions, new construction, and demolition, a pre-application review is highly recommended. Applicants should allow another month for this step. It is also recommended that applicants retain the services of a design professional for major projects within the Historic District.

#### **A. PRE-APPLICATION REVIEW**

For projects comprising major alterations or construction within the Historic District, a pre-application review is strongly encouraged. The purpose of the pre-application review is to acquaint the applicant with the standards of appropriateness of design that are relevant to the proposed project. A pre-application review is voluntary and does not require formal application submission. However, preliminary sketches must be submitted to the Borough at least seven (7) working days prior to the HARB's regularly scheduled monthly meeting to enable the HARB chairman to place the pre-application on the meeting agenda.

The pre-application process enables the applicant to present the basic concepts of the proposed project in sketch form for feedback and informal discussion with the HARB. During pre-application review, the applicant can provide a single design proposal or present several design options for discussion. The pre-application review process saves the applicant the time and expense of developing a complete submission for a final design that may not be approved, and a favorable preliminary design streamlines the formal review process.

#### **B. APPLICATION SUBMISSION**

An "Application for Certificate of Appropriateness" form must be completed by the applicant and submitted to the Borough's Building Inspector at least ten (10) working days prior to the HARB's monthly meeting. The required application package must include:

- The completed application form.
- Photographs of the structure showing the part or parts to be altered as well as photographs of the entire facade and the buildings in the immediate surrounding area.
- Architectural drawings, including exterior elevations and plans as applicable, of the proposed alterations, of sufficient detail to show architectural design elements, materials, and dimensions.
- Copies of manufacturers' literature showing products and items to be incorporated into the work.
- Material and paint samples as applicable.
- Historical photographs where supportive of the application.

An incomplete application may not be considered by the HARB.

A copy of the Application for Certificate of Appropriateness may be obtained from the Borough's Department of Building, Housing & Codes Enforcement.



### C. HARB REVIEW

The HARB considers each application for a Certificate of Appropriateness at its regular monthly public meeting, typically held the first week of the month. Applicants are encouraged to attend these meetings to present their projects and address questions from the HARB. An applicant not attending the HARB meeting risks the potential continuance of his or her application in the event that the HARB has unanswered questions concerning the project.

Following the review of an application, the HARB will take one of the following actions: 1) recommend a Certificate of Appropriateness for the application as presented, 2) recommend a Certificate of Appropriateness with specified conditions, 3) recommend that the application be denied, 4) continue the application because of the incompleteness of the application, or 5) continue the application at the request of the applicant. The HARB diligently strives to avoid the denial of an application by suggesting design alternatives, and by allowing the applicant to revise the design and present again at a future meeting. Every decision made by the HARB becomes part of the public record. For approved and denied applications, a written Certificate of Appropriateness is provided to Borough Council for approval.

### D. BOROUGH COUNCIL REVIEW

The Certificate of Appropriateness prepared by the HARB is initially reviewed by the Planning, Zoning, Business and Industrial Development (PZBID) Committee of Borough Council and then by the full Borough Council. Council uses the same criteria as the HARB in evaluating the applications. An applicant may attend both the Council's committee and the full meeting to comment on his or her application. For applications denied or approved with conditions by the HARB, the applicant may appeal to Borough Council to reverse the HARB's decision.

After reviewing the application and HARB's recommendation for a Certificate of Appropriateness, the PZBID Committee may recommend approval of a Certificate of Appropriateness to the full Council or send it to Council without recommendation. During Council's work session, the Chair of the PZBID Committee presents each application for discussion by Council. Borough Council then decides if the Certificate of Appropriateness should be placed on the consent agenda for approval at the voting session or if it should be held for further discussion at the voting session. Council officially votes to approve or disapprove each of HARB's recommendations for a Certificate of Appropriateness at its voting session. All of Borough Council's decisions are part of the public record.

Following Council's vote, the Borough's Department of Building, Housing & Codes Enforcement sends a letter to each applicant informing him or her of Council's decision. For an approved application, the letter authorizes the applicant to apply for a building permit to perform the proposed work as presented or with specified conditions. If Borough Council disapproves the application, the letter indicates the reasons for disapproval.



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**Graphic Design by**

*Joel Avery*

*i design: information*

*506 East Lancaster Avenue, 2nd Floor*

*Dorwintown, Pennsylvania 19335*

*www.CREATIVENESS.com*

*phone: 610.518.7784*

*email: information@creativity.com*



**Production by**

*Robert Bernstein*

*wdf-2*

*2709 Springfield Road*

*Broomall, Pennsylvania 19008*

*www.wdf-2.com*

*phone: 610.359.6367*

*email: bob@wdf-2.com*

