



## City of Detroit Historic District Commission

# What You Need To Know About Local Historic Districts

### *Introduction and Permit Application Requirements*

Coleman A Young Municipal Center  
2 Woodward, Suite 808  
Detroit, MI 48226

<http://www.detroitmi.gov/Government/Boards> - Detroit Historic Commission

#### *Historic District Commission Staff*

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#### *Historic District Commission*

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## INTRODUCTION

The Detroit Historic District Commission was formed by Detroit Ordinance 161-H in 1976. Its purpose is to ensure the preservation of historically and culturally significant areas of the City which are designated by the City Council as Historic Districts. Citizen members of the Commission are appointed by the Mayor and the Commission is staffed by the City of Detroit Planning and Development Department.

A building permit is required for any exterior changes to a building or site in a designated or proposed historic district. The Historic District Commission administers a building permit application review procedure and may approve or deny based on the appropriateness of the proposed work. Building permits are issued by the Buildings, Safety, Engineering & Environmental Department upon approval by the Historic District Commission. In addition to permit application reviews, the Commission is also involved in other matters concerning historic properties, preservation programs, and designation of proposed districts.

## WHO IS THE HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION?

The Commission is made up of seven Detroit residents who are appointed by Mayor Duggan. These dedicated volunteers are generally residents of historic districts and represent such professions as architects and realtors. They generally meet the second Wednesday of the month beginning at 5:30 PM, to review applications for building permits in historic districts. A call to the Commission office can confirm meeting times and application deadlines

The purpose of Historic Preservation in the City of Detroit is to:

- Safeguard the heritage of the city by preserving areas in the city which reflect elements of its cultural, social, spiritual, economic, political, engineering or architectural history;
- Stabilize and improve property values in such areas;
- Foster civic beauty and community pride;
- Strengthen the local economy; and promote the use of historic districts for the education, pleasure and welfare of the citizens of the City of Detroit.

## BENEFITS OF LOCALLY HISTORIC DISTRICT DESIGNATION

- Preserve Detroit's neighborhoods, housing stock, and history for future generations of Detroiters.
- May qualify to apply for federal historic tax credits.
- Regulation of exterior changes in neighborhoods including window replacement, ensuring new construction and additions are compatible, and the historic character of houses and grounds is maintained.
- Prevention of property neglect and demolition by the use of the *demolition by neglect* portion of the ordinance that requires owners to repair their properties before they reach such a state of disrepair that they have to be demolished.

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### **What can I do to the inside of my house?**

The Commission does not regulate changes to the interior of a house, unless the interior change affects the exterior appearance.

### **How do I know what colors to paint my house?**

The Commission has a publication called *Detroit Historic Districts Style and Color Guide* that gives the acceptable colors depending on the style of the house. Color charts and instructions are provided by Commission staff.

### **Does the Commission review what I do to the back of my house?**

The Commission is required to review **all** exterior changes, including those not visible from the street. The **entire** house, garage and yard contribute to the historic character of the district.

### **How does the Commission decide whether to approve my project?**

The Commission is required to use “The Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation and Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings” when deciding whether work is appropriate in a historic district. The Standards are listed on page 10 of this document.

## WHAT REQUIRES REVIEW

*The below lists are NOT all inclusive. If you do not see your project, CALL THE COMMISSION!!!*

<b>Call the Commission before:</b>
Changing paint colors
Removing large trees, shrubbery, plantings
Installing new or replacement fencing
Replacing roofing, flashing, gutters
Reconstructing areas of masonry walls, chimneys, floors, porches, etc.
Installing new storm/security doors and storm windows
Reconstructing all or part of a porch
Installing new doors, garage doors, security doors
Installing or replacing signage, including awnings
Cleaning the building
Demolishing all or part of a building, including garages
Constructing a new building or addition
Installing new or replacement storm windows
Removing, repairing, or replacing existing windows; installing new windows

<b>Go ahead with your project if:</b>
Painting in the same colors in the same location
Trimming or pruning trees, shrubs, plantings
Repairing a few sections of fence with like materials and sizes
Repairing <b>a few</b> shingles, flashing, gutters with like materials
Replacing <b>a few</b> panes of glass with matching glass, switching seasonal storms/screens
Tuck-pointing <b>small areas</b> of mortar with matching mortar
Installing or removing <b>existing</b> storms and screens for the season
Replacing <b>small deteriorated areas</b> of siding with identical materials and sizes
Repairing existing doors with identical materials
Putting out or removing cloth awnings on existing frames for the season.

## **APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS**

*Applicants must submit one complete set of information in a digital format, with the photographs as separate PDF images*

### **New Construction / Additions (including garages):**

- A completed City of Detroit Building Permit Application
- One (1) set of scaled and/or dimensioned drawings on 11"x 17" paper, as well as electronic drawings saved as a PDF (can be submitted on a thumb drive) that includes:
  - Site plan showing all changes and landscape features, including location of construction fencing if applicable;
  - Floor plans
  - Elevations
  - Sections and other details as needed
  - Material samples and colors for roofing, siding, and trim
  - Brochures showing materials and design for windows, doors, garage doors, exterior lighting, and fencing
  - Project narrative
  - Photographs of the existing property, clearing showing the front of the house and all necessary elevations

### **Original/Historic Door & Garage Door Replacement (including security doors)**

- A completed City of Detroit Building Permit Application
- Project Narrative – including a detailed description of existing doors including materials, and why repair is not possible and why replacement is necessary
- Brochures showing materials and design of doors
- Photographs of the door/elevation where the work will occur

### **Paint Color Change (that doesn't conform to Color System)**

- A completed City of Detroit Building Permit Application
- Samples of the proposed paint color (i.e., paint chips) and a list of locations where paint color will be applied (photographs and/or diagrams may also be used)
- Photograph of the front of the house, as well as elevations that have special/additional architectural features

### **Porch Reconstruction and other Repairs (Satellite dishes)**

- A completed City of Detroit Building Permit Application
- A detailed description of the proposed work including:
  - description of existing materials and colors
  - a description of which components will be retained or repaired
  - a statement of why the components being replaced cannot be repaired
  - a description of the proposed replacement materials/colors
  - photographs of each side of the structure

### **Roof Replacement of Historic Roofing Materials**

- A completed City of Detroit Building Permit Application
- Narrative: description of existing roofing material and color, written justification of why the historic roofing material needs to be replaced, review of submitted estimates along with stating which estimate is the first choice and why. Also confirm if related work to gutters, soffit and fascia will be completed, and if so, explain what will be done.
- Material sample of proposed roofing material (if submitting a shingle board, the proposed color must be the featured color on the board)
- A completed *Historic District Commission Application for Replacement of Historic Roofing* (both pages must be submitted) which includes:
  - two (2) estimates of the cost to repair the existing roof
  - two (2) estimates of the cost to replace with the same material
  - two (2) estimates of the cost for asphalt shingle replacement
- Photographs of the structure, including the front elevation, and close-ups showing the deteriorated condition of the shingles

### **Roof Replacements (non-Historic Roof Materials)**

- A completed City of Detroit Building Permit Application
- Material sample
- A description of existing roofing material and color
- A detailed description of proposed work, including related work such as dormers, gutters, soffit and fascia
- Photograph of the front of the house (and garage if necessary)

### **Fence, Paving, Walls, Landscaping Installation/Removal**

- A completed City of Detroit Building Permit Application
- A scaled and/or dimensioned site plan showing:
  - the existing lot lines
  - the existing buildings
  - the location and dimension of existing and proposed sidewalks, driveways, fencing (including height), landscape materials, and other landscape features
- Material and color samples for fencing, walls, paving
- Brochure(s) showing fencing and other manufactured landscape items proposed
- In cases of removal include a detailed justification of why the item(s) need to be removed
- Photographs of the site where the installation/removal will occur, and one photograph of the front of the house (for reference)

### **Building Cleaning**

- A completed City of Detroit Building Permit Application;
- A detailed description of the cleaning method, including the names of chemicals and the pressure of any washes or applications
- Brochures for cleaning agents
- A description of the surface treatment after cleaning
- Photographs of the sides of the structure that will be cleaned

### **Replacement of Historic Siding Material**

- A completed City of Detroit Building Permit Application
- Written justification of why the historic siding needs to be replaced, and why the proposed material was selected
- A brochure giving the color, materials, and dimensions of the proposed replacement siding
- A completed *Historic District Commission Application for Replacement of Historic Siding* (both pages must be submitted) which includes:
  - two (2) written estimates from different companies of the cost to repair and paint the existing siding
  - two (2) written estimates from different companies for the replacement and painting of the siding in matching materials
  - two (2) written estimates from different companies for the replacement of the siding with an alternate (synthetic) material
- Photographs of each side of the structure, as well as detailed photographs showing deterioration of the original siding

### **Demolition (including partial demolitions)**

- A completed City of Detroit Application for Building Permit
- A structural assessment report of the property, completed according to the Commission's template. The assessment must be completed by a licensed structural engineer.
- Detailed justification stating why building or portion of building needs to be demolished
- A detailed description of what will happen to the site after the demolition occurs
- For partial demolition, include elevation showing the building and surface treatments to newly exposed walls
- Photographs of the site and structure(s)

### **Sign Installation/Replacement**

- A completed City of Detroit Application for Building Permit #4;
- Scaled and dimensioned drawings of signs including photo simulations
- In cases where signs will be attached to the building, include the entire building elevation
- Color and material samples
- Photograph of the elevation where the sign will be installed
- In cases of replacement, a detailed description including the colors, materials and location(s) of existing signs and justification of why the sign(s) need to be replaced

### **Window Replacement (Historic Windows)**

- A completed City of Detroit Building Permit Application
- Written justification of why the historic windows need to be replaced
- A completed *Historic District Commission Application for the Replacement of Historic Windows* (all pages must be submitted) which includes:
  - a brochure or other information giving the color, materials and configuration of the proposed new replacement windows;
  - two (2) written estimates from different companies of the cost to repair and paint the existing windows
  - detailed photographs showing deterioration of the window interiors

**WORK ITEMS THE STAFF OF THE DETROIT HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION  
CAN APPROVE**

*Note: all other types of work must go before the Commission at their monthly meeting.*

1. *Gutter and downspout replacement*, provided that: (a) quality materials like copper are not being removed and replaced, and (b) the design of gutters and downspouts closely resembles the original, and the routing of the downspouts is either the original or not so placed as to be intrusive in the design of the building, and (c) the colors meet the terms and conditions of the *Detroit Historic Districts Style & Color Guide*.
2. *Masonry cleaning*, provided that the application meets the terms and conditions of the Commission's policy on Exterior *Masonry Cleaning Techniques*.
3. *Re-roofing of an asphalt shingle roof* with new asphalt shingles, provided that the shingles are of a color and texture resembling historic roofing materials used in the district and/or on the building in question.
4. *Window and/or door replacement*, provided that the design and material(s) conforms with the original, and the color conforms to the *Detroit Historic Districts Style & Color Guide*; where the existing door or window is not original to the structure, the replacement should be compatible with the architectural design of the structure.
5. *Partial installation of vinyl windows*, provided that (a) the original windows were removed and vinyl, fiberglass or composite windows installed prior to the area's local historic district designation (upon submission of dated visual and/or physical confirmation, **OR** (b) a COA was issued by the Historic District Commission for the installation of vinyl, fiberglass or composite windows **AND** (c) the proposed vinyl, fiberglass or composite windows are only on the sides and/or rear elevations.
6. *Storm window and/or door installation* provided that (a) mullions, muntins, and meeting rails of storm windows conform with those of the prime window, and the design of the storm door reflects the design of the prime door, and (b) if aluminum or vinyl storm windows and doors are used, the color is appropriate under the *Detroit Historic Districts Style & Color Guide*.
7. *Window or door boarding*, provided that (a) the boarding up of window(s) and/or door(s) is temporary and for the protection of the building.
8. *Replacement of the fabric of existing canvas awnings*, provided that the new canvas is not plastic or vinyl coated or does not appear to be so; and where the color is appropriate to the trim colors on the building.
9. *Antenna and Satellite dish installation*, provided that the design and location meets the guidelines in Historic district commission *Antenna and Satellite Dish Guidelines*.
10. *Replacement of an existing fence* provided the type, materials, and height match the existing fence, OR meets the *Fence and Hedge Guidelines*.
11. *Replacement of an asphalt shingle roof with a wood shingle, tile or slate roof* provided the owner or contractor can substantiate that wood shingles originally existed on the roof.

12. *Installation of gas or electric lamps* in the tree lawn of the Indian Village Historic District, provided the lamps match the standard lamp in the district.
13. *Reconstruction of existing porches*, provided the materials and design match the existing materials and design, and that the colors meet the *Detroit Historic Districts Style and Color Guide*.
14. *Change of paint color(s)*, provided the new color(s) meets the *Detroit Historic Districts Style and Color Guide*.
15. *Installation of a temporary, chain link construction fence* for a period that does not exceed nine (9) months.
16. *The installation of glass blocks to replace basement windows* provided the installation meets the *Glass Block Installation Guidelines*.
17. *The removal of dead, diseased or damaged trees* with a written statement from a professional service or arborist.
18. *A change in walkway or driveway material* that matches the same width and length, and meets the districts' elements of design.
19. *Erection of a fence and or hedges at a new location* provided the type, materials, and height conform to the *Fence and Hedge Guidelines*.
20. *Installation of a sign or canvas awning at a new location* provided it conforms with the Historic District Commission guidelines on *Signs and Awnings*.
21. *Erection/installation of canvas awnings or canopies* at a new location provided that the new awning or canopy is not plastic or vinyl coated or does not appear to be so; the color is appropriate to the trim colors on the building; and installation meets the terms and conditions of the Commission's *Signs and Awnings Guidelines* and the *City of Detroit Zoning Ordinance: Article XIV. General Development Standards*.
22. *The renewal of seasonal outdoor café plans* with the condition that the future application does not change from a plan that the Detroit Historic District Commission approved and no complaints were received about the seasonal outdoor café plan during the previous season.
23. *A change in street furnishing and/or materials* that does not change the location of the barrier, barrier style, and meets the *Detroit Historic District Commission Color Guide*.
24. *Erection of temporary event tents* for a period of fifteen (15) days, with one renewal per calendar year.
25. *Removal of landscaping* that is located in close vicinity to an historic building to the extent that it is damaging/has the potential to damage the historic building.
26. *Installation of new cellphone antennas and associated equipment* at a building rooftop provided that the new cellphone antennas and associated equipment is finished the same color of the exterior surface to which it shall be affixed and it is minimally-visible from the direct right-of-way.



27. *Installation of new metal or wood hand railing at existing porches* under the condition that such work does not result in the removal/replacement of existing historic age fabric and the new railing is compatible in design, dimension, and finish color to existing porch's historic appearance.
28. *The replacement of non-historic age asphalt roof shingles* with new asphalt shingles under the condition that the design, dimension, profile, and color of the new/replacement asphalt shingles are compatible with the district's Elements of Design and the building's historic appearance.
29. *The installation of a new hand railing* at porches under the condition that they are compatible to the building's historic appearance and do not result in the removal of historic fabric.
30. *The installation of new light fixtures* under the condition that they are compatible with the building's historic appearance in scale, style and finish and meets the district's Elements of Design.
31. *The installation of potted/moveable plants.*
32. *The installation of a new dumpster enclosure* under the condition that the location, dimension, and materials conform to the Detroit City Code/Zoning Ordinance.
33. *The installation of concrete hardscape* under the condition that it is not "bright white." Specifically, such concrete must be composed of an exposed aggregate, tinted grey, or finished with a clear or tinted grey curing compound.
34. *The installation of DTE equipment for underground residential service*, provided that a) all items associated with the equipment shall meet the structural conditions as required by the Detroit Building, Safety, Engineering, and Environmental Department, and b) all work proposed for installation in the public right-of-way be approved by the Detroit Department of Public Works, City Engineering Division.
35. *Outdoor sidewalk cafes*, on the condition that: a) the outdoor café equipment can be removed from the public right-of-way during the months of December – March, b) no off-premises advertising signs shall be installed within the outdoor café area, c) all items associated with the canopies/awnings shall meet the structural conditions as required by the Detroit Building, Safety, Engineering & Environmental Department, d) all work proposed for installation in the public right-of-way be approved by the Detroit Department of Public Works, City Engineering Division, and e) the applicant shall insure the Detroit City Council approve the proposed sidewalk outdoor eating/café area prior to its installation.
36. *Replacement of entryway porch platforms*, on the condition that: a) architecturally and/or historically significant features or materials are not removed, and b) the new platform material shall be architecturally appropriate (in color, size, and pattern) for the individual style of the structure.
37. *The addition of painted murals to exterior walls.*
38. *The location of mechanical equipment within the property boundaries*, provided that the equipment is located to the rear or the building or screened from view front the public-right-way and otherwise conforms to City zoning requirements.

39. *Installation of solar panels*, on the condition that: a) the solar panels are installed in areas with limited-to-no visibility to the public right-of-way, b) ground-mounted panels shall be located in the rear yard, c) roof-mounted panels shall be flat-mounted, located on a rear roof elevation and/or garage, with adequate distance from roof edges and ridge, d) panels shall have a matte, dark finish consistent with the color of the existing roofing material, e) wall-mounted panels won't cover existing architectural features, nor damage existing wall materials, and f) the installation(s) shall comply with the National Park Service, Technical Preservation Serviced document, "Incorporating Solar Panels in a Rehabilitation Project" (ITS Number 52).
40. *Installation of ADA ramp*, on the condition that: a) the ramp is installed in an area with limited-to-no visibility to the public right-of-way, b) the design is sympathetic to the architectural style of the house and uses compatible materials (if the ramp and railing are constructed of wood, they shall be painted in a color corresponding with the house's color system), and c) the ramp conforms to the National Park Service Preservation Brief #32: *Making Historic Properties Accessible*.

## **HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION GUIDELINES**

The Detroit Historic District Commission has established guidelines to assist homeowners, residents, and contractors when planning projects that will affect the exterior of a historic property. These guidelines act as a starting point for alterations and consider protection of the historic property and preservation of a building's integrity. Based on research regarding the city's past, the guidelines do not prevent alteration, but assist in keeping a neighborhood's character intact. The following list of guidelines are available from the Commission staff.

- Antenna and Satellite Dish
- Fence and Hedge
- Glass Block Basement Windows
- Masonry Cleaning
- Security Bar & Lighting
- Signs and Awnings

## **SECRETARY OF INTERIOR STANDARDS FOR REHABILITATION**

1. A property will be used as it was historically or be given a new use that requires minimal change to its distinctive materials, features, spaces and spatial relationships.

2. The historic character of a property will be retained and preserved. The removal of distinctive materials or alteration of features, spaces and spatial relationships that characterize a property will be avoided.
3. Each property will be recognized as a physical record of its time, place, and use. Changes that create a false sense of historical development, such as adding conjectural features or elements from other historic properties, will not be undertaken.
4. Changes to a property that have acquired historic significance in their own right will be retained and preserved.
5. Distinctive materials, features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a property will be preserved.
6. Deteriorated historic features will be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature will match the old in design, color, texture, and, where possible, materials. Replacement of missing features will be substantiated by documentary and physical evidence.
7. Chemical or physical treatments, if appropriate, will be undertaken using the gentlest means possible. Treatments that cause damage to historic materials will not be used.
8. Archeological resources will be protected and preserved in place. If such resources must be disturbed, mitigation measures will be undertaken.
9. New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction will not destroy historic materials, features, and spatial relationships that characterize the property. The new work will be differentiated from the old and will be compatible with the historic materials, features, size, scale, and proportion, and massing to protect the integrity of the property and its environment.
10. New additions and adjacent or related new construction will 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.

**2018 APPLICATION AND MEETING DEADLINE**

**APPLICATION  
DUE DATE**

Monday, January 29  
Monday, February 26  
Monday, March 26  
Monday, April 23  
Monday, May 28  
Monday, June 25  
Monday, July 23  
Monday, August 27  
Monday, September 24  
Monday, October 29  
Monday, November 26

**MEETING DATE**

*No Regular Meeting in January*  
Wednesday, February 14  
Wednesday, March 14  
Wednesday, April 11  
Wednesday, May 9  
Wednesday, June 13  
Wednesday, July 11  
Wednesday, August 8  
Wednesday, September 12  
Wednesday, October 10  
Wednesday, November 14  
Wednesday, December 12

Applications must be received in the Commission office at 2 Woodward, Suite 808, **by 5 PM on**

**the due date.**

All Commission meetings are held in the Coleman A. Young Municipal Center beginning at 5:30 PM, unless otherwise noted.

### **WALK-IN COUNTER HOURS**

TUESDAY AND THURSDAY 9:00 A.M. – 4:00 P.M.

It is recommended to email staff in advance to confirm their availability on these days.

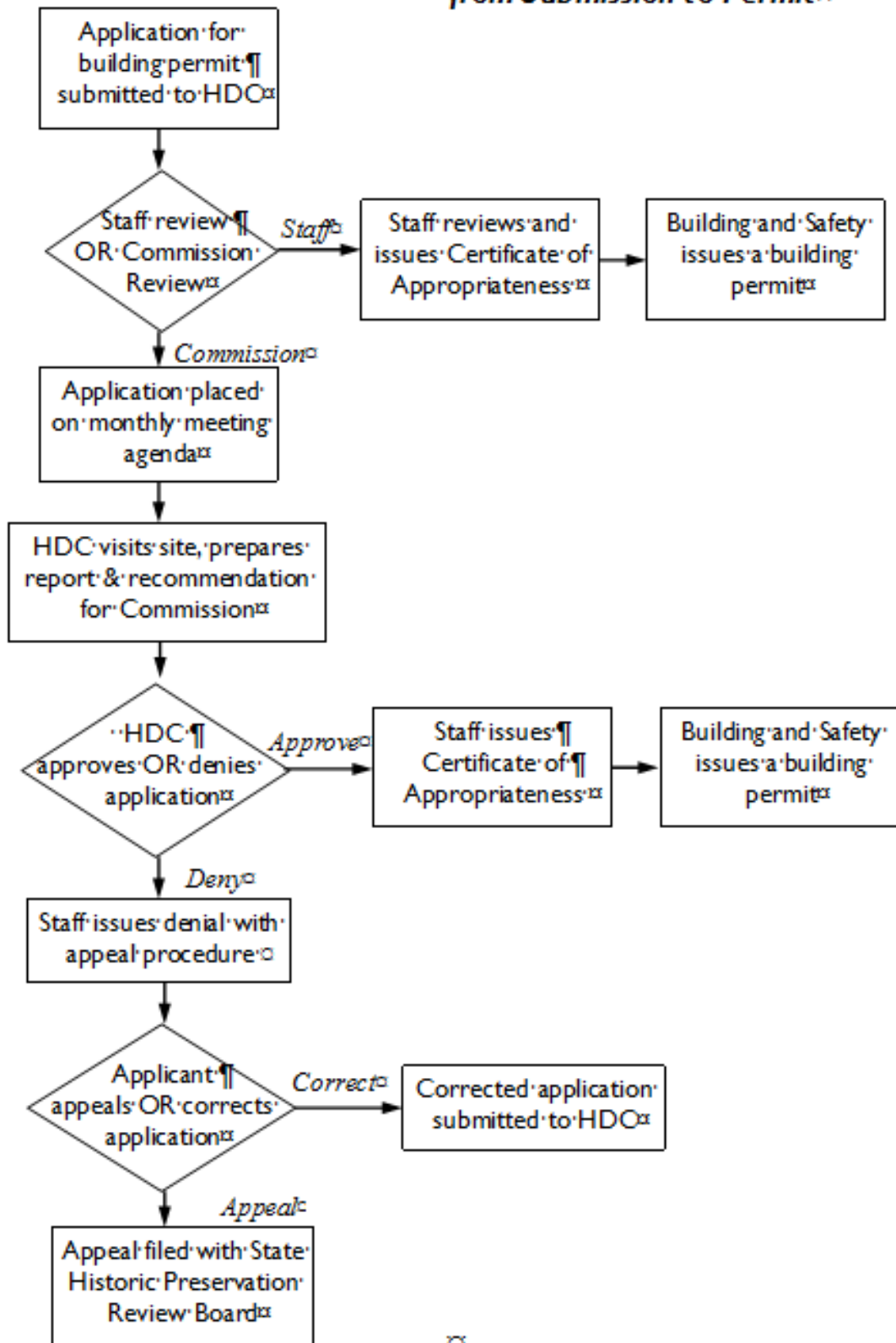
MONDAY, WEDNESDAY AND FRIDAY – Walk-in reviews **are not** available

To make an appointment with HDC staff, please email Jennifer and/or Audra

### **HELPFUL INFORMATION**

- ❖ Email property addresses to HDC staff to confirm if a property is located within a local historic district.
- ❖ Color charts for exterior painting can be obtained only in the Planning Department, or a chart can be mailed to you. The color systems are not available online due to the color corrected nature of the documents.

## Building Permit Application Process from Submission to Permit



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