

Welcome to Chapel Hill's Historic Districts

Living in one of Chapel Hill's three historic districts— Franklin-Rosemary, Cameron-McCauley, and Gimghoul—is a special experience. This guide is designed to help you enjoy your home while following Town ordinances.

What are historic districts?

The Town has created these districts to preserve the history and character of Chapel Hill. They are zoning overlay districts, meaning special requirements beyond usual zoning laws.

What are the rules for changes to properties in the districts?

The Chapel Hill Historic Design Principles and Standards, <https://chplan.us/3FueMXE>

Who makes decisions about changes to properties in the district?

The Chapel Hill Historic District Commission (HDC) makes decisions about whether proposed changes are *not incongruous with the special character of the district*. The HDC decides whether the Town should issue a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA).

What activities are covered?

External changes to historic district properties require a COA. These include new construction, reconstruction, alterations, restoration, and demolition of all or part of a structure or wall.

Town planning staff can often approve minor works, those that the HDC has delegated approval authority to staff. The staff may issue you a memo for repairs and routine maintenance.

Changes to trees and landscaping do not need a COA.

The HDC may not deny a request for demolition or removal of a structure but may delay the request's effective date for up to a year.

How does an owner get a COA?

The owner must apply for a COA <https://chapelhillnc.viewpointcloud.com/categories/1086> and pay any fees. The application must include information about the existing structure, the proposed changes, and how those changes will not be incongruous with the special character of the district.

What happens after an application is filed?

Staff reviews the application and may request more information from an applicant. Staff prepares a report for the HDC before the hearing.

What happens at an HDC hearing?

The HDC is a quasi-judicial body. Applicants may present sworn testimony and exhibits. Other individuals may testify about the application. HDC members may not have any personal interest in the application.

At its hearing the HDC may approve the application as submitted or with conditions, request more information, or deny the request. The HDC's role is to find whether the proposed changes are not incongruous with the district. The HDC will issue a decision citing the applicable design standards. The HDC must act within 90 days from the time the application is filed unless the HDC grants an extension

Is there an appeal from an HDC decision?

Applicants may appeal to the Chapel Hill Board of Adjustment and then to District Court.

Where can I find more information about the historic districts?

Please visit the Town website: <https://chplan.us/33C1vPh>