

CHAPEL HILL HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION

Rules of Procedure

(Adopted 4/14/77; Amended 5/26/77; 2/8/79; 2/22/79; 6/11/81; 9/22/83; 9/27/84; 12/14/06; 3/8/16; 5/9/2017; 4/10/2018; 12/14/2021; 12/9/2025)

I. PURPOSE

To establish procedures for processing applications for Certificates of Appropriateness for erecting, altering, restoring, moving, or demolishing exterior portions of buildings or other structures within the Chapel Hill Historic Districts.

II. GENERAL RULES

The Chapel Hill Historic District Commission shall be governed by the terms of the relevant provisions of the Town's Land Use Management Ordinance (LUMO), including, but not limited to Sections 3.6.2 and 8.4, as amended, the [Chapel Hill Advisory Board Policy](#)¹, and the relevant provisions of Chapter 160D of the North Carolina General Statutes, including, but not limited to 160D-940 through 160D-963 160A-400.14, as amended or revised.

III. JURISDICTION

The Historic Districts shall be delineated on the official zoning map on file in the Planning Department. As provided by the Town's Land Use Management Ordinance, a Certificate of Appropriateness is required for most development within any of the Town's Historic Districts.

IV. MEMBERS, OFFICERS, AND DUTIES

- A. General. The Commission shall be composed as set forth in the Town's Land Use Management Ordinance.
- B. Officer Roles and Elections. The Commission shall elect a Chair and Vice-chair as set forth in the Chapel Hill Advisory Board Policy.
- C. Secretary. A member of the Planning staff, designated by the Town Manager, shall serve as Secretary to the Commission. The Secretary, subject to the direction of the Chair of the Commission, shall prepare meeting agendas, shall keep all records, shall conduct all correspondence of the Commission, and shall generally supervise the clerical work of the Commission.

¹ <https://www.townofchapelhill.org/government/mayor-and-council/boards-commissions/board-membership-policy>

- D. Terms of Appointments. Members shall be appointed to serve terms of three (3) years. Vacancies shall be filled for the unexpired term only. Members shall serve a maximum of two consecutive terms.
- E. Attendance at Meetings. Any member of the Commission who misses more than three (3) consecutive regular meetings or more than half the regular meetings in a calendar year shall be replaced by the Town Council, as appropriate, provided that special extenuating circumstances may be considered by full membership of the Commission and/or the Council prior to automatic removal, on a case-by-case basis. Absence due to sickness, death, or other emergencies of like nature shall be recognized as excused absences and shall not affect the member's status on the Commission, except that in the event of a long illness or other such cause for prolonged absence, the member may be replaced. The Commission's Chair and Secretary shall notify a member who has two consecutive unexcused absences to alert the member of the attendance clause. Notification shall also be sent to Mayor and Council and Town Clerk. Upon the third consecutive regular meeting absence, the Chair or staff liaison shall send another notification to the member, Mayor and Council, and Town Clerk. When a member has exceeded the maximum number of unexcused absences, the Secretary shall notify the full Commission and the Town Council.
- F. Applications Involving Conflicts of Interest. As provided by G.S. 160D-109, a Commission member shall not participate in or vote on any application in a manner that would violate affected persons' constitutional rights to an impartial decision maker. Impermissible violations of due process include, but are not limited to, a member having a fixed opinion prior to hearing the matter that is not susceptible to change, undisclosed ex parte communications, a close familial, business, or other associational relationship with an affected person, or a financial interest in the outcome of the matter. No Commission member shall take part in the hearing, consideration, or determination of any case in which he/she is a party.
- G. No Commission member shall vote on any matter deciding an application or a request to reconsider unless he or she shall have attended the Commission's previous deliberations on such application or shall otherwise have the approval of the Chairperson to vote on such matter. The Chairperson's approval shall be contingent on the assurance by the member that he/she has familiarized him/herself with the application and the minutes of any meetings at which the application was discussed.
- H. No Commission member shall in any manner discuss any application with any person prior to the Commission's deliberations on such application, except as specified elsewhere in the Commission's Rules of Procedure; provided, however, that members may seek and/or receive information pertaining to the application from Town staff prior to the hearing if the information is provided to all Commission members and to all parties. A Commission member shall disclose at the hearing any ex parte communications that took place prior to the hearing. This section shall not apply to communications between the Commission or individual Commissioners and the Commission's attorney.

- I. Members of the Commission shall not express individual opinions on the proper judgement of any application or any condition applicable thereto with any persons prior to the determination of that application except in accordance with these Rules of Procedure. Violation of this rule shall be cause for dismissal from the Commission.
- J. Each member of the Commission shall thoroughly familiarize him/herself with all statutes, laws, the Town's Land Use Management Ordinance and these Rules of Procedure relating to the Historic District and quasi-judicial proceedings as time and circumstances permit.
- K. Members of the Commission may be removed by the Town Council for cause.

V. MEETINGS

- A. Regular meetings of the Commission are typically held on the second Tuesday of each month at 6:30 p.m. in the Chapel Hill Town Hall; provided that meetings may be held by any other legally permissible location or method if the Chair or Secretary so directs after providing all required notices. The Secretary shall make a schedule of the Commission's regular meetings available to the public, such as posting to the Town website.
- B. Special Meetings. Special meetings of the Commission may be called at any time by the Chairperson. At least forty-eight (48) hours' notice of the time and place of special meetings shall be given, by the Secretary or by the Chairperson, to each member of the Commission and to the public. Such notice shall comply with all applicable requirements for notices of special meetings of public bodies as set forth in the North Carolina General Statutes, as may be amended from time to time.
- C. Cancellation of Meetings. Whenever there is no business for the Commission, or if so many members of the Commission indicate that they cannot attend that a quorum will not be available, the Chairperson may cancel the meeting by giving notice to all the members as soon as practical given the circumstances.
- D. Quorum. A quorum of the Commission, necessary to take any official action, shall be as described in the LUMO. The concurring vote of a majority of the membership of the Commission shall be necessary to take any official action to approve or deny an application or permit. Vacant positions on the Commission and members who are disqualified from voting shall not be considered members of the Commission for the calculation of the requisite majority. The concurring majority vote of the quorum shall be necessary to conduct other business including making a recommendation on an application to be considered by the Council.
- E. Open Meetings. All meetings shall be open to the public and noticed accordingly based on the nature of the meeting.
- F. Order of Business for Meetings. Except where otherwise agreed to by the Commission, the order of business at regular meetings shall be as follows: (1)

announcements, reports and updates; (2) petitions; (3) approval of minutes from previous meetings; (4) approval of the consent agenda; (5) old business; (6) new business; (7) adjournment. The Chairperson, at his or her discretion, shall have the authority to set an ending time for each Regular Meeting of the Commission. If the Chairperson elects to do so, the Chairperson shall announce the ending time prior to the commencement of the first evidentiary hearing.

G. Conduct at Meetings. The Historic District Commission pledges its respect to the citizens of Chapel Hill. The Commission asks its citizens to conduct themselves in a respectful, courteous manner, both with the Commission and with fellow citizens. Should any member of the Commission or any citizen fail to observe this public charge at any time, the Chair will ask the offending person to leave the meeting until that individual regains personal control. Should decorum fail to be restored, the Chair will recess the meeting until a genuine commitment to this public charge is observed.

H. Voting.

(a) Abstention. Except as provided herein, no member of the Commission may be excused from voting on any matter before the Commission. The failure to vote by a member who is physically present, is qualified to vote, or has withdrawn without being excused (preferably by a majority vote of the remaining members present) shall be recorded as an affirmative vote.

(b) Tie Votes. In the event that voting on an item being deliberated results in a tie, and the Commission is unable to break the tie or take alternative action, then the tie vote shall have the same consequence as if the Commission took no action on the item being deliberated.

I. The Secretary shall maintain a list of individuals wishing to receive email notifications of the public meetings of the Historic District Commission. Individuals subscribing to the list shall receive one emailed notice at least ten (10) business days prior to each public meeting of the Historic District Commission alerting the subscriber that a meeting agenda has been posted to the Town's website. Individuals may subscribe to the email notice list by providing their name and email address to the Secretary to the Historic District Commission in writing along with a statement that they wish to subscribe to the Historic District Commission Meeting Email List.

VI. CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS (COA) REVIEW PROCEDURES

A. The applicant has the burden of presenting competent, material, and substantial evidence showing the proposed project is not incongruous with the special character of the district.

B. Application Procedures. An application must be filed with the Planning Department at least 30 calendar days before the meeting date as provided in Section 3.6.2(d)(1) of the Land Use Management Ordinance. The Secretary may consent to accepting an application after the deadline provided the application is noticed and made accessible to the public. An application shall not be deemed filed until it has been accepted by the Secretary and deemed complete.

- (a) The Secretary shall provide notice of pending evidentiary hearings for COA applications according to NC General Statute 160D-406. Notices shall be mailed following Planning Department policy.
- C. Review Criteria. When considering a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) application, the Commission shall apply the Design Principles and Standards and shall, in approving, approving with conditions, disapproving, or deferring an application, make findings of fact indicating the extent to which the application is or is not incongruous with the special character of the district, and shall cause these findings of facts to be entered into the minutes of its meetings. The minutes shall also contain a summary of any citation to evidence, testimony, studies, or other authority upon which the Commission based its decision.
- D. Site Visits. Any on-premises site visits shall be coordinated with Town Staff and the applicant based on quasi-judicial limitations for contact with applicants and the safety of Commissioners.
- E. Conflicts of Interest. No Commission member shall participate in the decision of any matter in which he or she has a personal or financial interest per G.S. 160D 109 and Section IV.J.

If an objection is raised to a Commissioner's participation at or prior to the hearing or vote on a particular matter and that Commissioner does not recuse himself or herself, the remaining members shall by majority vote rule on the objection.

- F. Order of Business for Evidentiary Hearings. The Commission shall follow the quasi-judicial procedures outlined in G.S. 160D-406. Generally, the order of business for evidentiary hearings for applications for a Certificate of Appropriateness are as follows:
 - (a) All persons planning to offer testimony on the application shall be sworn in.
 - (b) The Secretary may provide an introductory explanation of the application subject to the hearing.
 - (c) Any person, other than an applicant, asserting they have standing to participate as a party at the evidentiary hearing shall identify themselves and provide evidence of standing. The Commission shall determine if they have standing to participate as a party. (See N.C. Gen. Stat. 160D-1402 for additional information on who has standing to participate as a party.) Any party may appear in person or by attorney at the meeting. The Commission understands that architects, landscape architects, land use planners, and engineers play a vital role during the Commission's quasi-judicial proceedings by presenting necessary facts and information on behalf of their clients.

- (d) Commission members shall disclose any ex parte communications, conflicts of interest, and site visits related to the property at issue or any of the parties.
 - (e) The applicant shall present the evidence and arguments in support of their application.
 - (f) Parties determined to have standing may cross-examine witnesses, if any, and present evidence and arguments in support of their position.
 - (g) Members of the public wishing to offer information may present competent evidence regarding the application subject to cross examination of the parties.
 - (h) Evidence submitted by any official, commission, or department of the Town of Chapel Hill, any state agency, or any local historical, preservation of neighborhood association shall be presented as directed by the Chairperson.
 - (i) The Chairperson, or such person as they shall direct, shall summarize the evidence and arguments which have been presented.
 - (j) The Commission shall thereafter proceed to deliberate on the application.
 - (k) The Commission shall take action on an application following LUMO Section 3.6.2(d)(5). All decisions of the Commission shall be supported by appropriate findings of fact, and, where necessary, shall be accompanied by such reasonable conditions and/or recommendations necessary to carry out the purposes of Part 4 of Chapter 160D-940, et. seq. of the North Carolina General Statutes.
 - (l) Procedures may be modified by concurrence of all parties and the Commission itself.
- G. Subsequent Action after Evidentiary Hearings. Should the Commission find that an application for a Certificate of Appropriateness is not incongruous with the special character of the district, the Commission shall review and vote on the written decision at their next regularly scheduled meeting. The Secretary shall share the written decision with the applicant in a timely manner.
- H. COA Expiration. A Certificate of Appropriateness shall be valid for 365 calendar days from date of issuance or, in the case of a Certificate of Appropriateness for demolition, from the effective date. If the authorized work has not commenced within that period or has been discontinued for more than 365 calendar days from the date of issuance, such Certificate of Appropriateness shall immediately expire, and the applicant shall be required to reapply.

- I. Process for Previously Denied COA Applications. The process for considering applications for a Certificate of Appropriateness which previously had been denied shall be as follows:
- (a) If the Commission denies an application for a Certificate of Appropriateness and the Town Manager accepts a new application affecting the same property, The applicant shall outline the substantial changes with respect to the reasons for its denial, made in the plans for the proposed construction, reconstruction, alteration, restoration, or moving for a Certificate of Appropriateness permitting the consideration of the new application.
 - (b) The Commission shall thereupon treat the request as a new application received at that time, following the procedures set forth above for notice and deliberation.
- J. COA Amendments.
- (a) A COA application may be amended during the evidentiary hearing or by written request from the applicant to the Commission. Such request shall include a description of the proposed change and shall be accompanied by elevations, plans, or sketches, where necessary.
 - (b) A previously approved and valid Certificate of Appropriateness may be amended as set forth in the Chapel Hill Historic District Design Principles & Standards.
- K. Minor Works. Staff may review and approve a Certificate of Appropriateness for minor works as identified and defined in the Historic District Design Principles and Standards as provided by Section 3.6.2(b)(4) of the Land Use Management Ordinance. Minor works are defined as those exterior changes that do not involve substantial alterations, and do not involve additions or removals that could impair the integrity of the property and/or the district as a whole. All approvals by staff shall be reviewed by the Commission as soon as practical.

VII. AMENDMENTS TO RULES OF PROCEDURE

These rules may, within the limits allowed by law, be amended at any time by an affirmative vote of a majority of the membership of the Commission, provided that such amendment shall have been first presented to the membership in writing at a regular or special meeting preceding the meeting at which the vote is taken. Whenever reference is made in these rules to any North Carolina statute, Town ordinance, or other regulation such reference shall be deemed to apply, and be made, to the corresponding section or provision of any successor or amended statute, ordinance or regulation.

ADDENDUM
Guidance for Virtual Meetings

I. APPLICABILITY OF VIRTUAL MEETINGS

Regular meetings of the Commission are typically held on the second Tuesday of each month at 6:30 p.m. in the Chapel Hill Town Hall; provided that meetings may be held by any other legally permissible location or method if the Chair or Secretary so directs before the meeting and adequate notice is given to the public.

In extenuating circumstances, the Commission may be required to meet virtually.

II. GENERAL RULES

A. Consent for Virtual Meeting. Applicants must be made aware that the commission is meeting virtually. Those with standing shall provide consent to the virtual meeting format.

B. Notice. The Secretary shall include a statement regarding the virtual meeting on all meeting materials and mailing notices.

C. Attendance at Meetings

(a) Commissions shall have access to a camera and microphone to participate in the meeting.

(b) Should a commissioner be recused from an item, he/she shall turn off his/her camera and microphone to signal that they are not participating in the public hearing.

D. All other Rules of Procedure apply to virtual meetings.

III. HELPFUL TIPS

A. Look your best.

(a) The camera sees everything. You are never alone.

B. Be Present

(a) By turning off your microphone and video, you are no longer present for quorum.

(b) If you need a break, ask the Chair to take a brief recess.

C. Evidence

(a) Review application materials ahead of time and be prepared to discuss.