

# *York Chester Historic District*

*Established 1988*



*Revised 6-2006*

**City of Gastonia  
North Carolina**

*Office of the Mayor*

On behalf of the citizens of Gastonia, allow me to welcome you to the York Chester Historic District, Gastonia's first locally designated historic district. Such a designation is an honor and a distinction indicating that the community believes the architecture, history, and overall integrity of this area are worthy of preservation and protection.

This publication has been developed for the purpose of disseminating information to our citizens and other interested individuals. This handbook presents various protections the City has provided to maintain our York Chester Historic District as a viable, productive, and beneficial city asset.

Jennifer T. Stultz  
Mayor

March 2001

## **Table of Contents**

<b>Purpose About York Chester</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>York Chester Map</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Historic District Zoning Historic District Commission</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Certificate of Appropriateness</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Procedures for Obtaining a Certificate of Appropriateness</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Ordinary Maintenance and Repairs: Minor Work, and Major Work</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Frequently Asked Questions</b>	<b>13</b>

## ***Purpose of Historic Districts***

Historic Districts are established for the purpose of protecting and conserving the heritage and history of the neighborhood and the City of Gastonia, fostering civic beauty and enhancing property values within the District and Gastonia as a whole, thus contributing to the improvement of the general health and welfare of Gastonia and its residents.

## ***About the York Chester Historic District***

The ***York Chester Historic District*** is the city's oldest community and consequently the city's first historic district. Created in 1988, York Chester consists of over 540 structures, with many of the homes dating back to the early 1920s. The architecture of the district is a mixture of many styles, such as Bungalow, Italianate, Queen Anne, Colonial Revival, Greek Revival, Gothic Revival, Neo Classical, New England Saltbox, Farmhouse, Colonial, and Georgian Revival.



## ***HISTORIC DISTRICT ZONING***

The City of Gastonia first adopted Historic District Zoning in its zoning ordinance on August 2, 1988. This form of zoning requires that property owners obtain a Certificate of Appropriateness from the Historic District Commission for most exterior alterations to all properties within the Historic District and for all new construction within the District. *A Certificate of Appropriateness is usually required where a building permit is required and is sometimes required even where a building permit is not required.* There are also rules governing demolition.

## ***HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION***

The Gastonia City Council has created the Historic District Commission, which among other duties, is empowered to consider applications for Certificate of Appropriateness and to advise property owners concerning the treatment of the historical and visual characteristics of properties within the District. Members of the Commission serve without compensation for terms of three years. The Commissioners must be, under state law, resident of the territorial zoning jurisdiction of Gastonia and “shall have demonstrated special interest, experience or education in history or architecture”.

**The Commission meets on the fourth Thursday of each month at 6:30 p.m. in the City Council Chambers of City Hall, 181 South Street, Gastonia.** The mailing address of the Historic District Commission is P.O. Box 1748, c/o City of Gastonia Planning Department, Gastonia, North Carolina 28053-1748. The public is invited to attend these meetings. However, if any persons of the public would like to be placed on the meeting agenda, persons should contact the Historic District Administrator at (704) 854-6652 at least fourteen (14) days before the meeting.

## *Certificate of Appropriateness*

Before beginning any type of exterior construction, alteration or demolition work within the Historic District, an application for a Certificate of Appropriateness must be submitted to and approved by the Planning Department or by the Commission, depending upon the work to be done. Applications are available on the City's website: [www.cityofgastonia.com](http://www.cityofgastonia.com) or, from the Planning Department located on the second floor of The James B. Garland Municipal Business Center, 150 S. York Street. Information may also be obtained by calling (704) 854-6652. Office hours are 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Applications for a Certificate of Appropriateness **must** be signed by the **owner of the subject property or his agent**. Should the nature of the work require Commission approval, a **completed** application must be filed with the Planning Department at least fourteen (14) days before the next meeting of the Historic District Commission. Planning Department approval of Minor Works has no deadline. All submitted applications **must** be accompanied by sketches, drawings, photographs, specifications, descriptions, etc. of the proposed project sufficient to inform the Commission and/or Planning staff of the nature and extent of the application. If a building permit is required, the holder of a Certificate of Appropriateness shall then follow the normal procedures for obtaining a building permit.

In considering an application for a Certificate of Appropriateness, the Historic District Commission references the architectural guidelines as set forth by the Secretary of Interior for Preservation of Older Buildings. These guidelines are a set of **recommendations** as to appropriate treatments for exterior work in Historic District. These guidelines may be modified or changed as new areas are designated as historic districts. Proposed improvements and new construction should be consistent with the intent of the guidelines.

The Historic District Commission may approve, deny, or, suggest modifications to an application in order to make it acceptable. The Commission may, but is not required to, consider cost of improvements or new construction in its evaluation of an application.



## ***PROCEDURES FOR OBTAINING A CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS***

The following is a brief overview of the process for obtaining a Certificate of Appropriateness:

1. Determine whether the proposed work requires a Certificate of Appropriateness. If the proposed work falls under the Ordinary Maintenance and Repairs category, the Certificate of Appropriateness is not required. (See next page.)
2. Obtain an application from the Planning Department, second floor, James B. Garland Municipal Business Center, 150 S. York Street, or on the Internet at [www.cityofgastonia.com](http://www.cityofgastonia.com).
3. Determine whether your application may be approved by the Planning Department as 'Minor Work' or must be submitted to the Commission as 'Major Work'. Compare your project to the appropriate set of Architectural Guidelines; the Planning Department staff can provide assistance.
4. Complete application and attach appropriate exhibits.
5. Submit your completed application to the Planning Department. Applications for 'Minor Work' will be reviewed by the Planning staff (with possible recommendations from a subcommittee of the commission depending on the nature of the proposed work) within fourteen (14) days. Applications for 'Major Work' will be heard by the Historic District Commission at the next meeting. Notice to affected property owners will be given if Commission review is required.
6. For 'Minor Works': The Planning staff will approve, approve with conditions, or deny the application. If the Planning staff denies the application, the application will go to the Historic District Commission for review as a matter of right.
7. For 'Major Works': appear before the Commission to discuss your application and receive a decision.

**All applications must be reviewed and acted upon within 45 days from the date the completed application is filed.**



## ***ORDINARY MAINTENANCE AND REPAIR***

Ordinary maintenance and repair **does not** require a Certificate of Appropriateness, since no change is made to the appearance of a building. Ordinary maintenance and repair includes but is not limited to the following items:

- ◆ Repainting the same color, the original color or white.
- ◆ Replacement of window glass.
- ◆ Caulking and weather-stripping.
- ◆ Installation of “temporary” mechanical equipment (such as window air conditioning units).
- ◆ Minor landscaping, including vegetable and flower gardens, shrubbery and tree planting.
- ◆ Pruning trees and shrubbery.
- ◆ Removal of shrubbery.
- ◆ Repairs to walks, patios, fences and driveways as long as replacement materials match the existing material.
- ◆ Replacement of small amounts of missing or deteriorated siding, trim, roof shingles, porch flooring, steps, etc. as long as replacement materials match the existing material.
- ◆ Replacement or repair of architectural details, when there is no change in design or materials from the original or existing ones. Repainting and other masonry repairs, as long as the replacement materials match the existing material.
- ◆ Installation of storm windows and doors. It is recommended that the color match the color of the building trim.
- ◆ Installation of gutters and down-spout as long as no trim or molding is removed.
- ◆ Temporary signs (real estate, political, etc.), which do not exceed four (4) square feet.
- ◆ New roof coverings, as long as the material and color match that of the existing roof.



## ***MINOR WORK***

Minor work items **require** a Certificate of Appropriateness. Minor work items, however, can be approved by the Planning Staff, if the work is consistent with the district's architectural guidelines. Included are various minor projects where the visual character of the structure is not significantly changed and the following specific items:

- ◆ Side and rear yard fences and walls.
- ◆ Landscaping projects including removal of any size tree determined by the Planning Department to be diseased or dead.<sup>1</sup>
- ◆ New roof coverings involving a change in the material used or its color.
- ◆ Installation of mechanical equipment.
- ◆ Chimney and foundation repairs including vents and access doors.
- ◆ Site improvements, including but not limited to satellite dishes, swimming pools, tennis and basketball courts, and outdoor hot tubs.
- ◆ Painting of new construction and repainting existing colors other than to the same color, the original color or white.
- ◆ Exterior lighting fixtures.
- ◆ Removal of asbestos or other artificial siding.
- ◆ Replacement of exterior stairs, landings, and steps.

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<sup>1</sup> Certificate of Appropriateness may require the applicant to replace the tree with another tree, which shall be at least two (2) inches in diameter at the base.

***MINOR WORKS***  
***(With Commission Subcommittee Recommendations)***

Minor Work items approved by the Planning staff **with recommendations from a subcommittee of the Historic District Commission** include:

- ◆ Signs, excluding temporary signs (real estate, political, etc.) which do not exceed four (4) square feet in area.
- ◆ New accessory structures.
- ◆ Fences and walls in the front yard.
- ◆ Window and door replacement.
- ◆ Installation of artificial siding.
- ◆ Painting of new construction and repainting.
- ◆ Enclosure of porches or garages.
- ◆ Construction of decks or porches.
- ◆ Room additions.

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**Notes:**

Any approval or denial of a Minor Works Certificate of Appropriateness may be appealed to the Historic District Commission for any reason.

Upon issuance of a Certificate of Appropriateness (Minor & Major) the Zoning Administrator may issue a Zoning Permit.

## ***MAJOR WORK***

Major work **must** be approved by the Historic District Commission. In general, these are items, which involve a change in the appearance of a building or landscape and are more substantial in nature than minor work items. They include the following:

- ◆ New construction of or additions to buildings and exterior remodeling.
- ◆ Demolition of a structure or any part thereof.
- ◆ Moving of structures.
- ◆ Signs; however, temporary signs (real estate, political etc.) which do not exceed four (4) square feet are not restricted.
- ◆ New accessory buildings.
- ◆ Parking lots.
- ◆ Replacement of architectural details when there will be a change in design or materials from the existing ones.
- ◆ All minor work items reviewed by the Planning Department, but not approved.
- ◆ Removal of trees greater than eight (8) inches or more in diameter at the base, unless determined to be dead or diseased.<sup>2</sup>
- ◆ Any other work involving a significant change in the design, material or exterior appearance of a building, structure or other appurtenance feature and not otherwise specifically characterized herein.

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<sup>2</sup> Certificate of Appropriateness may require the applicant to replace the tree with another tree which shall be no smaller than two (2) inches in diameter at the base.

## ***FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS***

- 1. My home is in the historic district; will there be any increase of my property values?** We do not know for every individual case. However, evidence from other historic districts around the country indicates that property values are generally found to stabilize or increase.
- 2. I may want to redesign the interior of my house; will that require a Certificate of Appropriateness from the Historic District Commission?** No. The Commission only deals with exterior changes. You may make any interior changes you want as long as they are in accordance with the standard zoning regulations and building codes of the City of Gastonia. If interior changes require exterior alterations (such as the modification of windows), the exterior changes will necessitate an application for a Certificate of appropriateness.
- 3. How do I go about getting a Certificate of Appropriateness?** You can get an application for a Certificate of Appropriateness from the Planning Department or on the City's website [www.cityofgastonia.com](http://www.cityofgastonia.com). If your application requires Commission approval and it is filed in complete form at least fourteen (14) days before the regularly scheduled monthly meeting of the Historic District Commission, the Commission will review your application at that meeting. Applications submitted later will be reviewed at the following monthly meeting. At its meeting the Commission may grant approval, decide to study the matter further, or ask for further information. Within forty-five (45) days of your application, the Historic District Commission must issue or deny a Certificate of Appropriateness. If your application does not require Commission approval, there is no deadline for completion. All major work items require Commission approval. Minor work items can be approved by the Historic District Administrator; however, an application for minor work may be referred to the Commission for approval depending on the nature of the work to be done.
- 4. Can I appeal the decision of the Historic District Commission if I do not agree with it?** Yes, you can. It can be appealed to the Zoning Board of Adjustment. Further appeal can be made to the Superior Court of Gaston County. **Any aggrieved party can appeal including neighboring property owners.**
- 5. Who serves on the Historic District Commission?** The Commission, appointed by the City Council, will be composed entirely of Gastonia residents. Of the seven Commission members, a majority must be specially qualified with an interest in architecture or history.
- 6. Will I need a Certificate of Appropriateness before I put aluminum or vinyl siding on my house?** Yes, you will. A Certificate of Appropriateness is a major work item which must be approved by the Historic district Commission.

- 7. If I want to make changes behind my house, will I need a Certificate of Appropriateness?** Any changes (construction, reconstruction, alteration or demolition) that affect the exterior of your buildings or appurtenant fixtures (i.e. utility building, garage, swimming pool) will need a Certificate of Appropriateness. This applies anywhere on your lot since changes at the back of your property may also have a direct effect on the character of your property and the neighborhood.
- 8. Does this mean I cannot take out a tree without permission?** A Certificate of Appropriateness is required before any tree can be removed. If a healthy tree is 8” or less in diameter at the base, its removal can be approved by the Planning Department. Staff can also approve removal of any dead, diseased, or severely damaged trees. Removal of larger trees requires permission from the Commission.
- What is the procedure if I want to demolish a building on my property?** A Certificate of Appropriateness is required. The Commission may delay an approved Certificate of Appropriateness for the demolition of a building for up to 365 days from approval. This serves to provide time for the Commission to find a way to save the building if it is significant. If the building is found to be of no significance, the Commission must waive all or part of the delay period and authorize demolition. If it is determined that the property owner would suffer extreme hardship or permanently be deprived of use of or return from the property due to the delay, the Commission may reduce the waiting period.
- 10. Will I be forced to do extra maintenance on my property?** No. The Historic District Commission cannot require you to make any changes to your property. However, the Commission does have authority over any changes (other than ordinary maintenance and repairs) that are made to building exteriors or fixtures.
- 11. Will the controls in the historic district make it more difficult to sell my property?** The neighborhood will be enhanced, as should property, by the controls placed within the historic district. Experience with other historic districts has shown a strong improvement in the housing market within historic district areas. According to the historic district ordinance, there are no limitations set on the sale of property.
- 12. Must new buildings in the historic district be limitations of nearby or historical buildings?** Alterations and new construction must satisfy certain design principles specified in the Architectural Guidelines, which are part of the Historic District Ordinance. The intent is to make new construction harmonize with the buildings already in the area and to prevent serious incongruities. But there is no intent to prescribe any type of architectural or building style and thereby freeze the area into a particular style or period.
- 13. What effect does the historic district zoning have on property taxes?** It has absolutely no direct effect on property tax evaluation, rates or payments. In the long run, it may help to maintain or improve property values.

*York Chester*

*Historic District*