

TOWN *Of* CARY  
**CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS PERMIT  
FACT SHEET**

**What is a Certificate of Appropriateness?**

A Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) is a type of permit required by section 3.27.2 of the Town of Cary Land Development Ordinance. The COA certifies that changes to a locally designated Historic Landmark are appropriate to the historic character of the property. Once a property is designated as a Historic Landmark, the exterior cannot be changed without a COA issued by the Cary Historic Preservation Commission or by Cary Planning Staff.

**When is a COA required?**

If you are getting ready to do work to the exterior of your Landmark property or its grounds, you will need to apply for a COA. A COA is required for all exterior projects that involve a change in design, materials, or outer appearance to a Historic Landmark or its site.

A COA is not required for interior changes or routine maintenance. Routine maintenance is defined as the repair or replacement of building features when there is no change in materials or appearance. For example, replacing roof shingles when there is no change in color or material is considered routine maintenance. In the case of storm damage you do not need a COA to stabilize the structure or make immediate repairs necessary for safety or to protect your property or belongings, as long as the resulting job does not change the design or appearance of the building before the storm and does not use different materials than before the storm. A COA is required if major repairs or reconstruction are necessary after storm damage.

If you are in any doubt about whether a COA is required or not, be sure to call the Historic Preservation Planner in the Planning Department at 919-469-4084.

**How should I plan appropriate changes to my Landmark property?**

All decisions concerning applications for Certificates of Appropriateness are based on the Cary Historic Design Guidelines. The Design Guidelines recognize that buildings evolve over time and encourage compatible change that does not compromise the characteristics that made the Landmark worthy of designation. Please use the guidelines to plan your project.

**How do I apply for a COA?**

You can download a COA application from the Planning Department webpage, complete it, and then return it along with any drawings, site plans, photographs, or other materials you may have, or that are requested, to the Planning Department at Town Hall. Digital submittals are encouraged and preferred. The application includes more detailed information about submittal requirements.

**How are COAs issued?**

Your COA application will first be reviewed and evaluated by Planning Department staff using the Cary Historic Design Guidelines. These guidelines are available online, or a copy may be obtained from

Planning Department staff. You may want to review your COA application with Planning staff before you submit it to ensure that it is complete, accurate, and includes sufficiently detailed information.

There are two kinds of COAs: a minor COA and a major COA. A minor COA request can be approved by staff, but denied only by the Cary Historic Preservation Commission. Minor COA are used for changes to exterior features of property that do not involve substantial alterations, additions, or removals that could impair the integrity of the property as a whole.

Major COAs involve substantial changes to a Landmark such as changes in important historical features, building additions, new construction, and demolition. Major COA requests are presented to the Cary Historic Preservation Commission for approval during its regular monthly meeting. The presentation is accompanied by a public hearing and adjacent property owners are notified by mail. The applicant/owner should be present and prepared to answer questions that may arise. Adjacent property owners and other interested parties are given the opportunity to comment on the application at the hearing. After the hearing, the Historic Preservation Commission may approve your project as requested, approved it with conditions, or deny it. If the Historic Preservation Commission approves the request, the property owner is issued a COA, which must be posted at the work site with any other required permits.

You do not need to specify which kind of COA you are applying for. Staff will automatically consider it for a minor COA, if appropriate. Here are some examples of projects that may be considered for minor COAs:

- Removal of accessory buildings/outbuildings which are not architecturally or historically significant.
- Alteration/addition/removal of awnings, canopies, or shutters.
- Alteration/addition/removal of existing decks.
- Addition or installation of new doors, including storm doors.
- Alteration/addition to/removal of existing driveways.
- Construction of new driveways.
- Addition/alteration/removal of existing fences or walls.
- Construction of new fences and walls.
- Installation or removal of gutters and/or downspouts.
- Removal or significant pruning of trees 8 inches or greater in diameter, measured 4 ½ feet above ground level.
- Removal of dead, diseased, or dangerous trees.
- Installation/alteration/removal of exterior lighting.
- Installation of window air conditioners.
- Painting when there is a change in color.
- Alteration/addition/removal of existing parking lots.
- Alteration/addition/removal of existing patios.
- Construction of new patios.
- Installation of satellite dishes and/or television antennae.
- Installation/removal of signs.
- Alteration/construction/removal of exterior stairs and steps.
- Alteration/construction/removal of temporary features associated with a medical condition.
- Alteration/installation/removal of vents and ventilators.

- Alteration/addition to/removal of existing walkways.
- Construction of new walkways.

After reviewing a completed application, if staff determines that the project is minor, staff will issue a COA to the owner within 45 days. If staff believes the COA request should be denied, or if staff determines that the project is major, staff will schedule the COA request for review by the Cary Historic Preservation Commission at its next meeting. The Historic Preservation Commission's usual meeting time is 6:30 pm on the second Wednesday of each month, but there are sometimes exceptions due to holidays or conflicts with other major events, so always check the current meeting schedule at: [http://www.townofcary.org/Town\\_Council/Boards\\_Commissions/Historic\\_Preservation\\_Commission.htm](http://www.townofcary.org/Town_Council/Boards_Commissions/Historic_Preservation_Commission.htm).

#### **Once I have a COA, what then?**

A COA does not excuse you from any other requirements of the town. **You may still need to obtain other plan approvals and/or a building permit.** But once you have received your COA and all other required permits and approvals, you may begin work. Your COA may include conditions. That means that your COA is valid only if you abide by those conditions. The COA remains valid for one year from the date of issuance. You do not need to complete the work in one year, but should begin it during that time.

#### **What if I begin or even complete a project before obtaining a COA?**

If your project requires a COA but you have already begun it, or even completed it, you will still need to apply for a COA anyway. If work has already begun, then whether it is minor or major work, it automatically goes to the Historic Preservation Commission for review. Your project will be reviewed just like any other and may be granted as requested, granted with conditions, or may be denied. If it is denied, the Historic Preservation Commission will require that you demolish any construction not meeting the requirements. Therefore, it's in your best interest to check first to see if a COA is required and to check the design guidelines before planning your project!

#### **Staff Contact**

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