

DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING & SUSTAINABILITY

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HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) and what does it do?

The Historic Preservation Commission (or the HPC for short!) is a volunteer committee made up of seven (7) residents of DeKalb County and was established by **Chapter 13.5 of the DeKalb County Code of Ordinances**. The HPC oversees the review of local historic districts, landmarks, and other preservation matters on the behalf of the DeKalb County government.

What are the local historic districts in DeKalb County?

There are two local historic districts in DeKalb County, the Druid Hills Historic District and the Soapstone Ridge Historic District.

What is a material change in appearance?

Material change in appearance means **a change that will affect either the exterior architectural or environmental features of a historic property or any building**, structure, site, object, landscape feature or work of art within a historic district, such as:

1. Altering the size, shape, or facade of a historic property, including relocation of any doors or windows or removal or alteration of any architectural features, details, or elements.
2. Demolishing or relocating a historic structure.
3. A change in the location of advertising visible from the public right-of-way.
4. The erection, alteration, restoration, or removal of any building or other structure within a historic property or district, including walls, fences, steps and pavements, or other appurtenant features.

How does the HPC determine if a COA is approved?

The Historic Preservation Commission decides to approve an application for a COA if the application meets the established [guidelines](#) for the historic district and the application will not have a substantial adverse effect on the property or the district as a whole.

Can I appeal against a decision made by the HPC?

Yes; an [application](#) to appeal a decision of the Historic Preservation Commission on a certificate of appropriateness application must be filed within fifteen (15) calendar days after the issuance or denial of the certificate of appropriateness. Appeals are reviewed by DeKalb County Board of Commissioners (BOC). The BOC reviews the record for a COA application and determines if the HPC abused its discretion. An abuse of discretion exists where the record presented to the governing authority shows that the Historic Preservation Commission: (a) exceeded the limits of its authority; (b) that the preservation commission's decision was not based on factors set forth in the Section 13.5-8(3) or the guidelines adopted by the preservation commission pursuant to Section 13.5-6 or; (c) that the preservation commission's decision was otherwise arbitrary and capricious.

What is a local historic district or landmark? Is it the same as a National Register District or Landmark?

A local historic district or landmark is an area or piece of property that has been deemed historically significant and designated for preservation and protection by a local government. Local historic districts and landmarks are established through a designation process which results in the passing of an ordinance, designating a district or landmark as historic and requiring that any material changes to the district or landmark must obtain a Certificate of Appropriateness.

Local historic districts and landmarks are not the same as National Register Districts or Landmarks. The National Register of Historic Places is overseen by the National Park Service; districts and landmarks listed on the National Register do not require a Certificate of Appropriateness to make material changes but may be eligible for tax credits offered by the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) and the National Park Service (NPS). Districts and landmarks can be listed on the National Register **and** can be designated as local historic districts or landmarks but must go through the processes for these designations separately.

What is a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA)?

A Certificate of Appropriateness (or **COA**) is a document evidencing **approval by the historic preservation commission for the application to make material change in the appearance of a designated historic property or of a property located within a designated historic district.**

How do I apply for a COA?

You can apply for a Certificate of Appropriateness by completing the online form [here](#), and submitting it and supporting documents to the Historic Preservation Senior Planner, [Paige Jennings](#), before the deadline for the monthly HPC meeting. HPC meetings are held every month on the third Thursday of the month. To ensure that you submit your application before the deadline, please check the HPC calendar [here](#).

What happens if a material change is made without the approval of a COA?

Property owners that make material changes to a property within a historic district without first obtaining the approval for a COA are in violation with Chapter 13.5 of the DeKalb County Code of Ordinances and are subject to the same penalties for violating other chapters of the code of ordinances. This includes placement of stop work order on a property until a COA is obtained, or issuance of a fine that the property owner must pay.

Does the planning staff make determinations for COAs?

No; **the planning staff**, including the Historic Preservation Senior Planner, **does not make determinations regarding COA applications**. Planning staff does review applications and write staff reports with recommendations for the Historic Preservation Commission, however, all decisions regarding COAs are made by the Commission during their monthly meetings.