

The Marblehead Old and Historic Districts Commission

c/o Engineering Department
7 Widger Road Marblehead, Massachusetts 01945
(781) 631-1529

Dear Property Owner:

You are receiving this letter because you are the registered owner of a property located in one of Marblehead's Old & Historic Districts. Your property, and its neighborhood, has historical significance and plays a crucial role in preserving Marblehead's unique history and character.

The Old and Historic Districts Commission (OHDC) is charged with helping to preserve the historic appropriateness of properties in the districts and has purview over all structures (buildings, features, walks, walls, and the like) that are visible from the Public Way*. Any modifications, additions, or deletions to/from structures, visible from the Public Way, must, by law, be reviewed and approved by the OHDC in a process similar to typical Zoning and Planning Board procedures.

This letter provides some general guidance about your responsibilities as a property owner, as well as the process for obtaining approval for any alterations you wish to make.

Your Responsibilities

Before starting any repairs, alterations, or new construction to any structures which are subject to OHDC review, Town bylaws require that you first obtain a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) from the OHDC following this simple, 4-step process:

1. Complete an Application for a Certificate of Appropriateness. You can download the Application from the OHDC website (at <https://bit.ly/3mArlog>) or obtain a copy from the Town Engineering Department at the Mary Alley Municipal Building. Make sure to review the OHDC Guidelines, referenced on page 2 of this mailing, before filling out your Application.
2. Schedule and attend a meeting with the Building Inspection Department. (also in the Mary Alley Municipal Building) to review your application. The Inspector(s) will evaluate the proposed work, advise if additional permits or approvals are needed (ZBA, Planning, etc.), and highlight any restrictions or Building Code issues.
3. After sign-off by the Building Inspection Department, return your completed application to the Town Engineering Department and schedule your hearing with the OHDC.
4. Finally, meet with the OHDC at your scheduled hearing to present your proposed work for review by the Commission.

* Any questions about visibility from a Public Way should be referred to the OHDC and we can provide guidance.

Some examples of work which require a COA include: additions/deletions to a structure; window or door replacements, additions, or removals; mechanical systems (e.g., HVAC condensers and related piping); new or replacement fences; roofs (including gutters, downspouts, soffits, fascia, etc.); siding repair or replacement; hardscape, such as walls, patios, walkways, etc.; chimneys.

Some examples of work that do not require a COA: interior features; building color; storm doors & storm windows; plantings; signs smaller than 12 sq. ft. in area; arbors; trellises; flagpoles.[†]

As the property owner, it's your responsibility to obtain all permits and approvals necessary to conduct your project work, as well as comply with all restrictions and conditions. The Building Department can assist with this; however, it is your responsibility to explain the project work clearly and fully. Failure to do so, or to subsequently alter project work scope without proper notice, will violate the conditions of your permits or approvals.

Guidelines

While each property in Marblehead's Historic Districts is unique, the OHDC has created a set of guidelines to help applicants understand what is generally considered historically appropriate work. These guidelines can be found on the OHDC website at <https://bit.ly/3mArlog>, or they may be obtained through the Town Engineering Department. The website also has information on OHDC meeting schedules, definitions, and the approval process.

Violations

Executing work, which is regulated by the OHDC, without a COA, or which deviates from OHDC-approved work, constitutes a violation of Town bylaws. The OHDC may issue a Notice to Appear before the Commission and the Building Inspection Department may require that any work in-progress be stopped. Failure to comply with any orders of the Building Inspector by the specified date may result in daily fines and referral to Town Counsel for legal action.

Questions?

We're here to help. For questions about whether your proposed work needs to be reviewed by OHDC, please call the Building Inspection Department at (781) 631-2220. For questions about the OHDC process, call the Engineering Department at (781) 631-1529. For general guidance on historical appropriateness, you can review the OHDC Guidelines at <https://bit.ly/3mArlog>.

Thanks for doing your part in preserving Marblehead's unique historical legacy.
– The Marblehead Old & Historic Districts Commission

[†] A complete list of structures & features that do not require a Certificate of Appropriateness can be found in §110-4 of the Town bylaws at <https://ecode360.com/10437704>