



# Charlotte Court House, VA

## Historic District Design Guidelines

Adopted by Town Council on 5/31/23



OLD COURTHOUSE

# Town of Charlotte Court House Historic District Review Board

The Historic District Review Board (HDRB) was established in 2022 by the Charlotte Court House Town Council. The purpose of the Historic District Review Board is to preserve and protect the integrity and character of the buildings, structures, monuments, landmarks and resources within the town's historic district. See Zoning Maps, Appendix D of the Town of Charlotte Court House Zoning Ordinance.

The Historic District Review Board is empowered to require property owners to file an application for a Certificate of Appropriateness prior to beginning any construction, reconstruction, substantial exterior alteration, razing or relocation within the Historic District. Certificates of Appropriateness will be evaluated in accordance with approved Design Guidelines with a decision rendered within 60 days of the application being received.

## **Work requiring a Certificate of Appropriateness**

- Construction of new buildings and structures, to include signs
- Reconstruction or restoration
- Razing / Demolition
- Building relocation
- Substantial exterior alterations
  - Any addition or alteration of a building which increases the square footage of the building or substantially alters its size, height, contour, profile or outline.
  - Any change or alteration of the exterior architectural style of a structure, such as the removal or rebuilding of porches, openings, dormers, window sashes, chimneys, columns, stairways, and terraces.
  - Any change or alteration of the exterior color scheme of the structure or any of its significant elements to include, porches, openings, dormers, window sashes, awnings, canopies, chimneys, columns, stairways, terraces or any other structural elements.
  - Additions or removal of one or more stories or alteration of a roof line.
  - Landscaping involving major changes of grade or walls and fences.
  - Any other major actions not specifically listed above but which would have a substantial effect on the character of the Historic District.

## **Work not requiring a Certificate of Appropriateness**

- Repainting the building or structure in the same or a very similar color.
- Replacement of missing or broken windowpanes, roofing, tiles, porch floor, posts, rails, shingles, window frames, or shutters involving no substantial change in design or material.
- The addition or removal of storm doors or storm windows, window gardens or air conditioners located in existing windows, doors or wall opening (provided that no building permit is required.)
- The addition or removal of television or radio antennas or skylights and solar collectors in locations not visible from the street.

- Landscaping involving minor grading, walks or temporary fencing which will not substantially affect the character of the property or its surroundings.
- Erection or installation of signs permitted in a residential district and any permitted non-illuminated flat or wall sign not exceeding three inches from a wall and not exceeding four square feet, provided that it is consistent with the design guidelines.
- Construction of off-street loading areas and off-street parking areas containing no more than two (2) spaces.
- Creation of outside storage having a structural footprint less than forty-one (41) square feet which does not require structural changes or major grading and is not visible from a public street.
- Non-substantial alterations
  - Work done to prevent deterioration or to replace parts of a structure with similar materials in order to correct any deterioration, decay or damage.
  - To restore to its original condition prior to deterioration, damage or decay.

## Required Application Materials

In addition to a completed application for the Certificate of Appropriateness, any or all of the following materials may need to be submitted:

- Architectural plans
- Site plans
- Landscaping plans
- Construction methods
- Proposed signs with appropriate detail to demonstrate character and design
- Proposed exterior lighting arrangements
- Structural elevations to include design of doors, windows, colors and materials, and relationships to public view and other structures

The application and accompanying materials must be submitted by the property owner or an approved agent. Three (3) copies of all materials must be submitted. A record of the application and its final disposition will be maintained at the Town Office.

## Review Process

Once an application for the Certificate of Appropriateness has been received, the Historic District Review Board will have sixty (60) days to review and render a decision. The application and supporting materials will be evaluated against design guidelines approved by the Town Council. Based on these guidelines, the Historic District Review Board will have the authority to either approve, deny or specify required modifications to meet approval. An issued Certificate of Appropriateness is required prior to receiving building and zoning permits.

## Certificate of Appropriateness

If the project design is found to be appropriate to the historic district in which it is located, a Certificate of Appropriateness will be awarded within thirty (30) days. The Certificate of Appropriateness is only for the approved design. If the design is altered after the certificate has been granted, the applicant must submit a new application to undergo the review process. Work on the project must be halted until the new design is approved and a new Certificate of Appropriateness is awarded.

Once a Certificate of Appropriateness is granted, a copy of the certificate will be attached to the application and both sets of plans that are date stamped. The application and supporting material will be transferred to the Zoning Administrator and Building Inspector. One set of the materials will remain on file and the other will be returned to the applicant.

## Charlotte Court House Historic Districts

Charlotte Court House currently has two (2) Historic Districts, identified as “Historic District North” and “Historic District West”

These districts are intended to preserve and enhance landmarks, buildings, places, and structures within the district in which historic events occurred or that have special public value because of notable historic, architectural, archaeological, artistic, or cultural heritage or interest, of such significance as to warrant conservation and preservation. The Historic District is an overlay district that is super imposed over other general use districts. (4-1-5 Town Zoning Ordinance)

## Design Guidelines for Historic Districts

### Exterior Changes to Existing Buildings

Exterior changes to an existing building are defined as, but not limited to, replacement or alterations to siding or shingles, windows, doors, architectural trim work, porches, entryways, roofs, chimneys, storefronts, awnings, shutters, dormers, masonry (including re-pointing), and new paint color. Also covered under these guidelines are the additions of modern equipment fire escapes and permanent handicap access.

### Access

The Virginia Uniform Statewide Building Code (VUSBC) in its current edition should be consulted to obtain guidance on current access guidelines.

The VUSBC can be found online at: [www.dhcd.virginia.gov/codes](http://www.dhcd.virginia.gov/codes)

### Architectural Trim Work

In most cases architectural trim work defines the historic character and integrity of a building or structure. As such every effort should be taken to preserve these original features. If repairs to these elements are necessary, it is appropriate to use materials consistent in appearance with the historic nature of the building and to replace only the damaged areas. Elements beyond repair should be replaced in kind and historically accurate in profile, scale, and material. Replacing these elements

with synthetic composition materials may be appropriate to utilize in order to affect the integrity of the building and the Historic District as a whole.

## **Chimneys**

Chimneys are an integral part of many historic buildings whether they serve fireplaces or furnaces and should be maintained and in good repair. Re-pointing should be done in a timely manner to preserve the integrity of the chimney. Mortar joints should be uniform and the same profile, color, and gap as original joints. Existing chimneys should not be replaced by those smaller in scale or height, but maintain the proportion and size of the original.

## **Doors**

Doors, in the confines of the Design Guidelines, also includes its surround and other associated elements such as transoms, fan lights, side lights, pilasters, pediments, hoods, and architectural moldings.

Original or contributing later doors and their surrounds should be maintained to preserve their historic integrity. Door openings should not be altered in width, scale, or configuration. Repair of the aforementioned elements should be done in kind and limited to only those sections needing repair. Replacement of these elements should also be in kind. Doors should have the same or similar design and appearance as the original.

## **Dormers**

Dormers that are original to the building/structure should be retained as an integral part of the design and balance of the structure. Additional dormers added to a building should match existing dormers. New dormers constructed on a building that did not previously have this architectural element should be in proportion to the scale of the building and provide overall continuity in design. While wood is the most appropriate material for these architectural elements, other materials will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis.

## **Fire Escapes**

The Virginia Uniform Statewide Building Code (VUSBC) in its current edition should be consulted to obtain guidance on current fire escape guidelines.

The VUSBC can be found online at: [www.dhcd.virginia.gov/codes](http://www.dhcd.virginia.gov/codes)

## **Masonry**

Masonry encompasses foundations as well as exterior walls. Foundations should be maintained so as to provide structural integrity to the structure. New construction should consider the height of the foundations of existing buildings and complement the surroundings in scale, height, material and proportion.

Masonry exterior walls such as stone, brick and stucco should also be maintained to secure the structural integrity of the building. Painting masonry is not recommended (with the exception of stucco), but will be reviewed on an individual basis. Mortar joints of stone and brick structures should retain original profile, width of joint, color and style.

## **Modern Mechanical Equipment**

Technological changes and updates in interior functions sometimes require modern equipment to be installed on or next to an existing building. Mechanical equipment is defined as, but not limited to, air conditioners, heat pumps, antennas, alarm systems, propane or oil tanks, dumpsters, solar panels, utility meters and satellite dishes.

Installation of this type of equipment and its related fastener and other parts should be placed to be as unobtrusive as possible. It is preferable that this equipment be installed in the rear of buildings or concealed by fencing or plant material so as not to interfere with the historic integrity of the district. Equipment such as vents and air conditioners should be painted the same color as the surface or window trim, respectively. If roof installation of mechanical equipment is required then units should be placed out of the direct sight lines of the public, such as behind a chimney, parapet or on the rear slope. Additional utility lines should continue to be placed underground if economically feasible.

Seasonal air conditioners do not come under the purview of the HDRB, but it is strongly recommended, for the overall appearance of the Historic District, that window units be placed on the side or rear of the building.

## **Outbuildings**

Outbuildings that are contributing structures within a Historic District should have the same considerations as the buildings to which they belong. Modern outbuildings should be in keeping with the main building in style or complementary and similar materials used.

## **Painting**

Paint colors not appropriate to the history of the building and its time period will be considered on an individual basis. Drastic color changes may be incompatible with the surrounding buildings and character of the Historic District. Paint colors, samples, and chips are to be submitted along with the application.

## **Porches/Balconies/Stairs/Entryways**

Original or later contributing porches, balconies, stairs, entryways, particularly in public view are defining characteristics of historic buildings. Removal or alteration of these elements is not appropriate to the integrity of the building or the Historic District as a whole.

The exposed nature of these architectural elements requires they be painted regularly and sections repaired when necessary. If elements cannot be repaired and must be replaced they should be replaced in kind (same material, scale, type and profile) to maintain the integrity of the building. Substitute composite material other than in kind may be considered on a case by case basis.

Original entryways and stairs and those added later that contribute to the historic nature of the building should be retained and kept in good repair. Balance and scale of these architectural features is integral to the original design of the building. Expanding exterior door openings is not recommended because it will forever alter the building's historic integrity.

In the case of the addition of a new porch or balcony, the design should be compatible with the historic appearance of the building and those surrounding it. Research should be undertaken to determine the appropriate style, scale and material of this new feature. Detailed architectural drawings of the proposed addition will be required. Design assistance may be available to aid compliance.

## **Roofs**

Original roof slope and materials should be retained wherever possible. To avoid problems, roofs should be kept in good repair. Changes in roof material or color of asphalt shingles need to be approved by the HDRB. Ornamental items that are placed on the roof should fit the era of the building and need to be approved by the HDRB.

## **Shutters/Blinds**

Shutters have been popular on buildings/structures constructed after the 1790s in most places and were typical during the late 1800s through the 1960s and are an integral part of the appearance of the structure. If appropriate to the building, shutters should remain. When replacement becomes necessary, the new shutters or blinds should reflect the appearance and materials of the original respective architectural period. Permanent removal or change in material of shutters requires a Certificate of Appropriateness.

## **Siding**

Exterior siding is an important feature of buildings and provides authenticity to the appearance of Historic districts. It is important, therefore, original materials or materials of the same appearance be retained and kept in good repair, including painted surfaces. If repairs are necessary it is recommended that only those sections needing repair be addressed to maintain as much historic fabric as possible. Replacement of wood siding should be in kind with the same appearance as the original. Research should be conducted as to the type of siding originally on the building or structure or, if unknown, the types available when the building was constructed.

## **Storefronts and Awnings**

Original storefronts within commercial districts should maintain their historic integrity, including windows, entryways, and exterior wall materials. Architectural elements should not be covered. Alternations may be considered on an individual basis.

In-fill of new buildings or structures should maintain the placement and setbacks of surrounding structures. Typically, the front facades of commercial buildings in a downtown setting are adjacent to sidewalks. New in-fill construction should reflect this pattern of development and, if applicable, have parking in the rear of the building. This also creates a more pedestrian friendly environment and has historic precedent. Facades should be designed to complement the surrounding buildings in material, style, scale and window and door opening patterns.

Cloth or canvas awnings have historic precedence in downtown commercial districts. Awning should not detract or hide defining architectural elements of buildings and should be attached in a

manner as to not damage the historic fabric of the structure even when removed. Materials other than canvas will be considered on a case by case basis.

## **Windows**

Windows are a very important architectural feature of buildings and structures and therefore, care should be taken to maintain the same appearance as the original windows and the pattern of openings along the façade. It is not recommended or appropriate to the historic integrity of the building or structure to alter these patterns by enclosing, removing, widening or otherwise compromising the appearance of the building. It is understood that the windows may need to be replaced due to irreparable damage or energy efficiency. If windows need to be replaced, the character of the building must be retained. Size and arrangement of pane divisions of new windows should reflect the arrangement of the original. If the type of window originally on the building/structure is not known, then replacement of those windows should conform to the time period in which the building was constructed. True divided panes are encouraged; however, other alternatives may be considered on an individual basis.

## **Additions to Existing Buildings**

Historically, buildings were expanded to suit the needs of its occupants. It is therefore recognized that additions to existing buildings become necessary even in modern times. Additions to buildings or structures within the Historic Districts should be designed to complement the existing residence or business and the streetscape. Additions should not destroy or obscure existing historical features and should retain the scale, style and materials of the main building.

## **New Construction**

New construction should follow the same considerations as additions to existing buildings in the Historic District, including scale, materials, complimentary styles, setbacks and size. New construction in historic districts shall not be more than forty (40) feet in height.

## **Driveways/Off-Street Parking/Walkways**

Off-street parking should be carefully designed in order not to compromise the historic integrity of the property. Ideally parking for residential properties should be on the side of the building or in the rear. Parking for commercial buildings should be in the rear, in order to maintain the setbacks of the structures with historic districts.

Brick pavers, concrete or concrete aggregate are acceptable for walkways within both commercial and residential components of historic districts. Asphalt walkways are not appropriate for either application.

## **Fences/Walls**

Fences constructed of wood, brick, iron work, and stone or stucco walls are appropriate for historic districts as long as they do not obstruct the view of the building. Chain link or plastic are discouraged. The HDRB will consider all future fencing products as technology advances.

## **Lighting**

Lighting should be tailored to reflect the desired ambiance of a historic district and requires a Certificate of Appropriateness if in public view.

## **Signs**

Signs within designated Historic Districts should consider the present and future pedestrian and vehicle traffic. Signs should be designed in a manner that reflects the desired appearance of the districts and not detract from the historic integrity of the area. Historic signage should be retained and not covered by modern signage or introduced construction material.

Dimensions of signs should be in keeping with the scale of the buildings and not incompatible with the surrounding streetscapes. Wood, etched glass, brick and stone are appropriate materials for signs within designated historic areas. Plastic signs, plastic lettering, large vinyl lettering, or other signage that distracts from the historic nature of the district are not appropriate. Signage requires a Certificate of Appropriateness from the HDRB. For further information please refer to Article 6 of the Charlotte Court House Zoning Ordinance.

## **Billboards**

Billboards are not permitted within the boundaries of the Town's Historic Districts.

## **Relocation/Demolition**

Relocation or demolition of historic structures and buildings within Town Historic Districts compromises the integrity, appearance, continuity, and unity of the district as a whole, as well as the economic viability of the Town. Additionally, vacant lots lead to disjointed streetscapes and a loss of community. It is preferable to create a plan for adaptive reuse of buildings within the Historic Districts rather than relocation or demolition.

Relocation or demolition are options of last resort and require a permit from the HDRB. This process applies to structures within public view as well as contributing buildings not in view. Relocation will be considered only to prevent demolition. A demolition permit for structures and buildings with Historic Districts will only be approved if the structure does not contribute to the district as a whole. Demolition by neglect will not be tolerated. If the structure is deemed unsound by the Charlotte County Building Inspector, an application for a permit to demolish the building may be granted.

If demolition or relocation is approved, the property owner will be required to provide written documentation of historic elements of the building, architectural elevations, plans, and photographs in compliance with the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) standards.