



City of Easton, Pennsylvania HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION

GENERAL INFORMATION FOR APPLICANTS

This brochure, published by the City of Easton Historic District Commission, is intended to provide applicants for Certificates of Appropriateness with information about architectural review within the Historic District. Please review this information before planning your project. Familiarity with this material can help move a project quickly through the approval process, saving applicants both time and money.

The Easton Local Historic District includes within its boundaries individual buildings and streetscapes that convey to residents and passers-by alike a rich architectural heritage. The preservation of this heritage

depends on the willingness of owners to exercise proper care in the maintenance and renovation of their existing properties, and to develop new structures that are architecturally compatible with adjacent or nearby structures. The Historic District Commission (HDC) exists to aid property owners in discharging this responsibility.

The purpose of the Guidelines is to provide a useful manual and reference for the continuing preservation of Easton's historic buildings and streetscapes.

EASTON'S LOCAL HISTORIC DISTRICT

A local historic district is an area that includes resources such as buildings, structures, objects, or sites, whose character conveys a unique cultural and architectural heritage. Since the enactment of the State of Pennsylvania's Historic District Act 167

in 1961, many municipalities have passed local historic district ordinances.



The Bachmann Tavern, built in 1753, is the oldest building remaining in Easton.

The unique quality of Easton's architectural heritage was recognized in 1983 when Easton was added to the National Register of Historic Places. In 2005, the City of Easton passed the Local Historic District Ordinance to preserve for

future generations significant buildings and structures reflective of Easton's historic development and architectural styles.

BENEFITS OF THE LOCAL HISTORIC DISTRICT

A growing number of people are choosing to invest in Easton's architectural heritage and with good reason. Living or working in an area with historical significance and a tangible sense of place offers satisfactions that are reflected in

- rising property values and increased neighborhood stability,
- an appreciation of the area's physical environment,
- a sense of community pride and enhanced self-image, and
- an increased awareness and appreciation of local history and tourism.

The HDC encourages the economic development and revitalization of the Local Historic District while attempting to minimize the burden on long-term residents. Although each property owner's experience may differ, historic districts have been found to:

- foster economic development,
- increase business district investment,
- revitalize older commercial areas by attracting new customers, and
- provide funding opportunities to property owners with grants and financial incentives to improve their historic buildings and structures.



The Jacob Mixsell house, built in 1833.

WHAT DOES THE HDC REVIEW?

The HDC's primary concern is protecting resources from demolition and preserving neighborhood character. Strict historical restoration is not required.

Most proposed exterior changes to a property which are visible from a public street, sidewalk, or way are subject to review by the HDC. The review includes the general design, arrangement, texture, and materials of the proposed work. Some of the items that are reviewed by the HDC include:

- **Alterations:** Any physical change to building materials, including the replacement or addition of any exterior structural, decorative, or accessory element or feature, e.g. siding
- **New Construction:** The introduction of new buildings or structures or additions to existing buildings and structures
- **Demolition:** The tearing down or dismantling of all or part of any building or structure, including the removal of character-defining architectural elements

WHAT THE HDC DOES NOT REVIEW

There are some types of work that are not reviewed by the HDC including:

- Maintenance work that does not alter the exterior materials or features of a

building or structure, and has no material effect on the historic, architectural, or cultural significance of a building or structure. Examples of maintenance include the cleaning of masonry, gutters, and downspouts.

- Repair or additional work beyond maintenance including, but not limited to, patching, piecing in, splicing, consolidating, or otherwise reinforcing materials. **NOTE:** *When a repair is completed, there is no visual change to a building or feature.*
- Construction or demolition of a building's rear elements, such as porches, decks, patio roofs, balconies, sunrooms.
- Construction or demolition of some side or rear yard accessory structures, such as sheds, garages, animal shelters, hot tub enclosures.
- Installation of accessory elements such as downspouts and gutters, flower boxes, flags, mailboxes, heating or cooling units.

THE APPLICATION PROCESS

1. If you are not sure whether your project requires a Certificate of

Appropriateness (COA) reviewed by the HDC, contact the Bureau of Codes and Inspections at City Hall for assistance at (610) 250-6724.

2. Complete the COA Application, available from the Bureau of Codes and Inspections. Describe your project in detail and prepare all supporting material. The COA Application package contains a list of the required submission materials. Please contact the Bureau of Codes and Inspections at (610) 250-6724 for assistance.

The materials generally needed for review of a **construction, renovation, alteration, or repair** application include:

- Current photographs of the whole structure or lot where the alteration or construction will occur
- Photographs of the streetscape adjacent to and across from the proposed project
- Architectural drawings as appropriate
- Samples or catalog cuts of materials to be used

- An explanation of any deviations from the Design Guidelines, including financial feasibility and documented cost estimates or alternatives, as appropriate

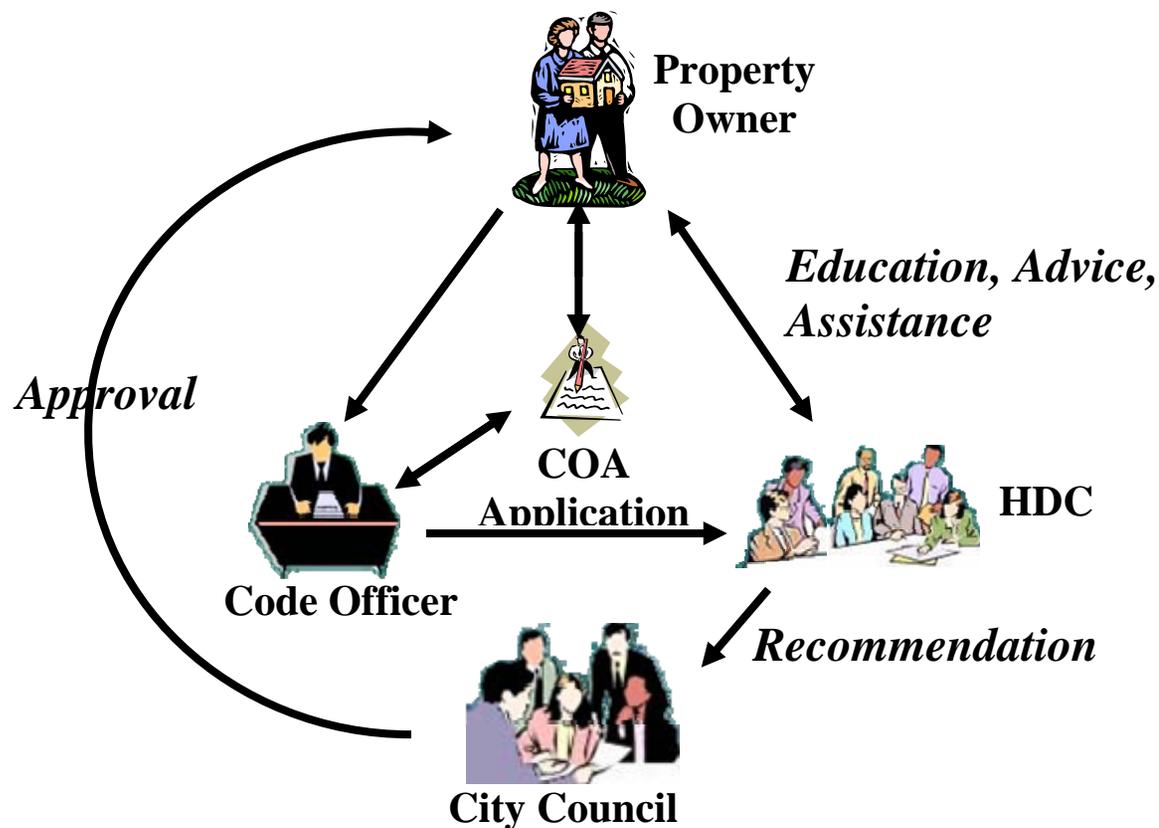
The information generally needed for review of a **demolition** application is:

- Current photographs showing what is proposed for demolition, including photographs showing the deteriorated condition of the structure
- Reasons for demolition including a written description of the deterioration and an explanation of why rehabilitation, reuse, or modification is not feasible or desirable
- Proposed disposition of architectural features and building materials
- Proposed future use and timeline for implementation

The materials generally needed for review of a **sign or awning** application include:

- Current photographs of the whole building or structure where the sign or awning is proposed

- Photographs of the streetscape adjacent to and across from the building or structure where the sign or awning is proposed
- Scaled drawings indicating façade elevation, sign layout, attachment detail, and detail of illumination (if applicable)
- Samples or catalog cuts of materials to be used, including lettering styles
- An explanation of any deviations from the Design Guidelines, including financial feasibility and documented cost estimates or alternatives, as appropriate



3. Submit the application with all appropriate materials to the Bureau of Codes and Inspections at City Hall, One South 3rd Street, Third Floor, Easton, PA 18042. **Applications must be received by 12:00 noon on the last Monday of the month, to be reviewed the following month.**

4. HDC meetings are typically held on the second Monday of each month at 5:30p.m. in City Council Chambers at City Hall, One South 3rd Street, Easton, PA 18042. The owner or his/her representative is **strongly urged** to

attend the meeting. Please contact the Bureau of Codes and Inspections at (610) 250-6724 to confirm the next meeting date. Prior to the HDC meeting, your application will be reviewed to verify that it is complete. Incomplete applications will be returned to the property owner.

5. At their meeting, the HDC evaluates the project for appropriateness and can recommend:
- approval of the application as submitted;
 - approval with conditions;

- tabling the application for further consideration or pending additional information or supporting material;
- denial, with recommended changes to result in an approved application.

The HDC renders its decision within 20 working days of the HDC meeting and makes its recommendation to the City Council.

6. City Council usually makes its decision on projects at its meetings, generally held on the second and fourth Wednesdays of the month at 7:00p.m. in the City Council Chambers at City Hall, One South 3rd Street, Easton, PA 18042. Applicants do not typically attend the meetings if they find the HDC recommendation acceptable. City Council can recommend
 - approval as submitted;
 - approval with conditions;
 - tabling for further consideration or pending additional information;
 - denial, with recommended changes to result in an approved application.
7. If the COA is approved by City Council, or approved with conditions,

the owner can then obtain a building permit for the approved work from the Bureau of Codes and Inspections, **provided all other City codes are complied with.** The denial of a COA application will result in disapproval of the building permit application. The applicant can appeal City Council's decision to the County Court of Common Pleas within the time specified by law.

ECONOMIC HARDSHIP

In some instances, the HDC's recommendation may not be viewed as cost effective by a property owner. To appeal a recommendation based on economic hardship, the property owner must demonstrate that as a result of the HDC's recommendation, he/she is unable to obtain a reasonable return or beneficial use of his property. The property owner will be requested to supply information in support of his/her claim of economic hardship including:

- Date property acquired, purchase price, and equity in property
- Form of ownership and operation of property – sole proprietorship, for-

profit, non-profit, limited partnership, joint venture, or other

- Appraisals or market value analyses within the previous two years

If the HDC agrees that the owner will suffer unreasonable economic hardship and the City cannot recommend any alternatives to relieve economic hardship, the HDC may recommend demolition.

TIMING FOR REVIEW

Typically, the process takes a minimum of 4-6 weeks from the submission date of the complete COA application to the issuing of a building permit. Incomplete submissions will extend the application review time period. Including all required materials with an application expedites the review process.

COMPLETED WORK

An HDC representative will review all completed work for compliance with the approved COA. If any changes are proposed after the COA approval, please contact the Bureau of Codes and Inspections to determine whether any additional reviews may be required.

Completed work that is not in compliance with the approved COA is subject to fines and possible removal. If a property owner has demolished a building or structure or a portion thereof without obtaining the necessary COA, the Code Administrator can delay a permit for new construction on the site for two years.



The Jacob Nicholas house built in 1807.

GUIDELINES FOR HDC DECISIONS

When reviewing a proposed project, the HDC is guided by principles contained in *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties*. In *The Standards*, rehabilitation is defined as “the act or process of making possible a compatible use for a property through

repair, alterations, and additions while preserving those portions or features which convey its historical, cultural, or architectural values”.

In reviewing projects, the HDC encourages sensitive rehabilitation involving the least amount of intervention or change using the following guidelines:

- **Identify, retain, and preserve historic materials and features.** The character of a historic building is defined by the overall form, materials, and details of its exterior. These must be retained to preserve that character.
- **Protect and maintain historic materials and features.** A regular program of protection and maintenance usually involves the least degree of intervention and can prevent or postpone extensive and costly work. All rehabilitation should start at this level.
- **Repair historic materials and features.** Repairs maintain a building in its current condition while making it weather resistant and structurally sound. Repairs involve the least intervention possible, concentrating on areas of deterioration. When repair is not possible, the HDC encourages replacement in kind, reproducing by new construction the original feature exactly, including the original material, finish, detailing, and texture. Although not preferred, substitute materials are acceptable when they convey the original appearance and finish of the original feature.
- **Replace missing or deteriorated historic materials and features** when the extent of deterioration precludes repair. Similar to repair, the preferred approach is to replace the entire feature in kind to match the original material, finish, detailing, and texture. Since this is not always technically or financially feasible, substitute materials are acceptable when they convey the original appearance and finish of the original feature.
- **Replacement of missing historical features.** If adequate historical, pictorial, and physical documentation exists, architectural features may be reproduced. The addition of features from other historic buildings or the addition of historical elements for which there is no documentation is inappropriate.

- **Alterations or Additions for adaptive reuse.** Some alterations are needed to insure the continued use of a building. An alteration or adaptive reuse involves returning a building to a useful condition while saving those parts that represent its historical, architectural, or cultural significance. It is important that alterations and adaptive reuses do not dramatically alter, obscure, or destroy character-defining spaces, materials, features, or finishes. If considered, new additions should be clearly differentiated but compatible in size, mass, form, fenestration, detailing, and style with the historic building, constructed at a less visible side or rear elevation so that the character-defining features are not radically changed, obscured, damaged, or destroyed.
- **New construction** is appropriate in cases where previous buildings have been removed or historic buildings have been replaced with newer construction that is not compatible with the context of the Local Historic District. New construction should be compatible with the general design, arrangement, texture, and materials of adjacent structures or, if there are no adjacent structures, with nearby structures.

MAINTENANCE IS PRESERVATION

Regular maintenance helps to preserve buildings and property. The benefit of regular maintenance includes protecting



real estate values and investments, and keeping Easton an attractive place to live, work, and visit.

Without regular maintenance, a building will be subject to accelerated deterioration. Small openings or unpainted surfaces can allow moisture penetration, eventually causing rot or loss of structural integrity. In the case of historic buildings, these features often represent the character-defining elements that are difficult and costly to replace.

Property owners should inspect their properties regularly to identify potential problems. Detected early, problems can be taken care of with smaller investments of money, not only improving the property's overall appearance and value, but also postponing or preventing extensive and costly future repairs. Regular maintenance items include painting, cleaning gutters and downspouts, periodic roof inspections, and inspections for any signs of moisture infiltration, open joints, and cracks or bulges.

The HDC encourages semi-annual reviews of buildings and structures to identify maintenance and repair needs. Prolonging

the life of original materials on historic structures through regular maintenance and avoiding the replacement of original materials with newer materials is highly desirable.

REPAIRS AND REPLACEMENT

Repairs or replacement in kind may be necessary when it is no longer feasible to maintain a historic feature. Repairs render a building weather-resistant and structurally sound, focusing specifically on areas of deterioration. Repair costs and effort can be minimized if any problems are addressed quickly, thereby preventing or postponing costly future repairs.

When repair is not possible, replacement in kind is encouraged. This involves reproducing the original feature exactly, matching the original material, size, scale, finish, detailing, and texture, and utilizing similar techniques. Building owners may be tempted to install newer materials such as vinyl siding or replacement window systems. However, these materials are not compatible with historic building systems and can lead to costly future repair needs. For example, using vinyl siding can trap moisture within a wall cavity and rot the framing.

If replacement in kind is not possible, the building owner is encouraged to use compatible materials and techniques that convey an appearance similar to the original feature. The new elements should be similar in design, color, texture, finish, and visual quality to the historic elements.

ALTERATIONS AND RENOVATIONS

Alterations and renovations can potentially alter the character of the Local Historic District. While sometimes needed to ensure the continued use of a building, great care should be given to the relationship between the original building and the proposed alteration or renovation.

Often changes are driven by business owners installing new signage or renovating storefronts. For residential property owners an alteration might be enclosing a porch. In all cases the proposed change may impact both the individual building and the streetscape.

The HDC encourage property owners to understand the important design features of an existing building and its streetscape. Design changes that identify, retain, and

preserve the character defining features of the historic building are encouraged. Such designs generally involve minimal alteration to the original design, materials, and features of the building, as well as the use of materials and techniques that are compatible to the historic building and district.



The former mansion of Herman Simon, a wealthy silk manufacturer, is now home to Easton's Third Street Alliance for Women & Children.

ADAPTIVE REUSE

Adaptive reuse can provide new life for a historic building. Alterations or renovations are often necessary to utilize a building for a different purpose from which it was originally designed. **(Please note that proposed new use must be permitted by the Zoning Code.)** Careful

consideration should be given to the original building and its relationship to the alteration or renovation. For example, it might be inappropriate to reuse a building with numerous windows as a theater where windows would not be desirable. Examples of adaptive reuse include:

- Conversion of industrial or commercial buildings into housing
- Conversion of institutional buildings into commercial or residential space
- Conversion of a house into apartments or offices.



Built as a bank in the 1920s, Bank St. Annex is now a wedding and special event venue.

There are many benefits to adaptive reuse including:

- Potential cost savings over new construction
- Presence of existing infrastructure and established neighborhood
- Retention of Local Historic District character and high quality historic materials and craftsmanship
- Increased opportunity for economic development while retaining the historic character of the Local Historic District
- Stability of ownership and occupancy in the Local Historic District.

ADDITIONS AND NEW CONSTRUCTION

Additions to historic buildings, and new construction within a historic district, can dramatically alter the appearance of the district and its streetscapes. Although the duplication of historic styles is not encouraged, contemporary design must be reviewed within the context of the historic district.

New construction within the historic district should be designed to look appropriate to, and compatible with, adjacent buildings or streetscapes. Plans for new construction will be assessed on the size, shape, and proportion of the proposed structure; the materials to be used in construction; and the details of the façade.

In conformance with *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards*, any addition to a building within a historic district should be secondary to the historic building and clearly seen as an addition. Additions to existing properties should be compatible with the design of the building and the streetscape, and should not destroy significant architectural material. If possible, additions should be constructed so that the essential form and integrity of the historic building would be unimpaired if the addition were removed in the future.

Wherever possible, additions should be constructed at side or rear elevations, subordinate to the historic building. In any case, additions should be constructed so that the historic building fabric is not radically changed, obscured, damaged, or destroyed.

Although construction of rear porches, decks, patios roofs, balconies, and sunrooms are not reviewed by the HDC, ideally they should follow the design guidelines.

DEMOLITION IN HISTORIC DISTRICTS

Once buildings that contribute to the character of the Local Historic District and the history of the community are destroyed, they cannot be replaced. The complete or partial demolition of buildings within the Local Historic District is considered a drastic action that permanently alters the character of the streetscape. Alternatives to demolition include the construction of an addition, thereby increasing the size and potential use of a building, or adaptive reuse.

The HDC does not review all proposed demolition requests. The demolition of some side or rear yard accessory structures, such as sheds, garages, detached decks, hot tub enclosures, and animal shelters as well as the demolition of rear porches, decks, patio roofs, balconies, and sunrooms is not reviewed by the HDC. However, property owners are encouraged to carefully

consider the long term consequences of any demolition request.

The HDC encourages the property owner to evaluate the significance of the building in the historic district, and to exhaust all attempts to reuse a historic building prior to considering demolition.

The HDC will not recommend approval for demolition unless the following criteria are met:

- The proposed demolition involves a non-significant addition or portion of the building, and will not adversely affect those portions of the building that are significant
- The proposed demolition involves a non-significant building, and will not adversely affect those parts of the site or adjacent properties that are significant
- The applicant has demonstrated that they have exhausted all other options and/or they will suffer undue economic hardship.



The Boyd Theatre, North Third Street, was demolished in November of 1975.

GLOSSARY OF ARCHITECTURAL TERMS

Arch – A curved structure built to support the weight above an opening consisting of wedge-shaped stones or bricks put together to make a bridge which spans the opening.

Baluster - A short, upright column or urn-shaped support of a railing.

Balustrade - A row of balusters and the railing connecting them. Used as a stair rail and also above the cornice on the outside of a building.

Bay - Any number of principal divisions of a wall, roof or other part of a building that is marked by vertical supports.

Bracket - A supporting member for a projecting element or shelf, sometimes in the shape of an inverted L and sometimes as a solid piece or a triangular truss.

Capital - The topmost member, usually decorated, of a column or pilaster.

Column - A slender upright structure, generally consisting of a cylindrical shaft, base, capital, and pillar; a supporting or ornamental member in a building.

Cornice - A projection at the top of a wall or the top course or molding of a wall when it serves as a crowning member or horizontally divides a wall.

Dormer - A window set upright in a sloping roof. The term is also used to refer to the roofed projection in which this window is set.

Eave - The underside of a sloping roof, projecting beyond the wall of a building.

Facade - A front or principal face of a building or any of its sides that face a public way. Facades are usually noted for their architectural detail.

Frieze - The frieze, located directly below the cornice, is a decorative band. In many cases the frieze was designed in conjunction with the cornice.

Gable - Triangular wall segments at the end of a pitched or gambrel roof.

Gambrel Roof - A ridged roof with two slopes on each side, the lower having the steeper pitch.

Gingerbread - A pierced wooden curvilinear ornament, located under the eaves of the roof.

Hoodmold - A projecting molding over the arch of a window or door.

Hipped Roof - A roof with sloping ends and sides meeting at an inclined projecting angle.

Jambs - Either of the vertical sides of an archway, doorway or window opening.

Light - A pane of glass in a window or a glazed component of a window.

Lintel - A horizontal structural member such as a beam over an opening that carries the weight of the wall above it.

Mansard Roof - A roof where the lower part is steeper and has a more shallow upper part.

Mass - The bulk and shape of a building.

Moulding - A strip of wood used for ornamentation and finishing in cornices and around window and door openings, shaped to create modulations of light, shade and shadow.

Mullions - The vertical members between the lights of a window; the central vertical member of a double-door opening.

Muntin - One of the thin strips of wood used for holding panes of glass within a window.

Pediment - A wide, low-pitched gable surmounting the facade of a building in a classical style; any similar element used over doors and windows.

Piers - Vertical-supporting members that frame a window or door; often used to divide storefronts, display windows or the entrance to a building's upper floors.

Pilaster - Similar to a column, a shallow rectangular feature that projects from a wall and has a capital and base.

Pitch - The slope of a building element.

Ridge - The highest point of a roof or horizontal line where two roof planes meet.

Sash - A window's fixed or movable framework in which the panes of glass are set.

Siding - The narrow horizontal or vertical wood boards that form the outer face of the walls in a traditional wood frame house. Also referred to as clapboards.

Sill - A horizontal timber at the bottom of a wood frame structure that rests on the

foundation; also the horizontal bottom member of a window or door.

Soffit - The exposed undersurface of an overhead building component such as a roof.

Transom - A window or series of windows located above a door or display window; usually made of glass. In a commercial building they can be seen as an extension of the display window and for this reason, provide an excellent location for signage.

Trim - Finished woodwork used to decorate, border or protect the edges of openings such as doors and entrances.

Additional Sources of Information

Contact the National Trust for Historic Preservation or visit online at www.nationaltrust.org.

Contact the US Government Bookstore or visit www.nps.gov for *Preservation Briefs*, National Park Service.

Further reading:

National Register Bulletin 39: Researching a Historic Property. U.S. Department of the Interior. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1994.

Historic Building Façades: The Manual for Maintenance and Rehabilitation, William C. Foulks (ed.) (Washington, DC, Preservation Press, 1997)

Caring for Your Historic House, National Park Service/Heritage Preservation Services (New York, Harry Abrams, Inc., 1998)

The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties: with Guidelines for Preserving, Rehabilitating, Restoring & Reconstructing Historic Building, Kay D. Weeks and Anne E. Grimmer (National Park Service, Technical Preservation Services, 1995)

Preservation Sourcebook, Mid-Atlantic Edition, 1998: The Comprehensive Directory of Products and Services for Historic Preservation and Restoration (Vienna VA, Preservation Publications LLC, 1997)

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q. I am planning a complex project. When should I involve the HDC?

A: Early in the process before a lot of time and money has been invested. To discuss your project informally with HDC to uncover any potential concerns prior to finalizing your design, please contact the Bureau of Codes and Inspections at City Hall (610) 250-6724.

Q. Is there a way to speed up the review process?

A. The best advice is to be sure that your application is complete and includes all of the requested materials.

Q. Is acquiring a COA expensive?

A. There are no fees associated with the review process.

Q. Do I need to hire a professional to help me?

A. Depending on the nature of your project, it may be unnecessary to hire a

professional. Individuals are welcome to submit applications for a COA without the assistance of a contractor or design professional. If your project is complex or you otherwise desire to use professional help, a careful review of these Guidelines prior to hiring can assist in the planning stage. If you decide to retain an outside professional, it is suggested that you choose one who is familiar with the requirements within the Local Historic District.

Q. Can I begin construction immediately after I get HDC approval?

A. While HDC approval is necessary, each project is also subject to City review for compliance with all applicable zoning, building and safety codes. You will need a Certificate of Appropriateness and all necessary permits before proceeding. To minimize any delay, an applicant should obtain any building code applications at the same time as the COA application.

Q. Who can help me?

A. Contact the HDC at the earliest stage of your project. To discuss your project informally with HDC to uncover any potential concerns prior to finalizing your

design, please contact the Bureau of Codes and Inspections at City Hall at (610) 250-6724.

Acknowledgments

This publication was prepared for the City of Easton and the Historic District Commission with help and guidance from the following:

The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties: with Guidelines for Preserving, Rehabilitating, Restoring & Reconstructing Historic Building. Kay D. Weeks and Anne E. Grimmer, National Park Service, Technical Preservation Services, 1995.

Easton Design Guide

South Bethlehem Historic Conservation Commission *Design Guidelines*
David Shafferman, AIA, Bonsall Shafferman Architects

NOTES:

City of Easton
Historic District Commission
C/O Bureau of Codes and Inspections
Easton City Hall
1 South 3rd Street
Easton, PA 18042

