



# Township of Cheltenham

## Board of Historical and Architectural Review

### GENERAL INFORMATION FOR APPLICANTS

This brochure is intended to provide applicants for building permits within the historic districts with an understanding of the design considerations and process which will affect the review of their proposed project. Please review this information during the early stages of planning your project. Familiarity with this material can assist in moving a project quickly through the approval process, saving applicants both time and money.

#### WHAT IS A HISTORIC DISTRICT?

A historic district is an area, delineated by a boundary, which includes resources such as buildings, structures, objects or sites, whose distinctive character conveys a unique architectural and cultural heritage. Since the enactment of the State of Pennsylvania's Historic District Act in 1961, many local municipalities, including Cheltenham Township, have passed local historic district ordinances.

#### WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF A HISTORIC DISTRICT?

Although each property owner can define the benefits of a historic district based upon their personal experience, historic districts have been found to:

- Increase neighborhood stability and property values
- Foster economic development, increase business district investment, and revitalize older commercial areas by attracting new customers
- Preserve the physical history of the area
- Promote an appreciation of the physical environment
- Foster community pride and self-image
- Increase the awareness and appreciation of local history
- Increase local tourism

Darla Schuck



*The parade of Civil War "soldiers" and the dedication of a Pennsylvania historical marker at the former entrance to Camp William Penn occurred in the historic village of LaMott in May, 1999. The parade and dedication were among the featured events of The LaMott Legacy and the Struggle for Freedom, the 22<sup>nd</sup> Annual Conference on Black History in Pennsylvania, held in Cheltenham Township.*

### WHAT IS THE BHAR?

The Board of Historical and Architectural Review [BHAR] is a public advisory body created by state and local laws. The BHAR helps to protect the architectural and cultural heritage within the historic districts of Cheltenham Township by considering the effects of proposed exterior changes to buildings and properties within the districts and commenting on the appropriateness of those changes.

Members of the BHAR are Township residents, many of whom are residents of the historic districts, serving without pay for overlapping terms. The professional membership of the BHAR includes a registered architect, a real estate broker, a member of the Historical Commission, and the Director of Engineering, Zoning and Inspections for the Township.

### WHAT IS THE BHAR'S ROLE?

The BHAR conducts monthly meetings and has the power and duty to advise the Township's Board of Commissioners on the following:

- The advisability of issuing a Certificate of Appropriateness [COA] for the repair, erection, replacement, reconstruction, alteration, restoration, demolition, or razing of any building or structure in whole or in part within the historic district
- Preserving and protecting open space within the historic district
- Changes that will promote the cultural, economic, and general welfare of the historic district.
- Actions that will foster the aesthetic value of the community by providing visual compatibility with the surrounding properties and to enhance the overall ambiance of the historic district

In most instances, property owners or tenants will interact with the BHAR when applying for a Certificate of Appropriateness [COA] for a proposed project at their building or site.



*This ca. 1890, Queen Anne house is an example of the diverse architectural styles found in Cheltenham Township.*

### WHAT DOES THE BHAR REVIEW?

In 1974 the Township of Cheltenham enacted a historic preservation ordinance to protect the distinctive architectural and cultural heritage of the local historic districts. As a property owner or tenant of a property within a historic district, you should be aware that proposed exterior changes to your property which are visible from a public street, sidewalk or way, except repainting, are subject to review by the BHAR.

The BHAR reviews the proposed changes to determine whether they are appropriate to the individual property and within the district as a whole in regard to the architectural style, general design, arrangement, location, and materials. Once the BHAR determines that the proposed changes are appropriate within the historic district, they will make a recommendation to the Public Works Committee of the Board of Commissioners that a COA be issued for the proposed work.

It must be stressed, however, that the BHAR review is necessary but not sufficient for the granting of a building permit. Each project is also subject to Township review for compliance with zoning, building, and safety codes.

## GUIDELINES FOR BHAR DECISIONS:

When reviewing a proposed project, the BHAR review is guided by principals 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." The *Standards for Rehabilitation* allow property owners and tenants common-sense guidelines to provide sensitive contemporary uses for their sites while retaining their architectural and cultural heritage.

In reviewing projects, the BHAR encourages sensitive rehabilitation involving the least amount of intervention or change as identified in the following guidelines:

- **Identify, retain, and preserve** the overall form, materials, and details that are important in defining the architectural and historical character of the building and site.
- **Protect and maintain** historic materials and features. This involves protection from other work that may occur in proximity to the historic materials, and also protection through regular maintenance. A regular program of protection and maintenance usually involves the least degree of intervention, and can prevent or postpone extensive and costly work.
- **Repair rather than replace** deteriorated historic materials and features. Repairs maintain the building in its current condition while making it weather-resistant and structurally sound. Repairs should involve the least intervention possible, concentrating specifically on areas of deterioration. When repair is not possible, the BHAR 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.
- **Reconstruct** missing historical features if adequate historical, pictorial, and physical documentation exists so that the feature may be accurately reproduced. The addition of features from other historic buildings or addition of historical elements for which there is no documentation is not appropriate.
- **Alterations and additions** are sometimes needed to ensure the continued use of a building. An alteration 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 do not radically alter, obscure or destroy character-defining spaces, materials, features, or finishes. An addition, however, is new construction at the exterior of an existing building and should be avoided. 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 and so the character-defining features are not radically changed, obscured, damaged, or destroyed.



*Sensitive maintenance and repairs preserve the building's character and highlight the historic features.*



*Renovations to an older home for institutional use retain the scale and character of the historic neighborhood. The additions display compatible scale, form, massing, setback and materials to the original building. The BHAR review focuses on maintaining the scale, character and materials of individual properties and assessing how alterations affect the entire historic district.*

### **MAINTENANCE IS PRESERVATION:**

General maintenance should be a regular part of any property, particularly historic buildings. Lack of regular upkeep, such as the gutter cleaning and painting, can result in accelerated deterioration of building elements and features. In the case of historic buildings, these features may represent the character defining elements of the building that are difficult and costly to replace. Regular, smaller investments of money at a property to identify and correct potential problems may not only improve its overall appearance and value, but also can prevent or postpone extensive and costly future repairs.

*The BHAR encourages:*

- Prolonging of the life of original materials on historic structures through regular maintenance
- Avoiding replacement of original materials with newer materials



*Alterations or renovations of a semi-detached house should be consistent at both halves of the building since they are read as one complete building from the streetscape. The BHAR reviewed the replacement porch railings for both properties.*

### **REPAIRS AND REPLACEMENT:**

When it is no longer feasible to maintain a historic feature, repairs or replacement in-kind may be necessary. Repairs maintain the building in its current condition while making it weather-resistant and structurally sound, concentrating specifically on areas of deterioration. When repair is not possible, the BHAR encourages replacement in-kind. Similar to a regular maintenance program, these activities can prevent or postpone extensive and costly future repairs.

*The BHAR encourages:*

- Non-intrusive repairs, focused at deteriorated areas, stabilizing and protecting the building's important materials and features
- When repair is not possible, replacement in-kind to the greatest extent possible, reproducing by new construction the original feature exactly, matching the original material, size, scale, finish, detailing, and texture, and utilizing similar techniques
- When replacement in-kind is not possible, the use of compatible materials and techniques that convey an appearance similar to the original feature, similar in design, color, texture, finish, and visual quality to the historic elements

## ALTERATIONS AND RENOVATIONS:

Alterations and renovations are sometimes needed to ensure the continued use of a building, but have the potential to alter the historic district's character. When considering alterations or renovations, great care should be given to the original building and its relationship to the alteration or renovation.

*The BHLAR encourages:*

- Identification, retention, and preservation of the character defining features of the historic building
- Minimal alteration to the original design, materials, and features
- New design elements and scale that are compatible with the historic building and district
- Use of materials and techniques that are compatible to the historic building and district



*Maintaining the appropriate historic contextual setting is encouraged.*

### Suggested reading

Contact your local or regional library for further information about the history of Cheltenham Township and architectural styles.

#### Cheltenham Township History

Bean, Theodore W. *History of Montgomery County*. Philadelphia, 1884.

Rothschild, Elaine W. *A History of Cheltenham Township*. Cheltenham Historical Commission, 1976.

Toll, Jean Barth and Michael Schwager. *Montgomery County: The Second Hundred Years*. Montgomery County Federation of Historical Societies, 1983.

#### Architectural Styles

Blumenson, John J. *Identifying American Architecture: Pictorial Guide to Styles and Terms 1600-1945*. Nashville: American Association of State and Local History, 1977. Rev. ed. New York: Norton, 1981.

## ADAPTIVE REUSE:

In adaptive reuse projects, alterations or renovations might be necessary to utilize a building for a different purpose from which it currently or was originally designed. It should be noted that proposed new uses must be permitted by the zoning code. Similar to alterations or renovations, great care should be given to the original building and its relationship to the alteration or renovation.

*Examples of Adaptive Reuse:*

- Conversion of a house to apartments or offices
- Reuse of historic storefronts
- Conversion of industrial or commercial buildings into housing
- Conversion of institutional buildings into commercial space

*Benefits of Adaptive Reuse:*

- Retention of historic district character and high quality historic materials and craftsmanship
- Promotes stability of ownership and occupancy in the historic district
- Potential cost savings over new construction
- Presence of established neighborhood and existing infrastructure

McAlester, Virginia and Lee. *Field Guide to American Houses*. New York: Knopf, 1984.

Poppeliers, John C., Chambers, S. Allen, Jr., and Schwartz, Nancy B. *What Style is it? A Guide to American Architecture*. Washington, DC: Preservation Press, 1983.

Whiffen, Marcus. *American Architecture Since 1870: A Guide to the Styles*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1969.

#### Further Information

Contact the following organizations for further information or to research historic properties:

Richard Wall House Museum [215] 887-9159  
1 Wall Park Drive; Elkins Park, PA 19027

Old York Road Historical Society [215] 886-8590  
450 Old York Road; Jenkintown, PA 19046

Historical Society of Montgomery County  
[610] 272-0297  
1654 DeKalb Street, Norristown, PA 19401

### 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 surrounding landscape. Although the duplication of historic styles is not encouraged, contemporary design must be reviewed within the context of the historic district. Because of the sensitivity of the area, the property owner should take great care when proposing either an addition or new construction in a historic district.

*The BHLAR encourages:*

- Preservation of the cohesive ambiance of a historic district with compatible, sympathetic, and contemporary construction
- Compatible siting, proportion, scale, form, materials, fenestration, roof configuration, details, and finishes
- Construction of additions at secondary elevations wherever possible, subordinate to the historic building, and compatible with the design of the property and neighborhood
- Construction of additions so that the historic building fabric is not radically changed, obscured, damaged, or destroyed

### DEMOLITION IN HISTORIC DISTRICTS:

The demolition of buildings within a historic district is considered a drastic action since it alters the character of the streetscape, surrounding buildings, as well as the demolition site. Once buildings that contribute to the historic district and history of the community are destroyed, they can not be replaced.

*The BHLAR encourages:*

- An evaluation of the significance of the building in the historic district
- All attempts to reuse a historic building be exhausted prior to considering demolition

*The BHLAR does not recommend demolition unless:*

- The proposed demolition involves a non-significant addition or portion of the building, provided that the demolition will not adversely effect those portions of a building that are significant
- The proposed demolition involves a non-significant building, provided that the demolition will not adversely affect those parts of the site that are significant

Preservation Design Partnership



*The adaptive reuse of the former Wyncote Elementary School [1894] into an office building gave new vitality to an important architectural resource in the historic district.*

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### Basic reading about maintenance and preservation

Contact your local or regional library or bookstore.

Kitchen, Judith L. *Caring for Your Old House.*

Washington, DC: The Preservation Press, 1991.

Heritage Preservation and National Park Service. *Caring for Your Historic House.* New York: Abrams, 1998.

National Trust for Historic Preservation. *Landmark Yellow Pages: Where to Find All the Names, Addresses, Facts, and Figures You Need.* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York: Preservation Press, 1998.

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

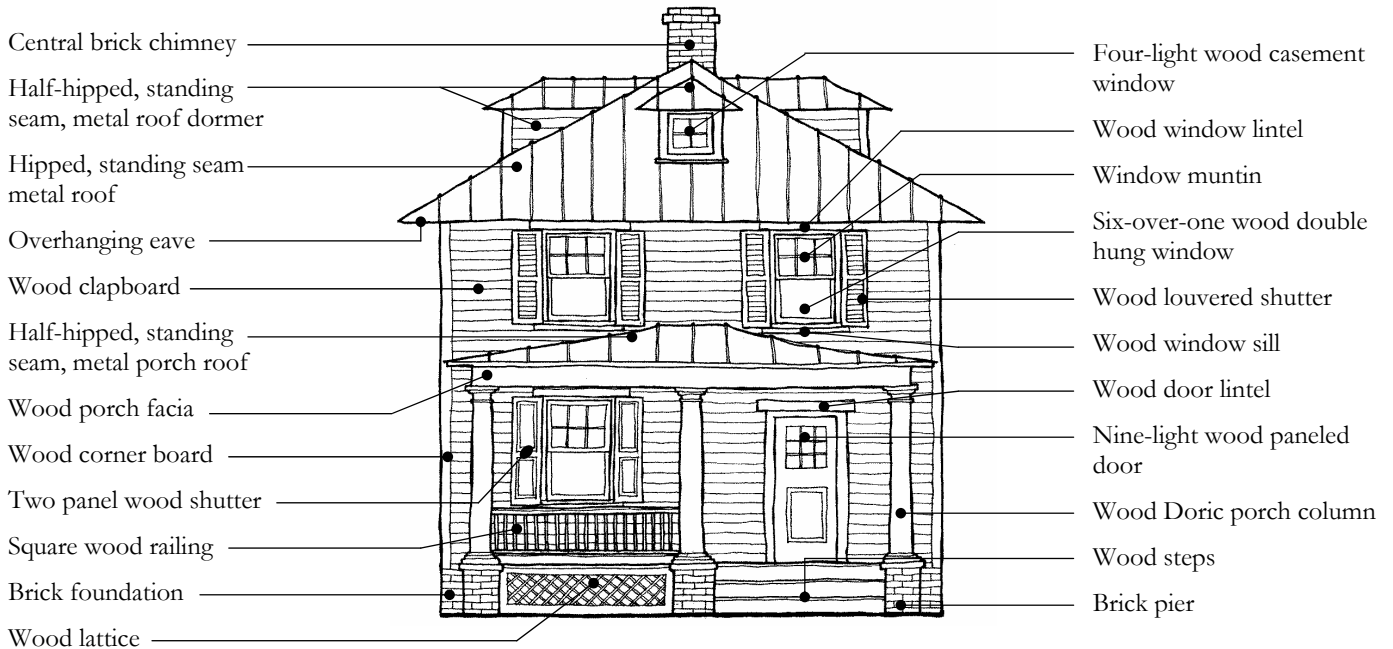
*Preservation Briefs.* Washington, DC: National Park Service, Technical Preservation Services.

Technical Preservation Services, National Park Service, United States Department of the Interior. *Respectful Rehabilitation: Answers to your Questions About Old Buildings.* Washington, DC: The Preservation Press, 1982.

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

## GLOSSARY OF ARCHITECTURAL TERMS:

The following diagrams represent composite buildings that provide a basic vocabulary of architectural elements and terms.



## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS:

***Q: How do I make sure that my project will be approved by the BHAR?***

**A:** It is helpful to have an understanding of what makes your property architecturally or culturally significant when considering a project. This will allow you to make informed decisions about the proposed project with an understanding of some of the issues considered by the BHAR.

***Q: Is the review process expensive? Do I need to hire an outside professional?***

**A:** There is no cost or fee associated with the review process, but proper preparation and filing complete applications on time can reduce the additional time required to complete the process. Carefully reviewing this brochure and the application package for the Certificate of Appropriateness prior to hiring a design professional or contractor can assist in the early planning stages of your project.

Individuals are welcome to submit applications for work without the assistance of a design professional or contractor. If retaining the services of a professional, it is helpful to work with architects, contractors, sign manufactures, etc. who are familiar with the requirements of working within a historic district. Prior to the submission of an application, verify that the application is complete and all materials are included with your submission.

***Q: Is there a way to expedite the review process?***

**A:** It is important to thoroughly complete the application and submit all requested materials to the Building and Zoning Office at the Township Administration Building to be placed on the agenda for the following month's meeting. It is suggested that you call the Building and Zoning Office directly for the next month's submission deadline and meeting date.

***Q: I am planning a complex project. When is the best time to talk to the BHAR?***

**A:** The best time to talk to the BHAR is early in the process before you invest a lot of time and money into the design process. If you would like to discuss your project informally with the BHAR to obtain an initial review and feedback about potential concerns prior to finalizing your plans, please contact the Building and Zoning Office at the Township Administration Building at [215] 887-6200, ext. 215.

***Q: Can I begin construction immediately after I get the BHAR's approval?***

**A:** The BHAR review is necessary but not sufficient for the granting of a building permit. Each project is also subject to Township review for compliance with zoning, building, and safety codes, and the applicant must obtain a Certificate of Appropriateness and all necessary permits prior to proceeding with any work. If the BHAR recommends an application for approval, that recommendation is considered at the next Public Works Committee meeting. If the Public Works Committee also recommends approval, the Board of Commissioners then reviews the application at their next meeting. In general, it is possible to obtain an approved COA and all necessary permits approximately two weeks after the BHAR meeting.

***Q: Who can help me?***

**A:** All applicants are encouraged to contact the BHAR at the earliest stage of their project. This initial meeting can help move a project quickly through the review process saving both time and money. If you would like to discuss your project informally with the BHAR to obtain an initial review and feedback about potential concerns prior to finalizing your plans, please contact the Building and Zoning Office at the Township Administration Building at [215] 887-6200, ext. 215.

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