



Town of
AMHERST
New Hampshire

Historic District Commission Introduction & Guidelines



Welcome to Amherst Village!ⁱ

The Town of Amherst recognizes that the character and quality of life enjoyed by its citizens depend in great measure upon the Town's rich architectural heritage and the importance of the natural and designed landscapes in our community. The unusually well-preserved Village Center is an important part of the Town's character and a significant factor in the quality of life residents enjoy. This historical, cultural, archaeological, social and economic heritage is entrusted to each generation, enriched and passed on to future generations.

The original center of town developed at the crossroads of the major routes from Boston and Portsmouth to Lake Champlain (a granite marker stands at the end of Jones Road on the site of the first Meetinghouse). Designated by King George II in 1769 as the first Shiretown in New Hampshire, Amherst prospered as the principal center of law, transportation, agriculture and commerce in south central New Hampshire from colonial times up until the late 19th century. During both the Revolution and the Civil War, Amherst served as an important stage top for soldiers mustering from outlying areas.

Amherst's charm and its historic buildings remained uniquely preserved through the 19th century. Lacking a river sizable enough to support industrial-scale factories, Amherst was bypassed by the Industrial Revolution along with the pressures of population and commercial development. The geography that caused the town to become a place of early historical significance also helped to preserve its historical beauty.

History of the Commissionⁱⁱ

To promote continued enrichment of our local heritage, the Amherst Historic District was established by the voters of the Town of Amherst at Town Meeting of March 1970. As an overlay on the residential/rural zone, the District provides protection to the historic character by guiding the construction, maintenance, and rehabilitation of properties beyond what applies elsewhere in town. The Historic District Commission is responsible for reviewing proposed projects to determine if they conform to their regulations.

Since its establishment the Amherst Historic District Commission (HDC) has worked to support the preservation and enhancement of historical sites, buildings, landscapes and structures, and the surrounding environment within the Amherst Historic District.

Late in 1982, 167 buildings and properties within the Historic District were accepted into the National Register of Historic Places. This action culminated a six-year effort by the Historical Society and the Selectmen, an effort spearheaded by Robert T. Crouter with the assistance of Dorothy J. Davis, Susannah B. Means and other society members. Advantages of the registry are that the district can be protected against adverse effects of federally licensed or funded activity. In addition, since all buildings named on the Registry are deemed worthy of preservation, an owner applying for restoration funds or tax credits need not prove the historical significance of the property.

In 1986, the Town voted to expand the Amherst Historic District to include the approaches to the village. Although these properties are not listed on the National Registry, this local designation has allowed the Town to preserve the historic character of 147 additional properties. The HDC is delighted to share with you some information about this historic village and your important role as stewards of this truly unique American landmark.

Locationⁱⁱⁱ

The Historic District is centered around the Village Green, or the *Big Common* as it is called on the National Register Nomination Form. In colonial America, commons were pasture lands shared by the animals of village residents. In early Amherst, the Big Common was called "the Plains." This open space also served as a parade and training ground for the colonial militia. When in 1755 the first meetinghouse was moved from Upper Flanders to the Plains, the Village began to develop into the form we see today: the large central common with eight roads radiating from it to the various outlying settled areas. In 1764 the settlers constructed a new, larger Meetinghouse on the Big Common, and in 1788 the Second Courthouse was built on there as well. Both buildings were moved to their present locations in the first half of the 19th century and the open space became the site of agriculture fairs and public gatherings. The significant structures surrounding the Green are the Amherst Town Hall, formerly the Third County Courthouse, the Congregational Church, formerly the Second Meetinghouse and the Amherst Brick School. The Hillsborough Bank, a buggy whip factory, and one of several mills are among the early commercial buildings since converted to residences. Today the Green, with the surrounding smaller commons, serves the community as a park,

gathering space, and the site of many community activities including the annual Fourth of July celebration. As a whole, the Village contains an outstanding concentration of buildings from the late Colonial, Federal and Greek Revival periods of American architecture. Streetscapes evoke the period as strongly as individual buildings.

The character of the Village has been maintained not only by the preservation of the historic buildings in the Village itself but by the open spaces that continue to exist along the roads that approach the center. In large part due to topography and the existence of substantial wetlands, the open area and pond preserve the sense of openness and rural character near the heart of the village... the approaches to the village pass through largely wooded areas, punctuated by open meadows and individual houses. It was with an eye to maintaining this aesthetic that the Town voted to extend the Historic District in 1986.

History^{iv}

(Most of the following was written for the National Registry application in 1980. The complete application is available on the Town's website and at the Amherst library.) Amherst Historic District was first surveyed and settled in 1735 by descendants of Massachusetts veterans of King Philip's War who had been promised wilderness land in payment for services rendered to the Crown during the Indian War against the Narragansetts in 1675. The grant from the Crown was initially designated "Narragansett Number 3" and subsequently "Souhegan West". In 1760, the village, as chartered by the Crown, was incorporated as the Town of Amherst, taking its name from the Commander of British Forces in North America, Lord Jeffrey Amherst.

Amherst played a significant part in the early military history of the country. About 1745, seven garrison houses were erected in different parts of the town, to which the inhabitants resorted in times of danger from Indian attacks. As early as April 1758, the Town voted in Town Meeting to appropriate "20 pounds of lawfull money" to procure powder and ammunition in preparation for the War of Independence and in September 1776, voted to build a house on the easterly side of the burying-ground, "to secure the Town stock of ammunition." The ammunition lasted for about 70 years.

During the era between the Revolution and the Civil War, Amherst was a principal stage stop for both east-west and north-south traffic. These activities provided business for the several blacksmiths, wheelwrights and tavern keepers in the village.

For the next hundred years (1760 - 1860) Amherst Village prospered as the principal center of law, transportation, agriculture and commerce in south central New Hampshire. Amherst was chosen as the Shiretown of Hillsborough County in 1769. As such, it was the County Seat where the Courts of Law were held and where the records were kept. It also had the County jail for convicted prisoners, and the gallows for hangings. Amherst remained the only Shiretown until 1792 with annual term of the Superior Court being held in Amherst until 1879 giving the town eleven decades as a Shiretown. Here were heard the pleas of such noted colonial lawyers as Jeremiah Mason, Levi Woodbury, Joshua Atherton, and Arthur Gilmore.

The presence of the law courts brought to Amherst many people of note in politics and government. For example, Daniel Webster, a native of New Hampshire and later a distinguished Senator from

Massachusetts, made his maiden plea as a lawyer before the bar at Amherst. A by-product of the Courts was the county jail in the village where justice was carried out. Public hangings were common occurrences and occasions for festivities, family outings and picnics in the center of the village. Amherst was the scene of the last public hanging in the state.



Old Jailhouse

Early in the Nineteenth Century, there were several small mill sites on which were established three corn mills, five saw mills, one mill for dressing cloth, four trading stores, three small cotton and wool manufactories, and one printing establishment. Until roughly 1860, Amherst was a thriving industrial and commercial village for that time in history. It was the key town in southern New Hampshire.

Amherst also played an early part in medical research and vaccination. Dr. Mathias Spalding practiced and taught medicine in the Stewart-Spalding House. According to the Amherst Historic Society, "Spalding graduated from Harvard College in 1798, studied medicine in Cambridge, Mass., with Dr. Benjamin Waterhouse (1754-1846) and in London with Dr. Edward Jenner (1749-1823). On his return from his studies in London, Spalding carried the smallpox vaccine in a silver snuffbox from. The box, is now at the Harvard Medical School Library (Walking Tours of Amherst Village, 25). At this time in history, the populace was more frightened of the vaccination process than the disease itself. However, Dr. Spalding and his colleagues persevered, and in time, the disease of smallpox was eliminated as a health problem in the United States.



Stewart-Spalding House (19 Main Street)

The Industrial Revolution marked a shift away from small, rural communities to powered machinery and urban factories. Mill

town populations flourished along fast-moving rivers where water-power could be produced. *Railroads followed river valleys to bring raw materials to these new mill towns and to transport products to market. Without a river, sizeable enough to support an industrial factory, Amherst found itself bypassed by the industrial Revolution and the railroad boom.* This caused the town to decline as an important commercial and political center. It was precisely this series of events which kept this 18th Century New England village in a state of near-perfect preservation for the next 100 years.

The fine old houses, buildings, and farms made an ideal location for summer vacations only a short distance from the industrial cities growing up along the rivers from Boston to Manchester. Nor was there great impetus to tear down the older buildings to make way for newer commercial development. Instead, the older buildings were continued in use as holiday guest homes and rooming houses. A large hotel was built in 1870 to accommodate vacationers and patrons, but the basic architecture of the older buildings has remained largely intact.



Amherst Hotel (burned in 1879)

About 1950, the pressure of population and the drive away from cities began to bring the rural towns of southern New Hampshire into consideration as potential areas of residential development, especially for people in the industrial cities of the Merrimack Valley and the northern environs of Boston. Amherst was no exception despite the recent growth of the town the architectural integrity of the original colonial village has been largely maintained, with relatively few incursions in this century.



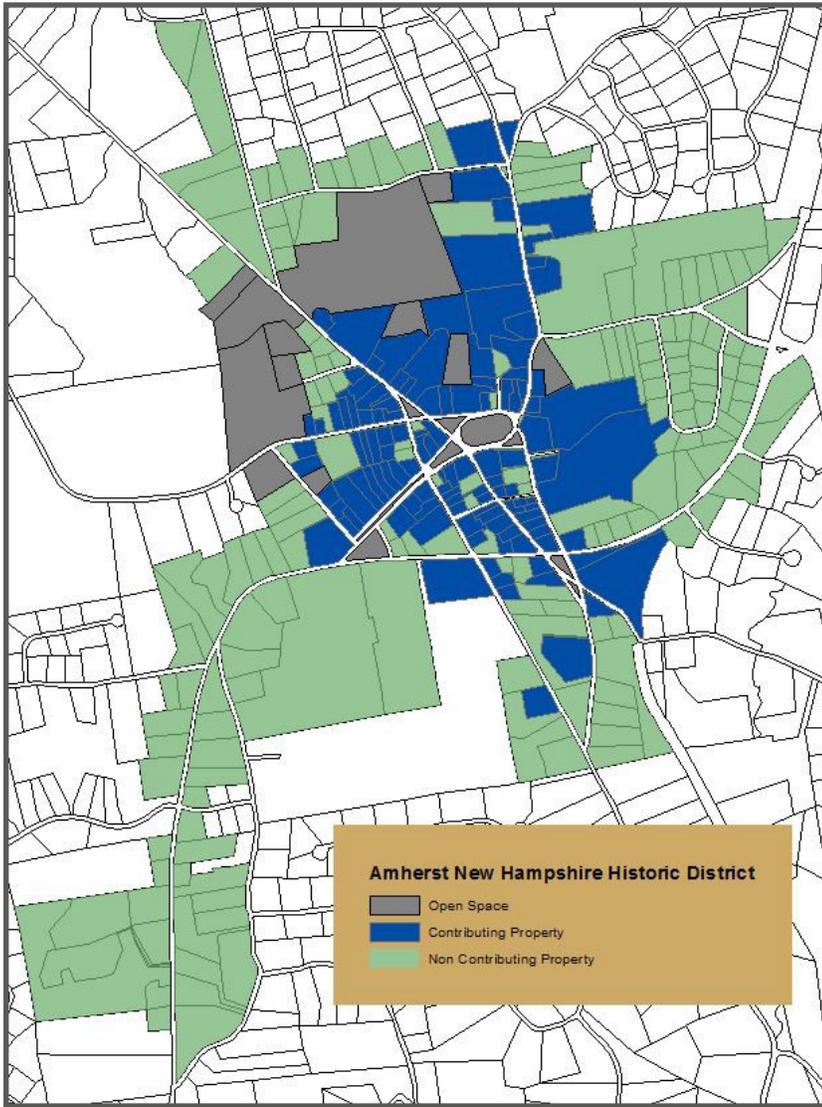
Introduction and Guidelines

The Amherst Historic District Commission's *Introduction & Guidelines* is an overview of the Town's Historic District. This document was developed in conjunction with Amherst's Historic District Commission and the Office of Community Development. Please review this information during the early stages of planning a project. Familiarity with the Amherst Historic District Regulations and this material can assist in moving a project quickly through the approval process, saving applicants both time and money.

The HDC's review process is based on the property's historical significance and integrity. Properties in the historic district are either contributing or non-contributing as designated in the Nomination Form to the National Register of Historic Places.

The more significant the property, the more critical is its authenticity. The greatest historic authenticity will be strictly enforced at Contributing Properties with more flexibility at Non-Contributing Properties.

The regulations that govern the construction, maintenance, and rehabilitation of properties in Amherst's Historic District are available at Town Hall and on the town's website at www.amherstnh.gov/historic-district-commission. For more information, to clarify whether a proposed project requires HDC review, or to obtain permit applications, please visit Town Hall or call the Community Development Department at (603) 673-6041 x206.



Map of Historic District

The Amherst Historic District spans more than 500 acres and includes 325 properties. The properties cover the period from 1700- 1924 and incorporate important Colonial, Federal and Greek revival styles. The parcels shown represent the current lot lines of property owners in the District. Each property is categorized as open space, contributing or non-contributing.

Researching Amherst’s History

Property owners seeking information regarding the history of their property can consult a variety of resources. Online digital libraries of historic homes and records can be found at the Amherst Historical Society’s website and the New Hampshire Historical Society’s website. Amherst has two museums. The Wigwam and Chapel Museums are both chock full of interesting artifacts relating to Amherst. The Amherst Town Library also contains a wealth of information on our Town’s past.

Historic Designation and Listingⁱ

Definitions

- **Historic Resource:** Any prehistoric or historic site, place, building, structure, or object that is deemed by the commission to have historic, cultural, social, economic, political, or architectural significance.
- **Historic District:** An area designated by ordinance of the Town of Amherst and which contains within definable geographic boundaries a significant concentration, linkage, or continuity of sites, buildings, structures, or objects united by past events or aesthetically by plan or physical development.

Amherst Historic District Classifications

- **Contributing Property:** A structure or site listed in the Historic District that generally has historic, cultural, social, economic, political, or architectural significance.
- **Non-Contributing Property:** A structure or site listed in the Historic District that generally does not have historic, cultural, social, economic, political, or architectural significance. *(Buildings less than 50 years old that are of modern design, appreciably different scale, height or building materials.)*

Local Designation

Local designation of a historic property or district provides a tool for local communities to determine what is architecturally and historically important to their community and a mechanism for the regulation of proposed changes to those properties.

Certified Local Government

The Certified Local Government program is designed to provide an opportunity for local governments to become more directly involved in identifying, evaluating, protecting, promoting and enhancing the educational economic value of local properties of historic, architectural and archeological significance.

The National Register of Historic Places

The National Register of Historic Places is the United States government’s official list of districts, sites, buildings, structures and objects identified as worthy of preservation. Listing in the National Register does not eliminate or restrict property rights of individual owners. The National Register is administered by the National Park Service, a division of the Department of the Interior.

Benefits of Local Designationⁱⁱ

The designation of local historic districts and landmarks has been found to:

- Increase neighborhood stability and property values
- Preserve the physical history of the area
- Promote an appreciation of the physical environment
- Foster community pride and self-image by creating a unique sense of place and local identity
- Increase the awareness and appreciation of local history
- Increase tourism and commerce
- Attract potential customers to businesses
- Create local jobs employing skilled craftsmen



Local designation helps to maintain the character and unique charm of Amherst Village and its historic neighborhoods

Sustainable Benefits of Rehabilitation

Historic buildings are intrinsically “green,” as reusing an existing building has substantially lower environmental impact than building a new one. Rehabilitation minimizes the wasteful loss of materials while maintaining a distinctive sense of place.

Sustainable benefits of rehabilitation include:

- The historic building or structure already exists, and the energy required to fabricate the lumber, bricks, windows and doors was expended long ago
- New construction often includes demolition of an existing building (construction waste comprises approximately 25% to 30% of landfills), in addition to the fabrication of new construction materials creating additional waste, while retaining an existing building conserves landfill space
- The most appropriate materials for the majority of rehabilitation projects are often historic materials rather than non-biodegradable manufactured products.

Preservation Assistance Programs

There are federal and state incentive programs available for historic properties. The submission and review requirements are rigorous and it is highly recommended that applicants contact the applicable agency at the early planning stages of a potential projects.

Federal Historic Preservation Tax Incentives

The Historic Preservation Tax Incentives Program rewards private investment in rehabilitating historic income-producing properties such as offices, rental housing and retail stores. The Program, established by the Tax Reform Act of 1986, is jointly administered by the U.S. Department of the Treasury and the U.S. Secretary of the Interior’s National Park Service. Owner-occupied single-family residences are not eligible for the program. If eligible, up to 20 cents on every dollar spent on qualified rehabilitation work (including most architectural and engineering fees) would be available as a credit against federal income taxes. The 20% tax credit is available to buildings that are listed in the National Register of Historic Places, either individually or as a contributing building in a National Register historic district, or as a contributing building within a local historic district that has been certified by the Department of the Interior. To be eligible for the 20% tax credit, project work must be certified as meeting the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation.

Preservation Easements

Preservation easements are a tool often used to insure the preservation of the character defining features of a property for the public’s benefit. The New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources maintains an easement program to protect historic resources (www.nh.gov/nhdhr/programs/easements.htm). The extent of the protection of the property is dependent on the strength of the easement. Some easements protect just the facade of a building. Other easements protect the larger preservation values including but not limited to the exterior and interior architectural features, materials, landscape, outbuildings, fences and archeological resources of a property. Preservation easements are perpetual assuring the property’s historic character will be protected.



Assistance programs, such as the Federal Historic Preservation Tax Incentives Program are available for designated commercial properties that undertake a certified rehabilitation project.

Historic District Commission

The HDC has regulatory review within the bounds of the Amherst Historic District. The HDC is comprised of five members and five alternates, all of whom are appointed by the Board of Selectmen. In addition, there is one ex-officio voting member each from the Board of Selectmen and the Planning Board.

The HDC holds meetings at 7pm in the Town Hall on the third Thursday of each month and may hold additional meetings if the Commission deems necessary. Applicants can come in on a conceptual basis to discuss a project before applying for a Certificate of Approval.

Applications to be reviewed by the Commission are due in the Office of Community Development at the close of the day, 21 days prior to the meeting. This allows the agenda to be publically posted, as well as providing an adequate notification period for any abutters.

The process for a Certificate of Approval requires an applicant to provide sufficient information on the Amherst Historic District Application. At minimum, all applications require:

- Photographs of the existing structure and/or building site clearly showing areas and elements to be affected by the proposed work.
- Accurate scaled drawings, renderings, or illustrations of the proposed work sufficient to show the style, design, detailing, treatments, massing, scale proportions, etc. of the proposed work
- Complete specification and/or descriptions of all materials for each element of the proposed work
- Copies of the completed application, checklist, plans, specifications and supporting material be submitted

Complete applications are added to the HDC's meeting agenda to be heard in public hearing format. The applicant should attend their public hearing to answer any questions the HDC may have. The HDC can table a decision pending clarification and/ or the submission of additional information as requested. During their reviews, the Commission references the criteria set forth in their regulations. Review by the HDC ensures that any proposed changes will be compatible with the character of the individual property and/or Historic District.

The HDC can take one of four actions following the review of an application:

- **Approval** - The Certificate for Approval will be issued.
- **Conditional Approval** - A Certificate for Approval will be issued pending review for compliance of imposed conditions.
- **Continued** - The applicant tables a vote of approval with the intent to return with additional information or clarification as requested by the HDC.
- **Denial** - It is determined that the project does not meet the requirements for the granting of a Certificate of Approval. The applicant may make modifications to the denied plans and resubmit the application for hearing without prejudice or appeal the decision to the Zoning Board of Adjustment.

Rehabilitation Guidelinesⁱⁱⁱ

Rehabilitation is defined by the Secretary of the Interior as "the process of returning a property to a state of utility, through repair or alteration, which makes possible an efficient contemporary use while preserving those portions and features of the property which are significant to its historic, architectural, and cultural values."

A successful rehabilitation will:

- **Identify, retain, and preserve** the overall form, materials, and details that are important in defining the architectural and historical character of the building and property.
- **Protect and maintain** historic materials and features. This involves protection from other work that may occur in proximity to the historic materials, and protection through regular maintenance. A regular program of protection and maintenance can prevent or postpone extensive and costly work. Please review Amherst's HDC Regulations, Article V.
- **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. Please review Amherst's HDC Regulations, Article V, and VI.
- **Replace** missing or deteriorated historic materials and features when the extent of deterioration precludes repair. The preferred approach is to replace the entire feature to match the original material, finish, detailing and texture. Please review Amherst's HDC Regulations, Article VI, and X.
- **New construction** of missing historical features is acceptable only if adequate historical, pictorial, and physical documentation exists so that the feature may be accurately reproduced. Please review Amherst's HDC Regulations, Article VII.
- **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. An addition is a new construction at the exterior of an existing building and should be carefully considered. New additions should be differentiated but also be compatible in size, mass, form, fenestration, material, detailing and style with the historic building. It is important that alterations and additions do not radically alter, obscure or destroy character-defining features. Please review Amherst's HDC Regulations, Article VI, and X.
- **Demolitions** are rarely considered to be the appropriate option. Once buildings that contribute to the character of the district are destroyed, they cannot be replaced. Demolition could represent a lost educational resource for the community whether the building was an example of past construction techniques, or has associations with a significant individual or event in our history. Please review Amherst's HDC Regulations, Article IV, and V.

DOES NOT REQUIRE a Public Hearing

Property Maintenance and Repair

Maintenance is defined by the Amherst Historic District Regulations as, “ordinary maintenance and repair of any architectural feature that does not involve removal or a change in design, dimensions, materials, or outer appearance of such feature.”

Maintenance helps to retain the defining features of a property, and the character and integrity of the District. Homeowner’s contribute to the District by preserving original materials and craftsmanship. The District is an attractive place to live, work, and visit because of the residents. It is prudent for residents to regularly inspect their properties to identify potential problems. This practice allows residents to detect deteriorating materials and address concerns with maintenance rather than replacement. Amherst homeowners should consider the following examples of maintenance practices when caring for their historic homes.

- Clean gutters and downspouts
- Paint exterior woodwork
- Check chimney bases and foundations
- Inspect roofing and flashing
- Examine windows and doors

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BUILDING ELEMENT	TYPICAL INSPECTION TIMETABLE		
	6 months	12 months	12 – 60 months
Roof coverings		✓	
Gutters and downspouts	✓		
Flashings		✓	
Chimneys (from ground)	✓		
Chimneys (close inspection)			✓
Masonry, including mortar joints			✓
Painted masonry		✓	
Windows and doors		✓	
Painted wood elements	✓		
Sidings, stucco, and other claddings		✓	



Regular repainting with proper preparation is one of the best ways to maintain exterior woodwork and siding. *Maintaining Your Historic Home: A Practical Guide for Homeowners by the Delaware County Planning Department. P. 6.

REQUIRES a Public Hearing

Replacement

In the case it is no longer feasible to maintain a historic feature due to deteriorated condition, replacement may be necessary. Replacing features requires homeowners to submit an application to the HDC. The Commission prefers replacement of original features with the same matching materials, finish, detailing, and textures. When identical replacement is not possible, new features should accent the material, size, scale, finish, profile, detailing and texture of the original feature.

Alterations

Alterations to historic buildings are often proposed to ensure the continued use of a property. In these cases, the HDC encourages the identification and retention of character defining features. The HDC understands resident’s need for their historic homes to support modern lifestyles. Successful applicants demonstrate that the design and use of materials are compatible with a historic building and setting.

Additions

Additions are usually more substantial changes than alterations. Additions to a historic building can dramatically alter the appearance of an individual property and the District. Exact reproduction of historic buildings is discouraged, while both traditional or contemporary design compatible to the context of the historic resources and their surroundings is encouraged. Due to the sensitivity of the District, the property owners should take great care when proposing an addition to their property.



The rear addition in the above photo is designed to be sympathetic to the form, massing and scale of the historic house. It is smaller in size and includes similar fenestration patterns, materials, gable eave detailing and trim, making it highly compatible.

New Construction

New construction projects are usually more significant than additions when considering the impact, a new building can have to a property and the District. All new construction should be distinctly residential in character and draw from local historic design elements, materials, and details. Historic Districts are cohesive areas with character and integrity, thus new construction will likely be limited to building types, scales, materials and designs similar to those found in the District.

Preparing for a Public Hearing^v

When preparing for a public hearing regarding a proposed change to a property within the historic district, it may be informative to know what the HDC's review is guided by:

- The **Amherst Historic District Commission Regulations** (Adopted: 01/1991; Amended: 03/2000, 10/2000, 05/2003, 05/2005, and 06/2009) - *These regulations govern decision made by the HDC. In certain circumstances, waivers to these regulations may be granted for good cause. Any changes to HDC regulations require a public hearing within the district, and majority vote from HDC members under RSA 675: 6.*
- The **Nomination Form** for the Amherst Village Historic District accepted by the National Register of Historic Places, (07/1982) - *The Nomination Form is an inventory of the District's resources. It designates properties to be either contributing or non-contributing.*
- The Secretary of the Interior's **Standards for Treatment of Historic Properties with Guidelines for Preserving, Rehabilitation, Restoring, and Reconstructing Historic Buildings** (1995) - *This literature discusses the significance and integrity of historical resources. Amherst only refers to the Rehabilitation section. In the rare case, the HDC chooses to make an exception from their regulations, the Commission's decision conforms to the federal standards and guidance on protecting the significance and integrity of a property.*
- The Secretary of the Interior's **National Register Bulletin, How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation** (Adopted: 1990; Revised: 1991, 1995, 1997, 2001, and 2002) - *This document discusses the significance and integrity of historical resources. Amherst refers to several sections including, VIII. How to Evaluate the Integrity of a Property. The Seven Aspects of Integrity are location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. A property cannot have Integrity with just feeling and association. This concept is normally evaluated in combination with Rehabilitation standards drawn from the Treatment of Historic Properties document referenced above.*
- Relevant evidence from trusted sources that discuss the character defining features of a contributing property. - *The HDC uses these sources to determine what gives a contributing property its significance and integrity. Historic properties typically derive their significance from their architectural character and/or their historical significance as it is related to an important individual or event. Trusted sources include:*
 - Daniel Secomb's **The History of Amherst** (1883)
 - Alonzo J. Fogg's **Statistics and Gazeteer of New-Hampshire** (1874)
 - Robert H. Rowe and William P. Veillette's **Amherst Historical Moments** (2004)
 - The Historical Society of Amherst NH's **Amherst, New Hampshire: A Sleeping Town Awakens 1881/1982** (1983)
 - The Historical Society of Amherst NH's **The Walking Tours of Amherst Village** (2011)
 - Emma P. Boylston's **Colonial Amherst** (1916)
 - John Farmer's **Historical Sketch of Amherst NH** (1837)
 - Clean Air Cool Planet's **Energy Efficiency, Renewable Energy and Historic Preservation: A**

guide for Historic District Commissions (2009) -

This publication is endorsed by the New Hampshire Department of Historical Resources. The HDC often looks to the State for guidance. Federal and State standards are the same. However, the State offers additional guidance about protecting historic properties from New Hampshire weather, and adapting to sustainable energy saving practices as well as other relevant topics of importance to New Hampshire.

Archaeological Landmarks

Given the area's early settlement, there are numerous archaeological sites identified and protected throughout the Town, and identified areas where there is the potential for archaeological discovery. Once an archaeological site has been disturbed by untrained lay persons, the ability to reveal the site through professional interpretation might be lost forever. As a result, archaeological sites are best preserved in-situ, or "in-place", until they can be professionally investigated. If a historic resource is discovered that has archaeological value and the site needs to be preserved, the Division of Historical Resources State Archaeologist at (603) 271-6433 will be notified.

In the most unlikely of cases, you suspect that you have found human remains, call the Amherst Police Department at (603) 673-4900. The Police will coordinate with the State Archaeologist and contact the State Medical Examiner.

Examples of Archaeological Importance:

- Gravestones
- Stone Foundations
- Domestic or industrial refuse sites, i.e. dumps
- Property boundaries
- Stone walls
- Town boundary markers and mile markers
- Underground shelters
- Monuments
- Well and cisterns
- Quarries



Not all archaeological objects are as clearly marked as gravestones. Care should be taken to minimize disruption of any archaeological artifact during construction projects.

Frequent Asked Questions

Q: How do I know if my home or property is in the Historic District?

A: A map of Amherst's Historic District can be found on page-4 of this document. This map includes road markings and property boundaries of the entire district. For more information or for clarification on your specific property, please contact a staff member of the Community Development Department at the Town Hall or call (603) 673-6041 x206.

Q: What projects do I need HDC approval for?

A: The Commission does not regulate interior changes of any kind to historic properties. Certain exterior work, where there is an alterations or upgrade in the design, materials, or general appearance of the structure, requires a Certificate of Approval (COA) prior to commencing work. The following list includes the most frequent items which are subject to HDC review. ***This list should be considered a representative example and is not intended to be all-inclusive.***

- additions/demolitions
- air conditioning/heat pump/generator units
- awnings and canopies
- chimneys and caps
- construction of a new building/home
- doors/replacement
- exterior lighting fixtures
- garden houses/storage sheds
- landscaping (fencing, walls, drive/pathways/parking)
- mechanical and plumbing vents
- porches/screen/railings
- roofing
- shutters and hardware (adding or removing)
- siding
- signage
- skylights/copulas/weathervanes/dormers
- solar panels
- swimming pools
- windows/replacement

Q: Where should I begin the process to get my project approved?

A: Once you have determined that your house is in the Historic District (see map on page 4) and your project is identified as one that is subject to HDC review (see listed items above) you can begin the process by downloading the *Historic District Regulations* and completing the Application on page-12 of this document. Once completed, or if you need help with application, please visit the Town Hall and meet with a staff member of the Community Development Department. A staff member will discuss your project and to determine if a COA is required and review next steps and materials required to obtain a COA for your property.

Q: How long does it take to have projects reviewed and approved by the HDC?

A: HDC review and approval typically will take six weeks from start to finish. This is estimated from the time a complete application is submitted to when a COA is received and the appeal period is over. Applications must be submitted to the Community Development Department 21 days before the next scheduled HDC meeting. The Commission meets monthly and reviews applications during a public hearing every third Thursday. When the Commission grants a COA, there is a 20-day period during which any decision by the Commission may be appealed. Homeowners are cautioned that any work started during this appeal period is "at-risk". Projects that include demolition or major new construction should plan on attending several review meetings to achieve a COA.

Q: How strict are Amherst's HDC Regulations?

A: Amherst's regulations do not require museum quality preservations. The purpose of Amherst's HDC is to ensure that properties in the district are not altered inappropriately. The Commission recognizes that these are living, vital neighborhoods, and does not want to inhibit that spirit in any way.

Q: What can I do to help improve the likelihood of an application's approval?

A: The best preparation is reviewing the HDC Regulations. You may also want to review the Nomination Form from the National Register of Historic Places, especially if there is explicit mention of your property. If you seek an exception from the Commission, it could be helpful to understand the Rehabilitation Standards and Guidance from the U.S. Secretary of the Interior, relevant publications written by or endorsed by the New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources, and pertinent evidence from trusted sources that discuss the character defining features of a contributing property.

If you are considering a complex project, particularly one that includes an addition or new construction, it is often helpful to meet with the Commission prior to submitting a complete application. The purpose of the meeting is to allow for an informal review of the project and offer suggestions which might resolve conflicts with project requirements and HDC regulations. Conceptual reviews are nonbinding and free for the applicant.

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

A: The HDC charges an application fee of 60 dollars plus 7 dollars per abutter. Applicants are not required to hire an outside professional. Carefully review the applicable HDC Regulations and fill out the Amherst Historic District Application. For complex proposals or those that require the submission of scaled drawings, consultation with a professional is encouraged and may expedite the review process. If you are retaining the services of a professional, it is helpful to work with architects, contractors and others familiar with the requirements of historic districts.

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

A: If your project is complex or requires review from multiple Commissions and Boards, the best time to talk to the HDC is as early in the project as possible. Before you invest significant time and money into the design process and even before you submit your application, we recommend you meet with us to review your proposal. This initial informal review meeting can help expedite a project through the HDC review process. Please contact the Community Development Department to be included on the agenda for an informal discussion at the next monthly HDC meeting.

Q: What can I do to make my historic home more energy efficient?

A: The Commission is supportive of homeowner's efforts to make their historic homes comfortable and energy efficient without adversely affecting the historic character of their property and/or the district. The Commission will make every effort to work with you to find a creative way to support your improvements.

Q: In the unlikely event an application is denied, what happens next?

A: The Commission is dedicated to aid applicants through the approval process. If, after extensive discussion, we do not approve the application in its current form, the Commission will make suggestions on how the applicant can modify their project on which we would conditionally approve the project. If the applicant is unwilling to make concessions, the HDC will vote to deny the application and issue a Notice of Denial. This denial will prevent applicants from obtaining a building permit. Applicants aggrieved by the HDC's decision have a right to appeal to Amherst's Zoning Board of Adjustment.

Q: What are the consequences for a property owner who does not comply with the Regulations of the HDC?

A: When all reasonable efforts to avoid a violation have failed, and a property owner is still out of compliance, the HDC may write a letter alerting the Amherst Code Enforcement Officer of the situation. The Code Enforcement Officer can issue a written warning to the property owner. If this warning is ignored, the Code Enforcement Officer may proceed by issuing an Order to take an action that would remedy the problem. In an extremely rare scenario where the property owner is still unresponsive, the Building Inspector, Code Enforcement Officer, Zoning Administrator, or other official designated as an enforcement authority may issue a Cease and Desist Order under RSA 673:17-a.

Q: What are the top misconceptions about the HDC?

The Amherst HDC requires white lights in the Historic District at Christmas time.

FALSE: There is no formal ordinance or regulation advising the use or color of Christmas/Holiday lights. There is an unwritten tradition that "Villagers" over the years follow. Most "Villagers" in the District wait until the tree lighting weekend to turn on their white-window lights creating a unique holiday charm for visitors and travelers to experience in Amherst Village.

The Amherst HDC has jurisdiction on what color I can paint my home.

FALSE: Most historic districts (Amherst included) do not regulate paint color – or any alteration that is considered cosmetic in nature and can readily be reversed. Historic districts that do regulate paint color normally only do so upon the overwhelming desire of the residents within their district.

The Amherst HDC DOES NOT have jurisdiction for replacement projects or projects not visible from public view?

FALSE: Page-7 of this document provides a good overview of what types of projects require HDC approval at public hearings. When repairs to historic homes are not possible, the HDC encourages replacement in-kind. This does not exempt a project from HDC approval. Every project is carefully reviewed to ensure that new construction reproduces the original feature exactly, including the original material, finish, detailing and texture. Projects with limited or no public visibility are also subject to HDC approval. The public view includes neighboring properties to the extent that the structure, facility, or condition may be reasonably observed from neighboring property. HDC regulations are most strictly enforced for structures, facilities, and conditions within the public view.

ⁱ New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources, *Certified Local Government* www.nh.gov/nhdhr/programs/cert_loca_govt.html (2017) and City of Portsmouth, New Hampshire Historic District Commission and Planning Department. *Historic District Commission Design Review Tools* (2016); 1-16.

ⁱⁱ City of Portsmouth, New Hampshire Historic District Commission and Planning Department. *Historic District Commission Design Review Tools* (2016); 1-16.

ⁱⁱⁱ Week, Kay D. and Anne E. Grimmer. U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Cultural Resource Stewardship and Partnership, Heritage Preservation Services. *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Treatment of Historic Properties with Guidelines for Preserving, Rehabilitation, Restoring, and Reconstructing Historic Buildings* (1995); 60-115.

^{iv} Delaware County Planning Department. *Maintaining Your Historic Home: A Practical Guide for Homeowners* (2009); 6.

^v Week, Kay D. and Anne E. Grimmer. (1995); 60-115.