



Certificate of Appropriateness Q & A

What is a Certificate of Appropriateness?

A Certificate of Appropriateness, or “CA,” is a type of permit that certifies that changes to a historic landmark or property in a local historic district are appropriate to the historic character of the property or district. Once a property is designated as a historic landmark or included in a local historic district, the exterior cannot be changed without a certificate of appropriateness issued by the Wake County Historic Preservation Commission (WCHPC) or by Capital Area Preservation (CAP) staff.

When do I need a CA?

If you are getting ready to do work to the exterior of your landmark property or its grounds, you will need to apply for a CA. A CA is required for all exterior projects that involve a change in design, materials, or general appearance to a historic landmark or its site.

A CA is not required for interior changes or routine maintenance. Routine maintenance is defined as the repair or replacement of building features when there is no change in materials or appearance. For example, painting a house when there is no change in color is considered routine maintenance. See the attached list of major and minor works for more examples of routine maintenance.

How are CAs issued?

Your application will first be reviewed by CAP staff based upon the adopted Design Guidelines. The Design Guidelines are the basis for evaluating proposed changes. Copies of these guidelines are available from CAP. It is suggested that you review your application with CAP staff before the deadline to ensure that it is complete, accurate, and includes sufficiently detailed information. (See “Information for Applicants” on the CA Application)

Major Works - involve substantial changes to a landmark such as additions, new construction, and demolition. Major works are presented to the WCHPC for its approval during the Commission’s regular monthly meeting. The presentation will be a public hearing, and CAP and the WCHPC strongly encourage property owners and applicants to attend the meeting. You are not required to speak; however, it is often helpful for the applicant/owner to be present to answer questions that may arise. Owners of adjacent properties will also be notified by mail. Adjacent property owners and any other interested parties will also have the opportunity to comment on the application at the hearing. If the WCHPC approves the application, the property owner is issued a CA, which must be posted at the work site with any other required permits.

Minor Works - do not involve substantial changes to the appearance of a landmark. Minor works are reviewed by CAP staff and can usually be approved within a few days. Minor works may be referred to the WCHPC if the staff determines that the change involves substantial alterations, additions, or removals that could impair the integrity of the landmark or district. (See list of Major and Minor works.) Owners will be notified as soon as staff approves the project, and a copy of the signed application will serve as the minor works CA. Like the major works CA, a copy of the minor works CA must be posted at the work site with any other required permits.

How should I plan appropriate changes to my landmark property?

All decisions concerning applications for Certificates of Appropriateness are based on these guidelines. The Design Guidelines recognize that buildings evolve over time and encourage compatible change that does not compromise the characteristics that made the landmark worthy of designation. The guidelines are free and available to property owners from Capital Area Preservation. CAP staff can assist property owners in interpreting the guidelines and in planning changes that are appropriate. Please utilize the guidelines to plan your project.

How do I apply for a CA?

Submit a Certificate of Appropriateness application to Capital Area Preservation, PO Box 28072, Raleigh, NC 27611. The application includes more detailed information about submittal requirements and schedules.