

**DOWNTOWN  
LOWELL**  
HISTORIC DISTRICT



# PERMITTING PROCESS

**A walkthrough &  
explanation of the  
application process**

**QUESTIONS?**

Reach out to the Historic Board staff  
at (978) 674-1443 or via email at  
[sstowell@lowellma.gov](mailto:sstowell@lowellma.gov)

**MORE INFO:**

[historiclowell.net](http://historiclowell.net)



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# What is reviewed?

The process covers the erection, demolition, reconstruction, or alteration of the exterior (and interior work when it affects the exterior appearance) of a building, structure, or parcel viewed from any street, canal, or way open to public or private view.

Work requires the approval of the Board before it begins and any other City approvals are issued and is divided into two types under the regulations. The Board staff will determine what type of work is covered in your application:

## Design review standards & outcomes

The purpose of the District's Design Review Standards is to guide all construction, preservation, restoration, and alteration of all properties in the District so that the integrity of Lowell's historic setting is not disrupted. They are intended to help applicants propose and design projects that are consistent with, and maintain, the District's setting. This helps in ensuring that the review process is fair and can be completed quickly. The goal is to minimize reliance on individual tastes and preferences of applicants and reviewers by having clear, understandable guidelines.

## Additional information

- The Board must approve in advance all development in the District. By state law, no City department, board, or commission can issue any permits, variances, approvals, etc. within the District until the Board has first issued its approval and/or granted an Historic Permit.
- If proposed work does not require a Building Permit, Board approval is still required in advance of the project commencing.
- If unapproved work is found to be in progress or has been completed, a "stop work" order will be issued by the Historic Board and if necessary, also by the Building Commissioner. If the work is found to be inconsistent with the District's Design Review Standards, a violation process is instituted and the owner may be required to undo the change and repair any damage at his/her own expense. Violations within the District are subject to fines of up to \$100 a day with each day constituting a separate offense if non-compliance continues.

## DEVELOPMENT TYPES...

### MINOR

**Items of ordinary maintenance and repair, items of in-kind replacement, and minor modifications or changes which are easily reversible and are determined to be consistent with the District's Design Review Standards** including, but not limited to, cleaning, painting, repairing or replacing architectural elements according to historically compatible plans, placement or removal of signs, awnings, light fixtures, and masonry repointing. These are administrative items and do not require a public hearing.

### MAJOR

**All other changes.** All determinations regarding Major Development are reviewed by the Board at a public hearing.



**The best way to determine whether the work you are contemplating must be reviewed by the Historic Board is to consult the staff.**



### Historic Permit

The most common result of design review is the issuance of a Historic Permit, whether with or without conditions. Whether issued administratively or after a public hearing, an Historic Permit outlines the work described in your application and is a legal agreement regarding the methods and results of the proposed work.



### Historic Permit with Conditions

This type of permit outlines the conditions under which the Board has agreed to approve the work. The most common condition is "final details to be reviewed by the Administrator." This condition is used to expedite the review process while ensuring that all details of the work comply with the District's Design Review Standards and the Board determination. Any conditions included in a permit are part of the legal agreement and must be adhered to.



### Continuance

Sometimes the Board may vote to continue the discussion to another hearing in order to review additional information such as revised drawings or a site inspection.



### Denial

Rarely the Board will deny an application. Typically the staff will warn the applicant if the proposed work is inconsistent with the Standards and work with the applicant to amend the proposal to meet them.

# Process timeline & appeals

By statute, any party aggrieved by a decision for Minor Development can appeal to the Historic Board within 7 days of the issuance of any written decision. Any person aggrieved by a decision for Major Development can appeal to Superior Court within 20 days of the decision being filed with the City Clerk.

**Minor Development  
Historic Permits**  
**7 days**

**Major Development  
Historic Permits**  
**30 days**

These time periods are averages. Completeness of applications, appropriateness of proposals, and timing of application submittals all affect the review process.

## What is the review process?

### 1 Consult with staff & complete the application form

Consult with staff as soon as you begin considering doing work to determine whether the work will require review and what Standards apply. The staff's job is to assist you in making appropriate and long-lasting changes to your building. The Board and its staff are always available to assist with any questions regarding design and process in the District.

When completing the form, please include all required materials and application fee. Incomplete applications will delay the review process. The staff makes every effort to assist the applicant in assembling all necessary materials for the application.



### 2 Attend required hearings or meetings

For Minor Development, you'll be asked to attend onsite and/or design review meetings as needed to discuss and finalize your proposal.

For Major Development, you'll be asked to attend the same preliminary review as above in addition to a public hearing to present the application. The Board will hear your presentation, testimony of interested parties, and the recommendations of the staff before rendering a decision



### 3 Get your new permit!

Great work! We've enjoyed working with you. This is just the beginning though. Please ensure you get the rest of your required permits from other City departments. If you're unsure of who to go to, we'll be glad to help you!

