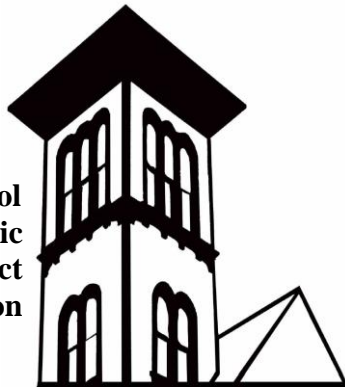


# A Property Owner's Guide to the Overlook Historic District

Bristol  
Historic  
District  
Commission



City of Bristol, Connecticut  
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## Introduction

This pamphlet has been prepared by the Bristol Historic District Commission to provide the public with an easy-to-understand summary of the location and purpose of the city's local historic district and the Commission's role and responsibilities in administering the affairs of the District.

In 2007, the Bristol City Council established the **Overlook Local Historic District** in order to preserve and protect the unique architectural heritage of a portion of the city's Federal Hill neighborhood. The District is dominated by many large Colonial Revival-style homes built by Bristol's leading industrialist families during the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Several of these homes are listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

When the District was created, the Council also established the **Bristol Historic District Commission**, which was given the responsibility to "preserve and protect" the District's architectural character. To accomplish this, the Commission is authorized by both state law and city ordinance to review proposed changes to the exterior features of buildings (and certain structures) within the District visible to the public and to decide upon the appropriateness of such changes within the context of the District.

To assist it with carrying out its responsibilities, the Commission has developed and adopted a set of *design and materials guidelines* that are used to help the Commission decide upon the appropriateness of activities proposed within the District. The guidelines are also intended to help residents of the District understand the Commission's general preferences as it reviews proposed changes.



18 Broadview Street

The Commission has defined its role to be one of responsibly balancing the needs of current property owners with the public interest of preserving the unique architectural features of the District's buildings and structures. The goal of the Commission is not to preclude changes to such buildings and structures but rather to ensure that those changes will be consistent with and appropriately integrated into the historical and architectural character of the District.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### Q: How do I know if my property is located in the District?

A: The District occupies nearly six blocks in the center of the city's Federal Hill neighborhood. To view a map of the District click here, for a list of properties in the District click here.

### Q: What type of work requires the Commission's review and approval?

A: Though not an exhaustive list, the following work generally requires the Commission's approval if visible from a public way (even if obstructed by landscaping): erecting a building or structure; altering one or more exterior architectural features of a building or structure (e.g., replacing windows); and demolishing or removing a building or structure. (Structures include fences, signs, and walls.) You are advised to check with the city's Land Use Office before proceeding with any proposed work to determine if it requires the Commission's approval.

### Q: Is there any type of work that DOESN'T require the Commission's review and approval?

A: Yes. These include the routine maintenance or repair of any exterior architectural feature as long as it doesn't alter the appearance or design of the feature; the installation of mailboxes; interior building alterations; and the replacement of certain types of roof shingles. Again, you are advised to check with the Land Use Office before proceeding with any proposed work to determine if it requires the Commission's approval.

### Q: If the work I'm proposing requires the Commission's review and approval, what do I need to do?

A: You'll need to obtain from the Commission a *Certificate of Appropriateness* (Certificate), which represents the Commission's formal approval of work proposed to be undertaken on a property located in the District.

### Q: How do I go about obtaining a Certificate?

A: In order for the Commission to review and decide upon the appropriateness of the work you're proposing, you'll need to file an application for a Certificate with the city's Land Use Office. Its staff serves as the Commission's administrative arm and is responsible for processing all Commission applications. They can provide you with the necessary application form, offer assistance and advice, and try to answer your questions about the application submission, review and approval process.

### **Filing the application**

An application for a Certificate of Appropriateness consists of three items: a completed application form, a filing fee, and information that describes and/or illustrates in detail the work that you propose to undertake.

The one-page application form is largely self-explanatory; staff can assist you with filling it out and will provide you with some of the technical information needed to complete it.

An accurate explanation of the work you propose is perhaps the most important part of the application. As such, you should submit any and all information that clearly depicts the nature and extent of the work. Examples of such information include: photographs, a detailed written description of the proposed work, architectural drawings, materials samples, and manufacturers' specification sheets (e.g., for windows, doors, and fences).

The Commission holds one regular meeting a month – usually (but not always) on the first Thursday; each regular meeting has an application filing deadline associated with it (typically ten days before the meeting). In order for the Commission to consider your application at its regular monthly meeting, you (or a representative) will need to submit it in person to the Land Use Office no later than 12:00 noon on the filing deadline day for that meeting. The Land Use Office can provide you with the Commission's schedule of regular meetings and filing deadlines for the current year.

### **Before the meeting**

At least 7 days before the meeting you will have to post a "notice of public hearing" sign on your property. The sign – available from the Land Use Office – informs the public that the property is the subject of a public hearing for a Certificate of Appropriateness. A refundable deposit for the sign is required.

About a week before the meeting, you will receive a copy of the meeting agenda. If your application was filed in a timely manner, it will appear on the agenda under "Public Hearings."



4 Oakland Street

### **At the meeting (the public hearing)**

By state law, the Commission is required to hold a public hearing on each application for a Certificate of Appropriateness. At the beginning of the hearing on your application, the person presenting it (you or your representative) should identify him/herself and then describe to the Commission the nature of the work being proposed. During the hearing, Commission members may ask questions about your project, as well as offer suggestions about it (e.g., not removing a specific decorative feature or using a different type of window more in keeping with the building's architectural style).

After your presentation is completed, the Commission will give the public an opportunity to comment upon and/or ask questions about your project.

Once all parties have been heard from, the Commission will close the public hearing. However, if the Commission feels additional information is needed in order to render a decision on your application, it may decide to continue the public hearing to the following month's meeting to give you more time to submit that information to the Commission.

### **The Commission's decision**

By state law, the Commission has 65 days from the date you filed your application to hold a public hearing and make a decision on it. Typically, however, the Commission will discuss the merits of your project and make its decision immediately following the close of the public hearing. If the Commission approves your application, it may do so with or without stipulations. If the Commission denies your application, it's required to state on the record the reasons for doing so. It may also suggest ways in which your project can be revised in order to address its concerns.

### **After the meeting**

Shortly after the Commission decides upon your application, you will receive official notification of the outcome from the Land Use Office. If the application is approved, a Certificate of Appropriateness will be issued to you; if the work also requires a Building Permit, a copy of the Certificate will be provided to the Building Department.

If the application is denied, you can try to revise your project in an effort to address the Commission's reasons for denial and then file a new application. By state law, you also have the right to appeal the Commission's decision to the Superior Court within 15 days from the date the decision was made.

prepared by Land Use Office  
City of Bristol, CT

### **Some tips**

- If a proposed project requires both a Building Permit and a Certificate of Appropriateness, the Certificate must be obtained first. A Building Permit will **not** be issued without a Certificate.
- For certain projects, a Certificate of Appropriateness may be required even if a Building Permit is not (e.g., installation of window shutters).
- The Commission's goal is to work with District property owners to help their projects become a reality. As such, the Commission welcomes the opportunity to informally discuss your project with you at one of its monthly meetings while the project is still in the planning and design stages and before you file a formal application. Contact the Land Use Office to arrange for a pre-application discussion.
- At any time throughout the process, you can have someone such as a contractor or architect represent you.

### **Resources (with links to each website)**

**Bristol Historic District Commission website**  
contains links to the Commission's guidelines, application form, meeting schedule, etc.

**Bristol Historical Society**  
98 Summer St., Bristol.  
Tel: (860) 583-6309  
Website: <http://www.bristolhistoricalsociety.org>

**Bristol Room, Bristol Public Library**  
5 Main St., Bristol  
Tel: (860) 584-7787  
Website: <http://www.bristollib.com>

**CT Trust for Historic Preservation**  
940 Whitney Ave., Hamden CT  
Tel: (203) 562-6312  
Website: <http://www.cttrust.org>

**National Trust for Historic Preservation**  
Website: <http://www.preservationnation.org>

### **City Staff Contacts (click on name for e-mail link)**

**Land Use Office:** (860) 584-6225  
[Robert Flanagan, City Planner](#)  
[Christopher Schaut, Assistant City Planner](#)

**Building Department:** (860) 584-6215  
[Guy Morin, Building Official](#)  
[Monica Holloway, Zoning Enforcement Officer](#)