



What Is a Certificate of Appropriateness?

A Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) is an approval given to the property owner of a local historic landmark or property in a local historic district for alterations proposed by the property owner. In addition, because the City of Joliet is a Certified Local Government in the State of Illinois, a COA is also given for landmarks and district properties on the National Register of Historic Places.

Why Is a Certificate of Appropriateness Needed?

Obtaining a COA assures that your historic landmark or district property can maintain its historic integrity. The qualities that make your property either architecturally or historically notable should be maintained or enhanced when alterations are made according to the appropriate guidelines. If your property is part of a local historic district, the COA process ensures that the entire district adheres to the guidelines. In general, receiving the COA can also be important if you are applying for a grant program and/or seeking reimbursement for funds. The Joliet Historic Preservation Commission (JHPC) can assist you or refer you to resources for any necessary work to your property.

When Is a Certificate of Appropriateness Needed?

The COA is needed when changes are made to the exterior façade visible from the street or the public right of way. If you are performing routine maintenance, a COA is not needed. However, if you must replace existing features or parts of your historic property or structure, you will need a COA. When replacing or restoring, it is helpful to remember the phrase “like for like.” This means the replacement materials should be as close as possible in design, composition, and size to the original materials. You should also read over the guidelines that apply to your historic structure, such as the Secretary of the Interior Guidelines or your district guidelines.

Many times obtaining the COA coincides with the need to obtain a building permit. However, you should check with the JHPC whether the project you are undertaking would need a COA. Also, the JHPC does not monitor interior changes or alterations, but strongly encourages property owners to maintain interior historic features.

How Does the Certificate of Appropriateness Process Work?

As part of the nomination process to become a landmark or part of a district, you agree to the COA process when signing the owner consent/ COA acknowledgment form.

If you have a change that is rather simple, such as replacing or repairing a roof with the same type of materials, your COA would be an administrative process. You would simply complete the COA form, along with before and after pictures or sketches, a list of materials, and a work plan summarizing the project. In these cases, the Commission Secretary can give an administrative approval rather quickly.

However, if you undertake a more significant project, such as tearing off an inappropriate front porch and replacing it with a more historically compatible one, you would probably go through a hearing process. Again, you would submit the COA form, existing pictures and proposed sketches, a list of materials, project specifications, and a work plan. Once these forms are submitted to the Commission Secretary, the JHPC evaluates the project and awards the COA. You are encouraged to attend the hearing to learn about the approval process and answer any questions the Commission might have. It is suggested that you seek assistance from the Commission Secretary or the Commission before starting a project, just to assure that the COA process can proceed smoothly and efficiently.

Where Can I Get More Information?

More details about the COA can be found in Section 8-615 of the Joliet Historic Preservation Ordinance “Criteria for Certificate of Appropriateness.” You may also contact the JHPC Commission Secretary at (815) 724-4050.

