

**TOWNSHIP OF LOWER MERION**  
***Building and Planning Committee***  
**Issue Briefing**

**Topic:** Administrative Review Guidelines for Historic Properties

**Prepared By:** Greg Prichard, Historic Preservation Planner

**Date:** March 31, 2017

**I. Action To Be Considered By The Board:**

Discussion of guidelines to allow administrative review of certain HARB and Historical Commission applications.

**II. Why This Issue Requires Board Consideration:**

Authorization to allow staff to modify the HARB/Historical Commission review process in special situations will require Board action.

**III. Current Policy Or Practice (If Applicable):**

All exterior modifications to properties within historic districts and properties individually listed on the Township's Historic Resource Inventory currently require HARB or Historical Commission review and recommendation for approval or denial.

**IV. Other Relevant Background Information:**

Presently, the HARB and the Historical Commission have the authority to review major exterior changes to historic properties such as large additions as well as simpler modifications like changes in roofing materials and window replacement. The creation of a dedicated Township Historic Preservation Planner staff position has given the Township the resources to internally review simpler applications and pass them on to the building permit phase without board review. The circumstances of such review are outlined in detail in the Guidelines for Administrative Review and Approval drafted by B&P staff and reviewed by the members of the HARB, Historical Commission, and the Township's historic preservation consultant.

Applicants would not submit materials for this level of review separately from the normal HARB/Historical Commission review process. If staff is unable to determine whether an application qualifies for administrative review, it would be passed on for HARB/Historical Commission review and Board of Commissioners approval as usual. Staff would also be unable to deny such applications through this internal review process; if an application is not believed to comply with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards, it would be passed on for full by the HARB/Historical Commission and Board of Commissioners. At each HARB/Historical

Commission meeting, the Township staff member present will give a report describing each application that had been administratively approved over the past month. A similar summary can be provided to the Building & Planning Committee.

From the applicant's perspective, this streamlining of the review process would potentially lessen the amount of time and expense required to take part in the HARB/Historical Commission approval process. Typically, an application to the Historical Commission could take up to 7 weeks between submission and final approval by the Board of Commissioners. Applications eligible for administrative review under the guidelines could take as little as one week to be passed on to the building permit phase. In addition, applicants would not be required to attend meetings, which could be lengthy and require the attendance of architects and other paid consultants.

#### **V. Impact On Township Finances:**

The implementation of this review process would not significantly increase staff review time. It may reduce the amount of billable time of the Township's historic preservation consultant to review eligible applications and attend meetings where they would be discussed.

#### **VI. Staff Recommendation:**

If the Building & Planning Committee supports the concept of a staff review and approval process, staff will work with the Solicitor to prepare an ordinance for the Board of Commissioners to consider. Staff recommends that the Township proceed to draft an ordinance authorizing this administrative review & approval process.