

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Q. Why is a Historic Commission important?

A. Pennington has many great attributes, which is why we all love to live here, and one of them is the unique character and visual identity of the town center and main crossroads - Main Street and Delaware Ave. The Historic District that encompasses these areas includes over 120 buildings showcasing historic architectural styles from the late 18th through the mid 20th century.

These structures are critical elements of the look and feel of historic Pennington. The purpose of the Pennington Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) is to preserve these structures and the unique character of the Pennington Crossroads Historic District to maintain that look and feel and to ensure that improvements and additions are consistent with the historical nature of these buildings. Without a Historic Preservation Commission, these buildings could be demolished or altered in appearance, changing the town forever. Additionally, the Commission serves as a resource to homeowners for their maintenance and restoration projects.

The Historic Preservation Commission was established by an Ordinance of the Borough of Pennington in 2011.

Q. How do the Ordinance and the HPC affect me?

A. The HPC helps to preserve the historic and charming look and feel of the Crossroads District – this is important to maintain the value of our homes in such a historic town as Pennington.

If you live or own a property in the Historic District (see map and address listing on this website), and are making any improvements to the exterior of your home or other structures, you may need to obtain a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) from the Commission before proceeding with any construction. See additional information below.

Q. When do I need to make an application to the Historic Preservation Commission?

A. In general, any work that affects or changes the appearance of the front or sides of the house visible from the street requires a review by the Historic Preservation Commission. More specifically, the homeowner may need to file an application for a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) from the Commission. If the work requires a Building Permit, the Borough will generally coordinate a review of the work in question by the Historic Preservation Commission and advise if you need to make an application. **However, there is certain work that does not require a Building Permit, but does require an application to the Historic Preservation Commission.**

If you are planning any of the following work that will be visible from the street, you should check with the Historic Preservation Commission to determine the need for an application:

- Demolition (demolition is discouraged and generally not approved),
- Any new construction, even replacement in kind, of the house structure, porches, siding or trim.
- Changes to doors or windows,
- Changes to chimneys
- Changes to gutters or downspouts

The application form can be found on this website.

Q. What type of work does not require an application to the Commission?

A. The following work items do not require an application for a review:

- Painting, staining, and choice of colors
- Interior renovations
- Work not visible from any street
- Sidewalk replacement or landscaping, sitework or fencing
- Roofing, mechanical units or solar panels

Q. Will I need to hire an Architect or Engineer for the application to the Commission?

A. No. The application is quite simple, and while you may need an Architect or Engineer to design and implement the changes you are making, one is not required as part of the application process.

Q. What if I am unsure if I need to make an application?

A. Contact the Borough Land Use Coordinator at Borough Hall, explain the work you are planning and he/she will review whether an application is required. If there is a question, the Land Use Coordinator will put you in contact with a member of the Historic Preservation Commission for more information.

Q. What do I need to do for an application?

A. When you determine that a Historic Preservation Commission Application is required, print out the application (on this website) and fill in the form completely, noting lot and block numbers, type of application and type of proposed work. Most applications will be for a Certificate of Appropriateness, but where the work is limited in nature – for instance, replacing windows or siding only – a Minor Work Application may be appropriate. Attach a comprehensive description of the proposed work, accompanied by photographs, architectural drawings, catalog cuts and other information necessary to give the Commissioners a full understanding of the work proposed. Deliver this package to the Borough Land Use Coordinator.

NOTE: Work shall not proceed until a Certificate of Appropriateness, or other release has been issued by the Historic Preservation Commission.

Q. How long does the application process for a COA take?

A. In general, the Commission meets monthly. If the application and accompanying information are complete and submitted in advance, approval is often granted at that first meeting. Complicated situations or requests for demolition or major alterations may take longer.

Minor work applications for certain limited scopes of work do not require a meeting and can be approved with a simple site meeting with the Commission Chairman or designated representative.

Q. Does being in a Historic District impact my property value or affect the sale?

A. Being in the Historic District does not impact the assessment or property taxes of a property. By helping to preserve the historic integrity of the crossroads area, and by causing renovations to be done in an appropriate and historically sensitive manner, the market value of your home is preserved. When selling your home, there is no requirement for any review by the Commission, but we encourage you to be sure the new Owners understand their house is in a Historic District.

Q. I want to restore my home and be as historically accurate as feasible – can you help with that?

A. Yes. The Preservation Commission includes local residents with extensive knowledge of local architectural history – who will be glad to assist. We encourage anyone contemplating a restoration project to reach out to the Commission directly or through the Borough's Land Use Coordinator. Additionally, a great resource to consult is the US Secretary of the Interior Guidelines for Rehabilitation – <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/taxincentives/secretarys-standards-rehabilitation.htm>. This document is the key reference for the Historic Preservation Commission's review of Projects.

Q. What happens if I don't comply with the COA or do work without making an application?

A. The requirements for applications are stipulated by Borough Ordinance and failure to comply could result in a Building Department violation.

Q. Can I obtain historic information on my home?

A. The Hopewell Valley Historical Society has researched many homes in the Hopewell Valley, including Pennington, and a homeowner may check with them to see if there is information available on their particular home.

<https://www.hopewellvalleyhistory.org/>