

Fitchburg Historical Commission

Monument Park Local Historic District

Design Guidelines

Adopted 4.28.2022

These guidelines supersede all previous versions.

For further information or assistance, contact the Fitchburg Historical Commission through its website at <http://www.ci.fitchburg.ma.us/327/Historical-Commission>

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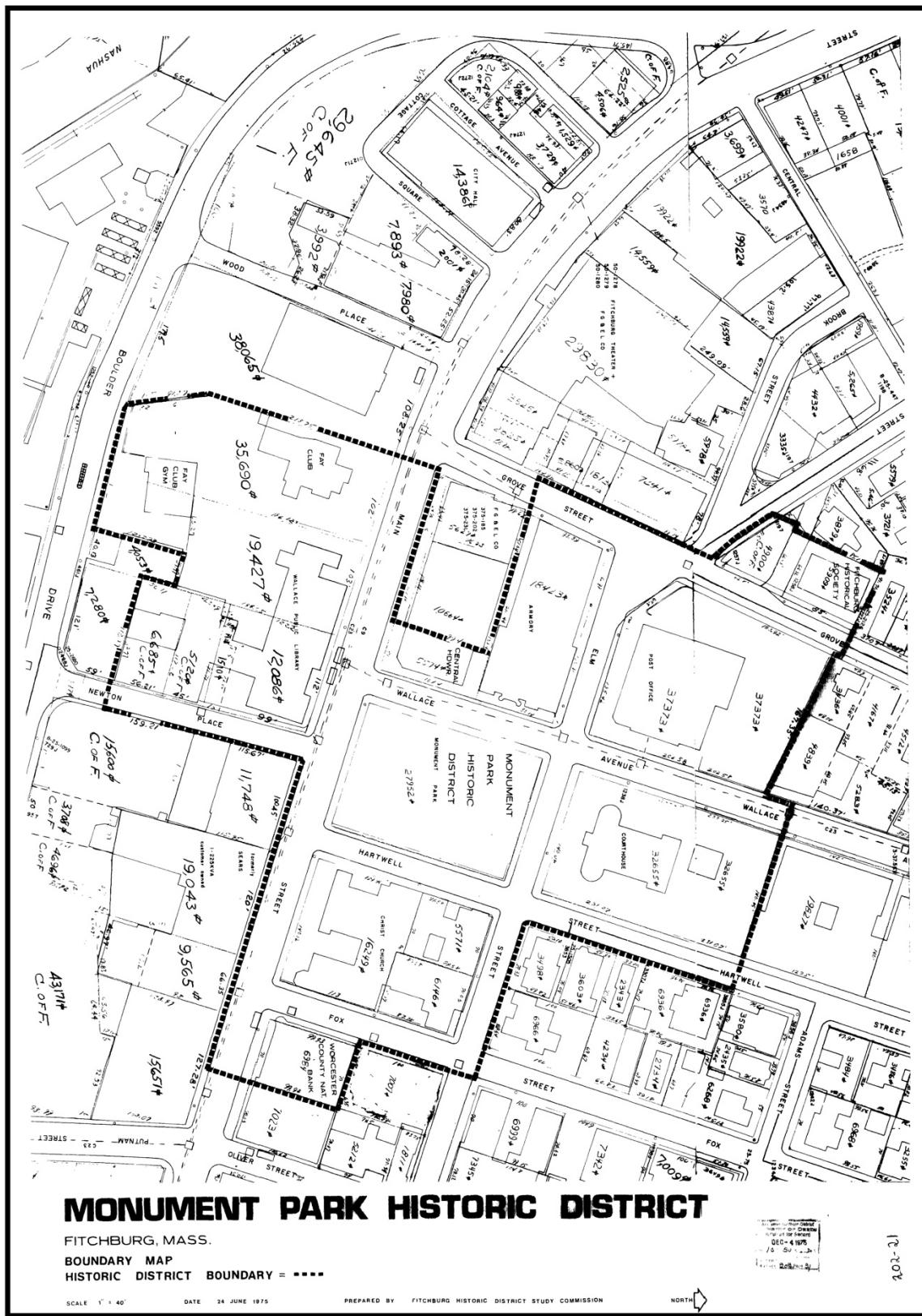
INTRODUCTION

City Council has created the Monument Park Historic District. The Fitchburg Historical Commission (the "Commission") administers the District pursuant to the Commonwealth's Historic Districts Act (MGL Chapter 40C) and the City's Historical Commission and Historic Districts Ordinance (Chapter 3 Article XXX of the General Ordinances of the City of Fitchburg).

The Commission is available to work with applicants to ensure that they submit complete applications, to answer questions regarding the policies, procedures, and design guidelines under which the Commission operates, and to serve as a resource for preservation issues.

These specific Design Guidelines are, as their name implies, guidelines intended to encourage appropriate design by applicants and foster predictability in Commission actions. While the Commission has the authority, in its exercise of discretion, to permit applicants to depart from the Guidelines, applicants are encouraged to follow them to the greatest extent possible and should not expect that the Commission will permit applicants to depart from them in most circumstances. Further, it should be understood that certain properties, and the specific features of certain properties, may have greater than usual architectural or historic significance.

MONUMENT PARK LOCAL HISTORIC DISTRICT MAP



DESIGN REVIEW PROCESS

When reviewing individual applications, the Commission will be guided by the context of the surrounding neighborhood and the design principles taken from the *Secretary of the Interior's current Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties* and, in general, the following:

1. A property will be used as it was historically or be given a new use that maximizes the retention of distinctive materials, features, spaces and spatial relationships. Where a treatment and use have not been identified, a property will be protected and, if necessary, stabilized until additional work may be undertaken.
2. The historic character of a property will be retained and preserved. The replacement of intact or repairable historic materials or alteration of features, spaces and spatial relationships that characterize a property will be avoided.
3. Each property will be recognized as a physical record of its time, place and use. Work needed to stabilize, consolidate, and conserve existing historic materials and features will be physically and visually compatible, identifiable upon close inspection and properly documented for future research.
4. Changes to a property that have acquired historic significance in their own right will be retained and preserved.
5. Distinctive materials, features, finishes and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a property will be preserved.
6. The existing condition of historic features will be evaluated to determine the appropriate level of intervention needed. Where the severity of deterioration requires repair or limited replacement of a distinctive feature, the new material will match the old in composition, design, color, and texture.
7. Chemical or physical treatments, if appropriate, will be undertaken using the gentlest means possible. Treatments that cause damage to historic materials will not be used.
8. Archeological resources will be protected and preserved in place. If such resources must be disturbed, mitigation measures will be undertaken.

PRINCIPLES

All changes to a property, including changes to the exterior of a building and hardscaping that are visible from a public way, park or body of water must be reviewed and approved by the Commission. Such changes include, but are not limited to, repairs, replacements and alterations to windows, doors, roofs, building materials, new construction, additions, fences, walls, and changes in grade. For the purposes of determining visibility, existing and proposed wooden fences and vegetation are deemed not to block sight lines from a public way. If there is a question regarding visibility, the final determination will be made by the Chair of the Commission or the Chair's designee.

Ordinary in-kind (exact duplicate) repairs and replacement are not subject to design review, although an application, Commission or Staff approval, and a Certificate of Non-Applicability is required before a building permit is issued or work is commenced.

The Commission does not review paint colors. However, the appropriateness of the application of paint and stains to previously non-painted surfaces such as masonry, shingles, or siding is subject to review.

Change in visible sloped roof material and color is subject to review.

While landscaping is generally not subject to design review by the Commission, the following are subject to review and approval by the Commission:

- (i) alterations to on-grade areas intended for parking more than four motor vehicles,

- (ii) changes to grade,
- (iii) outside HVAC equipment, condensers, and PVC venting pipes should be located where not seen from a public way, if possible and screened,
- (iv) and fences and all landscape structures should be located in the rear or minimally visible from a public way.

THE DESIGN REVIEW PROCESS

Local historic districts have these purposes:

1. *To preserve and protect the distinctive characteristics of buildings and places significant to the history of the Commonwealth and its cities and towns;*
2. *To assure that new construction is compatible with existing buildings and their historic relationship to other buildings in their vicinity.*

The design review process begins when an application submitted to the Historical Commission for a *Certificate of Appropriateness*, a *Certificate of Non-Applicability*, or a *Certificate of Hardship*, accompanied by such plans, elevations, and specifications, as may be relevant to the request. At this stage, the applicant will meet informally with staff of the Community Development and Planning Department and/or the Commission to discuss the proposed project and go over the information provided. It is advisable to provide as much information, in as much detail, and as possible, since an application lacking specificity and clarity may encounter delays in the review process. No building permit for construction, alteration, or demolition of an exterior architectural feature or building within this historic district can be issued without one of the following certificates:

Certificate of Non-Applicability. If the Commission determines that the proposed work (i) is not visible from a "public way" (including public paths, or parks, or (ii) is an in-kind repair or replacement of existing conditions, then the Chair will issue a Certificate of Non-Applicability, and the applicant may apply for a building permit without a public hearing by the Commission.

Certificate of Appropriateness following a "Ten Day Letter". For proposed changes that staff believe are minor or are minimally visible from a public way, abutters and commissioners will be notified of the work that is proposed and that staff recommends approval be granted without a hearing. If no objection is made within a ten-day period from the date of mailing, a Certificate of Appropriateness will be granted without a hearing. If there is an objection, a public hearing will be held.

Certificate of Appropriateness following Commission design review. If Staff determines that the proposed work is not entitled to a Certificate of Non-Applicability and is not a minor change or minimally visible from a public way, the work must be reviewed by the Commission at a public hearing. Designs that the Commission determines are appropriate to the property and local historic district are issued a Certificate of Appropriateness. If the design as presented might be acceptable with further revisions, the Commission may continue the hearing, with the applicant's concurrence, and establish a sub-committee to work with the applicant and architect to arrive at a design consistent with these Design Guidelines prior to the next public hearing. Modified designs which the Commission determines meet the Guidelines are then issued a Certificate of Appropriateness.

Certificate of Hardship. In certain rare cases, the Commission may, in its sole discretion, issue a Certificate of Hardship if failure to approve an application would involve a substantial hardship, financial or otherwise, to the applicant, and if the proposed work will not result in a significant detriment to the local historic district.

CONSTRUCTION

These Guidelines are intended to encourage appropriate design by applicants and foster predictability in Commission actions. While the Commission can, in the exercise of its discretion, permit applicants to depart from the Guidelines, applicants are encouraged to follow them to the greatest extent possible and should not expect that the Commission will permit exceptions in most circumstances. The Commission does not anticipate departing from certain of the Guidelines, such as that regarding artificial siding, under any circumstances. Further, it should be understood that certain properties, and the specific features of certain properties, may be treated as having greater than usual architectural or historic significance.

GENERAL GUIDELINES

Although the points listed in these General Guidelines are covered in greater detail in the Specific Design Guidelines that begin on the following page, these nine general guidelines are listed here to highlight their importance:

- Ornamental and decorative detailing should not be removed.
- Deteriorated ornamental, decorative and characteristic architectural features should be repaired, rather than replaced.
- No artificial siding may be installed
- Wood and metal casement windows should be retained.
- There should be no new openings on principal façades, except to restore original or preexisting openings.
- Missing architectural features should be documented as authentic by photographic, physical, or historical evidence before they are reproduced.
- Traditional building materials should be used for existing buildings.

WALLS AND TRIM

Traditional building materials should be used for existing buildings.

- Trim and detailing should not be removed.
- Replacement wood siding or shingles should replicate the materials, dimensions, detailing and patterns of the original.
- Artificial siding, including, but not limited to, vinyl, aluminum, asphalt, and artificial brick and stone, may not be used.

WINDOWS

- Existing windows should be repaired, not replaced. The Commission has available names of window rehabilitation specialists.
- If an applicant believes that an existing window cannot be repaired, the applicant's proposal for replacing any window[s] will be reviewed on a window-by-window basis.
- If a replacement window is proposed, the material and design of the existing window, including the casing, size, number of panes and type of window (e.g. single pane, true divided light),

should not be changed, unless the window is not a character-defining feature of a façade, in which case minor changes in the proposed replacement window may be approved by the Commission.

- If a replacement window is proposed, it should not have muntin bars greater than the width of the muntin's in the original window and should not have jamb liners contrasting in color to the windows.
- If a window in new construction has insulating glass and if the division of the lites of glass by muntins is deemed appropriate by the Commission, it should have either "true divided lites with muntins" no wider than those found on existing windows or (i) permanently applied muntins and (ii) dark colored internal spacer bars. Under no circumstances will replacement wood windows be approved with either flat muntin grids applied to the inside or outside panes or removable muntin grids.
- New and replacement windows should not be clad in non-historic materials. Vinyl or vinyl-clad and metal-framed sash, and replacement windows incorporating external storm panels that are integrated into the sash, should not be used.
- Tinted "solar" glass should not be used.
- The Commission encourages the repair/reconstruction of steel casement windows. If casement windows cannot be repaired or reconstructed, the Commission will consider the replacement of steel casement windows with aluminum or fiberglass casement windows designed to replicate as closely as possible the appearance of the original steel windows.
- If steel casement windows cannot be repaired or reconstructed in kind, the Commission will consider the replacement of steel casement windows with insulated glass on a case-by-case basis. The dimensions and width of the muntins should match the original windows.
- Stained glass or decorative windows should be retained.
- Storm windows are not reviewed by the Commission, provided that the installation of the storm windows does not alter the existing windows or frames and provided further that they are not external storm panels that are integrated into the sash. Such storm panels are not storm windows.

Why the Commission encourages retention of original windows.

The windows of your building are an important part of its original fabric. In fact, along with any masonry or slate, window glass is often the only untouched original surface normally seen in most buildings (most wood surfaces are routinely painted, while floors are typically sanded down to look like new). The replacement of existing windows and storm windows with double-glazed windows, whether as an alternative to maintenance and repair or because of claims of greater efficiency, is strongly discouraged. There are several reasons for this.

Historic windows assembled with old growth wood are more durable than most modern windows manufactured with commonly available new growth wood. Properly maintained, historic windows will last indefinitely.

The best modern "organic seal" double glazing has a guaranteed life of only 20 years and will inevitably fail (cloud up).

One sheet of glass in a sash, even with external applied "muntins", reflects light in a different manner than the multiple panes, set in putty, found in a typical old sash. This remains apparent even when the old sash is behind a storm window.

Similarly, the original glass found in most old sash is at least somewhat irregular which also contributes to a liveliness of the reflections from old windows.

Sheets of insulating glass bow inward during periods of higher atmospheric pressure and outward during lower pressure, producing a "fun house mirror" effect in their reflections

Replacement windows are factory made to standard designs and will never exactly match existing sash in all dimensions.

Most of the thermal benefits of insulated glass windows derive from the fact that there are two layers of glass with dead air between them and that the window and its installation in the wall is well sealed against air infiltration. A properly weatherstripped, well caulked, single glazed window (new or rebuilt), with good quality storm windows has the same energy efficiency of a standard insulating glass window.

Generally, the repair and rehabilitation of existing sash, including the installation of weather stripping and good quality storms, can be accomplished at no greater cost than that of replacement insulating glass windows and, if properly maintained, will last much longer.

MASONRY AND STUCCO

- Unpainted masonry should not be painted.
- Sealants should not be applied to masonry unless a sealant is necessary to prevent further deterioration. In all cases, the use of sealants is subject to review by the Commission.
- Repointing masonry (sometimes referred to as tuck pointing) should be appropriate in terms of the type, color, cement, and aggregate of the mortar to be used and the width and profile of the joint. Joints should not be widened when cutting out old mortar. New mortar should be kept off the face of masonry.
- Sandblasting should not be used to clean brick.
- Variegated bricks should not be used, unless to match an existing condition.
- Stucco should be repaired with a mixture that matches the original as closely as possible. Non-traditional resin-based stuccos should not be used.

CHIMNEYS, GUTTERS, AND ROOFS

- Slate and terra cotta tile roofing should be repaired or replicated in kind, including color, decorative patterns, and style. Synthetic slate or tile should not be used.
- Rubber membrane roofing should not be used in visible locations.
- The height and original pattern of decorative brickwork in chimneys should be maintained.
- All decorative metal, such as iron cresting, finials and weathervanes should be retained.
- Chimney pots are historic features and should be retained whenever possible.
- Wood gutters, when an integral part of an ornamental cornice or roof edge design, should be repaired and maintained. Copper gutters which duplicate the original molding profile of wood gutters may be considered as a replacement for wood gutters. Aluminum gutters should not be used except as like kind replacement.
- Existing copper gutters should be replaced in kind, including matching the original molding profiles.
- Roof top HVAC and other mechanical elements, including soundproofing elements, should be placed out of view.
- Roof decks and enclosures should be unobtrusive.
- Colors, patterns, and textures of roofs are subject to review. Typically, they are gray, slate, brown or black.
- Chimney fans should be concealed. Chimney caps and attic/roof vents shall be reviewed.

FENCES AND WALLS

- Masonry walls and iron fences should be maintained.
- New fences and walls should not prevent or restrict views of buildings from a public way. Tall solid fences and walls should not be constructed as noise or headlight barriers. The design of fences should be appropriate in scale and architectural style to the building, its site, and the surrounding properties.
- New front fences and the front yard portion of side fences should be open in character so as not to create visual barriers.
- New fences and walls running along property lines with street frontage, as well as any section of a side yard lot line fence or wall that is forward of the main body of (i) the applicant's outbuilding or (ii) adjacent outbuildings, should not exceed 42 inches in height. Other new fences and walls should not exceed 72 inches in height. Fences running from the side of a building to a side yard fence should not be more than 42 inches high if a higher fence would obscure significant features on the side of the building or site.
- If a new fence or wall is on or near the top of a retaining wall and exceeds 42", then the overall height of the new fence or wall and retaining wall should be measured from the grade on the lower side of the retaining wall, and the visual impact of the combined height from the lower side should be taken into account.
- Metal fences should be historically appropriate in design, materials, construction and assembly to the original period of the building.
- Brick walls should use historically appropriate brick. Bricks and mortar joints should be compatible in color, aggregate and joint profile with the building.
- Stone walls may be dry laid or set in a mortar that is historically appropriate in color, aggregate and joint profile.

NEW CONSTRUCTION

- The Commission will review all proposed alterations of, and additions to, existing structures and all new construction.
- Alterations and additions should be compatible with the character of the building and earlier additions in terms of size, scale, massing, material, location, and detail. The original portion of the building and earlier additions should continue to be recognizable apart from the addition by means of massing, articulation of setbacks, trim and ornamental detail. Additions should be designed so that the primary elevations of the original building remain clearly delineated.
- New construction should respect the existing historic streetscape. The historic relationship of buildings to the street, including setbacks and open spaces, should be maintained.
- The Commission will consider the appropriateness of the size and shape of the building or structure in relation to both the land area upon which the building or structure is situated and to buildings and structures in the vicinity. The Commission may impose dimensional and setback requirements more restrictive than those required by the Zoning By-law.
- The Commission will consider discrete additions and new buildings incorporating non-historical design vocabularies and materials, as long as they are otherwise consistent with the intent of these Guidelines.

DEMOLITION

Structures, including additions and outbuildings, should not be demolished.

AMENDMENTS AND SEVERABILITY

The Commission reserves the right to further amend these Guidelines at any time. If any section of these Guidelines is deemed to be invalid, illegal, or unconstitutional, then that section shall be severed from the text, and the remaining sections of these Guidelines shall continue to be in full force and effect.

FAQ

1. *What is the difference between a Local Historic District and being listed in the National Register of Historic Places?*

A Local Historic District is established and maintained by a local community to preserve the unique characteristics of structures and their surroundings, operating under state enabling legislation, Chapter 40C. It provides for review of exterior changes by the local commission. The National Register of Historic Places lists individual buildings, structures and districts “important” in American history, culture, architecture, or archeology. It is a federal designation and is administered by the Secretary of the Interior through the Massachusetts Historical Commission. National Register listing provides limited protection from adverse effects by federally funded, licensed, or assisted programs.

2. *How long will the approval process take?*

The approval process can take as little as two weeks and up to six weeks or more, depending on the timing of the application. Most applications require a 14-day advance notice to abutters before the monthly public hearing.

3. *What is required to complete the application?*

Application must include complete supporting materials such as photographs, drawings in plan and in elevation, a site map, sample materials and/or literature about any proprietary products proposed for use. The office staff is ready to assist in the application process.

4. *What are the fees?*

The minimum fee for a Certificate of Appropriateness is \$50.00. There is a sliding scale of \$2.00 per \$1,000 based upon the estimated cost for the work. The fee for a Certificate of No-Applicability is \$20.00. The fee for a retroactive application is three times the cost, with a minimum of \$150.00 for a Certificate of Applicability and \$60.00 for a Certificate of Non-Applicability. The check should be made out to the City of Fitchburg.

5. *What if my application/proposal is denied?*

The appeal procedure is through the Superior Court process.

**CITY OF FITCHBURG**

submit to

Department of Community
Development and Planning
718 Maini Street
Fitchburg, MA 01420

HISTORICAL COMMISSION
Application For Certificate
in the
Monument Park
Local Historic District*(see next page for Instructions)*

For Official Use Only	
Application No.	
Received	
App. Accepted	
Hearing Date	
Fee	
App. Returned	

TYPE OF CERTIFICATE REQUESTED:	<input type="checkbox"/> APPROPRIATNESS	<input type="checkbox"/> NON-APPLICABILITY	<input type="checkbox"/> HARDSHIP
PROPERTY LOCATION:			
OWNER:	Phone:		
OWNER'S ADDRESS:			
APPLICANT (IF NOT OWNER):	Phone:		
APPLICANT'S ADDRESS:			
APPLICANT'S EMAIL:			

Zoning: A proposed increase in square footage, height, or enclosed space, or a change in use or occupancy may require a zoning variance. If a zoning variance is required, the Historical Commission may not hold a public hearing prior to a hearing before the Zoning Board of Appeals.

Building Permit: A building permit is required after a Certificate from the Historical Commission is issued.

<input type="checkbox"/> Addition	<input type="checkbox"/> New Windows	<input type="checkbox"/> New Skylights	<input type="checkbox"/> Roofing
<input type="checkbox"/> Grade Change	<input type="checkbox"/> Repair Windows	<input type="checkbox"/> Foundation Repair	<input type="checkbox"/> Chimney
<input type="checkbox"/> Fence/Wall	<input type="checkbox"/> Ext. Wall Repair	<input type="checkbox"/> Doors	<input type="checkbox"/> Other
Brief description of work to be performed:			

DOCUMENTATION ATTACHED:				
<input type="checkbox"/> Photos	<input type="checkbox"/> Materials samples	<input type="checkbox"/> Manufacturer's literature	<input type="checkbox"/> Drawings	<input type="checkbox"/> Site or Plot Plan
Other:				
Signature(s)	Date:			
Owner:	Applicant:			

APPLICATION INSTRUCTIONS

Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 40C, the City of Fitchburg Ordinances, and the Historical Commission's Rules and Regulations. In the Monument Park Local Historic District, the Historical Commission approves all changes to buildings and structures, including exterior construction, alterations, repairs, or demolition, before the Building Commissioner can issue a building permit. The Commission's review applies to exterior architectural design and features that are visible from a public street, way, or park. Visibility is determined by the Commission. Please refer to the Historical Commission's Monument Park Local Historic District Design Guidelines prior to hiring a contractor or beginning any design work. They are available online on the Historical Commission website.

A preliminary site visit or meeting with the Historical Commission staff is recommended before submitting an application, to provide familiarity with your property and give advice on appropriate approaches. Applications must be submitted on time and include fees as well as complete supporting materials such as photographs, drawings in plan and in elevation, sample materials and manufacturer's literature for new materials. Application deadlines for Commission are two and one-half week prior to the Commission's meeting. Please be advised that incomplete applications will delay projects while additional material is obtained and additional reviews may be required.

After receiving a completed application, Commission staff will review it and determine which of two procedures will be followed: a public hearing, or a "10-day" letter. Most applications will require a public hearing with 14 days advance notice to abutters before a Certificate can be issued. The hearing is a forum for the Commission to hear cases, ask clarifying questions, and for the general public to comment on your project. In some cases where the proposed alteration is of minor significance or minimally visible, a Certificate may be issued following ten days' written notice to abutters. If abutters or the public raise any objection, the application will be reviewed at the next scheduled meeting.

There are three types of Certificates that the Commission issues:

- 1.) **Certificate of Appropriateness:** Issued when the proposed alterations are not incompatible with the existing historic building and the historic and architectural characteristics of the district and its surroundings.
- 2.) **Certificate of Non-Applicability:** Issued for a) work that is not under the jurisdiction of the Commission; b) work not visible from a public way; and c) ordinary repair or replacement of exterior architectural features that do not involve a change in design, material, or outward appearance.
- 3.) **Certificate of Hardship:** Issued when special conditions will create a substantial hardship, financial or otherwise, to the applicant if not approved, as long as the conditions are specific to the application and there would be no substantial detriment to the Historic District.

Application Fees

Certificate of Appropriateness: There is a sliding scale of \$2. 00 per \$1,000 of the estimated cost for the work, with a minimum fee of \$50.00.

Certificate of Non-Applicability: \$20.00.

Retroactive Certificate: The amount is three times the usual fee, with a minimum of \$150.00 for a Certificate of Applicability and \$60.00 for a Certificate of Non-Applicability