

LOCAL HISTORIC DISTRICTS ACT (EXCERPT)
Act 169 of 1970

399.205 Permit required; completed application; certificate of appropriateness or notice to proceed; issuance; permit fee; appeal to review board and circuit court; plan review standards, guidelines, and considerations; scope of review; preservation plan; approval; conditions; public meeting; availability of writings to public; rules of procedure; approval of minor work; finding of demolition by neglect; restoration or modification of work done without permit.

Sec. 5. (1) A permit shall be obtained before any work affecting the exterior appearance of a resource is performed within a historic district or, if required under subsection (4), work affecting the interior arrangements of a resource is performed within a historic district. The person, individual, partnership, firm, corporation, organization, institution, or agency of government proposing to do that work shall file an application for a permit with the inspector of buildings, the commission, or other duly delegated authority. If the inspector of buildings or other authority receives the application, the application shall be immediately referred together with all required supporting materials that make the application complete to the commission. A permit shall not be issued and proposed work shall not proceed until the commission has acted on the application by issuing a certificate of appropriateness or a notice to proceed as prescribed in this act. A commission shall not issue a certificate of appropriateness unless the applicant certifies in the application that the property where work will be undertaken has, or will have before the proposed project completion date, a fire alarm system or a smoke alarm complying with the requirements of the Stille-DeRossett-Hale single state construction code act, 1972 PA 230, MCL 125.1501 to 125.1531. A local unit may charge a reasonable fee to process a permit application.

(2) An applicant aggrieved by a decision of a commission concerning a permit application may file an appeal with the state historic preservation review board within the department. The appeal shall be filed within 60 days after the decision is furnished to the applicant. The appellant may submit all or part of the appellant's evidence and arguments in written form. The review board shall consider an appeal at its first regularly scheduled meeting after receiving the appeal, but may not charge a fee for considering an appeal. The review board may affirm, modify, or set aside a commission's decision and may order a commission to issue a certificate of appropriateness or a notice to proceed. A permit applicant aggrieved by the decision of the state historic preservation review board may appeal the decision to the circuit court having jurisdiction over the historic district commission whose decision was appealed to the state historic preservation review board.

(3) In reviewing plans, the commission shall follow the United States secretary of the interior's standards for rehabilitation and guidelines for rehabilitating historic buildings, as set forth in 36 C.F.R. part 67. Design review standards and guidelines that address special design characteristics of historic districts administered by the commission may be followed if they are equivalent in guidance to the secretary of interior's standards and guidelines and are established or approved by the department. The commission shall also consider all of the following:

(a) The historic or architectural value and significance of the resource and its relationship to the historic value of the surrounding area.

(b) The relationship of any architectural features of the resource to the rest of the resource and to the surrounding area.

(c) The general compatibility of the design, arrangement, texture, and materials proposed to be used.

(d) Other factors, such as aesthetic value, that the commission finds relevant.

(e) Whether the applicant has certified in the application that the property where work will be undertaken has, or will have before the proposed project completion date, a fire alarm system or a smoke alarm complying with the requirements of the Stille-DeRossett-Hale single state construction code act, 1972 PA 230, MCL 125.1501 to 125.1531.

(4) The commission shall review and act upon only exterior features of a resource and, except for noting compliance with the requirement to install a fire alarm system or a smoke alarm, shall not review and act upon interior arrangements unless specifically authorized to do so by the local legislative body or unless interior work will cause visible change to the exterior of the resource. The commission shall not disapprove an application due to considerations not prescribed in subsection (3).

(5) If an application is for work that will adversely affect the exterior of a resource the commission considers valuable to the local unit, state, or nation, and the commission determines that the alteration or loss of that resource will adversely affect the public purpose of the local unit, state, or nation, the commission shall

attempt to establish with the owner of the resource an economically feasible plan for preservation of the resource.

(6) Work within a historic district shall be permitted through the issuance of a notice to proceed by the commission if any of the following conditions prevail and if the proposed work can be demonstrated by a finding of the commission to be necessary to substantially improve or correct any of the following conditions:

(a) The resource constitutes a hazard to the safety of the public or to the structure's occupants.

(b) The resource is a deterrent to a major improvement program that will be of substantial benefit to the community and the applicant proposing the work has obtained all necessary planning and zoning approvals, financing, and environmental clearances.

(c) Retaining the resource will cause undue financial hardship to the owner when a governmental action, an act of God, or other events beyond the owner's control created the hardship, and all feasible alternatives to eliminate the financial hardship, which may include offering the resource for sale at its fair market value or moving the resource to a vacant site within the historic district, have been attempted and exhausted by the owner.

(d) Retaining the resource is not in the interest of the majority of the community.

(7) The business that the commission may perform shall be conducted at a public meeting of the commission held in compliance with the open meetings act, 1976 PA 267, MCL 15.261 to 15.275. Public notice of the time, date, and place of the meeting shall be given in the manner required by the open meetings act, 1976 PA 267, MCL 15.261 to 15.275. A meeting agenda shall be part of the notice and shall include a listing of each permit application to be reviewed or considered by the commission.

(8) The commission shall keep a record of its resolutions, proceedings, and actions. A writing prepared, owned, used, in the possession of, or retained by the commission in the performance of an official function shall be made available to the public in compliance with the freedom of information act, 1976 PA 442, MCL 15.231 to 15.246.

(9) The commission shall adopt its own rules of procedure and shall adopt design review standards and guidelines for resource treatment to carry out its duties under this act.

(10) The commission may delegate the issuance of certificates of appropriateness for specified minor classes of work to its staff, to the inspector of buildings, or to another delegated authority. The commission shall provide to the delegated authority specific written standards for issuing certificates of appropriateness under this subsection. On at least a quarterly basis, the commission shall review the certificates of appropriateness, if any, issued for work by its staff, the inspector, or another authority to determine whether or not the delegated responsibilities should be continued.

(11) Upon a finding by a commission that a historic resource within a historic district or a proposed historic district subject to its review and approval is threatened with demolition by neglect, the commission may do either of the following:

(a) Require the owner of the resource to repair all conditions contributing to demolition by neglect.

(b) If the owner does not make repairs within a reasonable time, the commission or its agents may enter the property and make such repairs as are necessary to prevent demolition by neglect. The costs of the work shall be charged to the owner, and may be levied by the local unit as a special assessment against the property. The commission or its agents may enter the property for purposes of this section upon obtaining an order from the circuit court.

(12) When work has been done upon a resource without a permit, and the commission finds that the work does not qualify for a certificate of appropriateness, the commission may require an owner to restore the resource to the condition the resource was in before the inappropriate work or to modify the work so that it qualifies for a certificate of appropriateness. If the owner does not comply with the restoration or modification requirement within a reasonable time, the commission may seek an order from the circuit court to require the owner to restore the resource to its former condition or to modify the work so that it qualifies for a certificate of appropriateness. If the owner does not comply or cannot comply with the order of the court, the commission or its agents may enter the property and conduct work necessary to restore the resource to its former condition or modify the work so that it qualifies for a certificate of appropriateness in accordance with the court's order. The costs of the work shall be charged to the owner, and may be levied by the local unit as a special assessment against the property. When acting pursuant to an order of the circuit court, a commission or its agents may enter a property for purposes of this section.

History: 1970, Act 169, Imd. Eff. Aug. 3, 1970;—Am. 1980, Act 125, Imd. Eff. May 21, 1980;—Am. 1986, Act 230, Imd. Eff. Oct. 1, 1986;—Am. 1992, Act 96, Imd. Eff. June 18, 1992;—Am. 2001, Act 67, Imd. Eff. July 24, 2001;—Am. 2004, Act 67, Imd. Eff. Apr. 20, 2004.

Compiler's note: For transfer of powers and duties of department of history, arts, and libraries or the Michigan historical center relating to the identification, certification, and preservation of historical sites to the Michigan state housing development authority, see Rendered Monday, July 7, 2025

E.R.O. No. 2009-26, compiled at MCL 399.752.

For transfer of powers and duties of the state historic preservation office relating to the identification, certification, and preservation of historical sites from the Michigan state housing development authority to the Michigan strategic fund, see E.R.O. No. 2019-3, compiled at MCL 125.1998.