



MEMORANDUM

FROM: Community Development Department

BY: Jakob Allen, City Planner

SUBJECT: **Holiday Lighting and Seasonal Ornamentations COA**

DATE: 11/13/25

RECOMMENDATION

Canton Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) to exempt temporary holiday lighting and other seasonal ornamentations from requiring a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA).

SITUATION

The City of Canton's Historic District Design Standards and Guidelines do not reference temporary holiday lighting and other seasonal ornamentations under the list of example modifications requiring a COA. This omission may lead to inconsistent decisions as to whether a COA is needed for the installation and removal of these items.

FINDINGS

Municipal codes, ordinances and historic design guidelines for municipalities throughout the country make little to no mention of temporary holiday lighting and other seasonal ornamentations in their respective historic districts. As such, these decorations may or may not need a COA.

DISCUSSION

COAs are required for material changes to the appearance of properties found within a municipality's historic district. This is done to ensure a consistent and harmonious aesthetic within these designated areas.

Material changes requiring a COA are not exhaustively listed in a city's code or historic design standards. However, examples of these alterations – and any exemptions – are often highlighted to provide additional detail. This specificity helps to reduce ambiguity and inconsistency in the administration of historic preservation programs and procedures. To this end, a COA exemption for temporary holiday lighting and other seasonal ornamentations might be considered.

If adopted, this exemption may be added onto page 2-6 of the City's Historic District Design Guidelines. The COA Approval Matrix found on this page has an existing work item – 'lighting' – that can be amended to note temporary holiday lights and seasonal ornamentations do not require approval from the HPC and are therefore exempt from obtaining a COA.

ATTACHMENTS – Holiday Lights COA Research

Acworth

Certificate of appropriateness required for:

“...material change in the appearance [or]...demolition or relocation of such historic property, or of a structure, site, object or work of art included within a historic district.” – *Sec. 66-161*

Mention of temporary holiday lighting / seasonal ornamentation (yes / no):

Holiday lighting, seasonal ornamentation, etc. are not referenced in the City’s Code of Ordinances or Historic Preservation Design Guidelines.

If yes, provide details and cite related codes / ordinances:

N / A

Canton

Certificate of appropriateness required for:

“...a material change in the appearance of a designated historic property or of a property located within a designated historic district.” – *Sec. 47-22*

Mention of temporary holiday lighting / seasonal ornamentation (yes / no):

Holiday lighting, seasonal ornamentation, etc., are not referenced in the City’s Unified Development Code or Historic District Design Guidelines.

If yes, provide details and cite related codes / ordinances:

N / A

Madison

Certificate of appropriateness required for:

“...to make a material change in the appearance of a designated historic property or of a place, district, site, building, structure, object or work of art located within a designated historic district.” – *Sec. 42-3*

Mention of temporary holiday lighting / seasonal ornamentation (yes / no):

Holiday lighting, seasonal ornamentation, etc. are not referenced in the City’s Code of Ordinances or Historic Preservation Design Criteria.

If yes, provide details and cite related codes / ordinances:

N / A

Marietta

Certificate of appropriateness required for:

“...a material change in the appearance of a designated historic property or, within a designated historic district, of a structure, site, or work of art located within said district.” – 7-8-9-020

Mention of temporary holiday lighting / seasonal ornamentation (yes / no):

Holiday lighting – e.g., string lights – are “not signs, but rather seasonal ornamentation” per the City’s Zoning Ordinance. No mention of said lights or other forms of seasonal ornamentation are found in the City’s Design Guidelines for Downtown.

If yes, provide details and cite related codes / ordinances:

“The City further finds that holiday decorations such as strings of light are not signs, but rather seasonal ornamentation not controlled by this division.” – 714.01D

Roswell

Certificate of appropriateness required for:

“...a material change in the appearance of a property, structure, site or work of art in the -HOD or a designated Historic Landmark.” – 13.7.3

Mention of temporary holiday lighting / seasonal ornamentation (yes / no):

Holiday lighting – but not other forms of seasonal ornamentation – are mentioned in the City’s Unified Development Code and are exempt from the provisions of Section 10.4.3. Holiday lighting, seasonal ornamentation, etc. are not mentioned in the City’s Unified Development Code Design Guidelines.

If yes, provide details and cite related codes / ordinances:

“For all land uses, developments and buildings that require a permit, all outdoor lighting fixtures shall meet the requirements of this UDC. All building additions of 50% or more in terms of additional dwelling units, gross floor area, or parking spaces, either with a single addition or with cumulative additions subsequent to the effective date of this Section, will invoke the requirements of this Section for the entire property, including previously installed and any new outdoor lighting. Cumulative modification or replacement of outdoor lighting constituting 60% or more of the permitted lumens for the parcel, no matter the actual amount of lighting already on a nonconforming site, will constitute a major addition for purposes of this Section.

B. Exempt Lighting. The following luminaires and lighting systems are exempt from these requirements:

1. Lighting for pools used at night;
2. Underwater lighting used for the illumination of swimming pools and fountains;
3. Temporary holiday lighting;
4. Lighting required and regulated by the Federal Aviation Administration, or other federal, state or local agency;
5. Emergency lighting used by police, fire, or medical personnel, or at their direction;
6. All outdoor light fixtures producing light directly from the combustion of fossil fuels, such as kerosene and gasoline; and
7. Security lighting controlled and activated by a motion sensor device for a duration of 10 minutes or less.” – *10.4.3*

“Minor / Administrative Certificates of Appropriateness include modifications to the following.

- A. Windows (including storm shutters);
- B. Roofs;
- C. Residential accessibility structures;
- D. Storage sheds/ playhouses;
- E. Doors (including storm shutters);
- F. Drainage;
- G. Utility meters: electric, gas, cables;
- H. Exhaust/supply fans/plumbing vents;
- I. Fences/gates/screening walls;
- J. HVAC;
- K. Exterior lighting;” – *13.7.4*