

# REVIEW PROCESSES

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## REVIEW PROCESSES

The development or rehabilitation of property is not an exact science, and it is not possible to describe a single process through which every building project will move. Use, financing, marketing, and timing are issues that must be thoroughly investigated by the owner or developer before beginning the formal review process.

The Planning Commission, the Building Department, and the Historic District Commission are three entities with three review processes, not all of which are required for every project. In addition to the basic planning, building, and historic reviews, you may request variances or appeal decisions made at reviews.

In the following section each of the review processes and schedules is explained. Sample forms are also included. The various reviews are coordinated through the Building Department. Processes, fees, and forms current as of this writing (1998) may change. Contact the Building Department for current information about review procedures.

## Where to go for assistance

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Rehabilitating your building is not something you need to face on your own. Help is available from numerous sources.

To receive copies of required forms, if you have questions about the procedures, and to verify the procedures listed here are current, call:

Northville Building Department  
215 W. Main Street  
Northville, Michigan 48167  
(248) 349-1300

For assistance when researching the original appearance of your building, contact:  
Historic District Commission through the City of Northville Building Department.

To purchase copies of *Preservation Briefs* (see Part 8, "References") and other pamphlets prepared by the Federal government that provide rehabilitation instructions in greater detail than these standards, contact:

Superintendent of Documents  
Government Printing Office  
Washington, DC 20402-9325  
(202) 783-3238

For a list of architects qualified in the restoration of historic structures, contact:

Bureau of History Michigan Department of State 717 Allegan St. Lansing, MI 48918 (517) 373-0510	American Institute of Architects 553 E. Jefferson Detroit, MI 48226 (313) 965-4100
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For information and an application to have an individual building listed on the State Register of Historic Places, contact:

Bureau of History  
(address above)

For information and an application to have an individual building listed on the National Register of Historic Places, contact:

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
P.O. Box 37127  
Washington, DC 20013-7127

For information about State of Michigan tax credits for rehabilitation, contact:

State Historic Preservation Office  
Michigan Historical Center, Michigan Department of State  
Lansing, MI  
(517) 373-1630  
SHPO web page: [www.sos.state.mi.us/history/preserve/preserve.html](http://www.sos.state.mi.us/history/preserve/preserve.html)

## HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION REVIEW

Alterations and improvements to a building's exterior, as well as new construction in the Historic District require prior review and approval by the Historic District Commission.

An item which is simple, small and/or generally limited to single family projects, or which simply involves signage is typically reviewed within a four week time period. (Note: If a submission is incomplete or otherwise not deemed appropriate for compliance within the Historic District, the HDC will provide the applicant with written comment.)

Projects within the Historic District which normally require site plan approval, such as non-residential alterations, or new construction projects, follow the normal site plan process. The project is first reviewed by the HDC. The HDC comments are then forwarded to the Planning Commission for their review and comment.

All submissions to the Historic District Commission (HDC) are made through the City of Northville Building Department. The HDC meets the third Wednesday of each month. The sample application form is included below.

**TO APPLICANTS OF THE HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION:**

Attached you will find descriptions of criteria needed to make application to the Historic District Commission.

Please note that the Commission meets the third Wednesday of each month, at 8:00 p.m. in the Council Chambers of the City Hall, 215 W. Main Street.

Applications and all pertinent information must be submitted to the Building Department at least 10 days prior to the meeting to enable us to place you on the agenda. Ten (10) copies of the elevation, folded to fit in a 10 x 13 envelope must accompany your application.

Upon approval of your project by the Historic District Commission, building permits must be obtained prior to work commencing on that project.

Thank you in advance, for your cooperation.

**NORTHVILLE HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION**

The following criteria shall be required for submission to this Commission, for review and/or approval, prior to the issuance of a permit for construction by the City of Northville Building Department.

**BUILDING EXTERIOR RENOVATION AND OR NEW CONSTRUCTION**

1. A recent photograph of the existing structure to be renovated and or demolished shall be required.
2. A site plan drawing may be required to indicate the relationship and/or the view of the proposed structure from the main thoroughfare.
3. A drawing of the proposed building front elevation, as well as pertinent side elevations, at a scale of  $1/4" = 1'-0"$ . Larger commercial structures may be drawn at a scale of  $1/8" = 1'-0"$  as required.
4. Building exterior color samples of all materials i.e.; roof, siding, brick, window trim, etc. Samples may be presented at the Historic District Commission meeting for review at that time.
5. New building mounted exterior lighting fixtures must be located on the building elevation drawings and a photo sample submitted along with the exterior building materials. Light diffusers may be required.
6. A floor plan at a scale of  $1/4" = 1'-0"$  is required for all building renovation submissions.

**BUILDING EXTERIOR SIGNAGE**

1. Commercial signage attached to a building, permanently displayed in a window front, or to be constructed as a free standing sign shall be reviewed by the Commission. A scaled drawing shall be submitted indicating the size, construction materials, color, and type face. If the sign is to be externally lighted, a drawing that clearly shows the fixture and dimensions must be included in the submission.
2. If the signage is to be attached to a building, a drawing of the building elevation shall be submitted to indicate the exact location of the proposed signage.

**BUILDING MOVING OR DEMOLITION**

1. All structures proposed to be demolished and or relocated shall be submitted to the commission for review. The submission shall include photographs of all four side elevations of the structure.

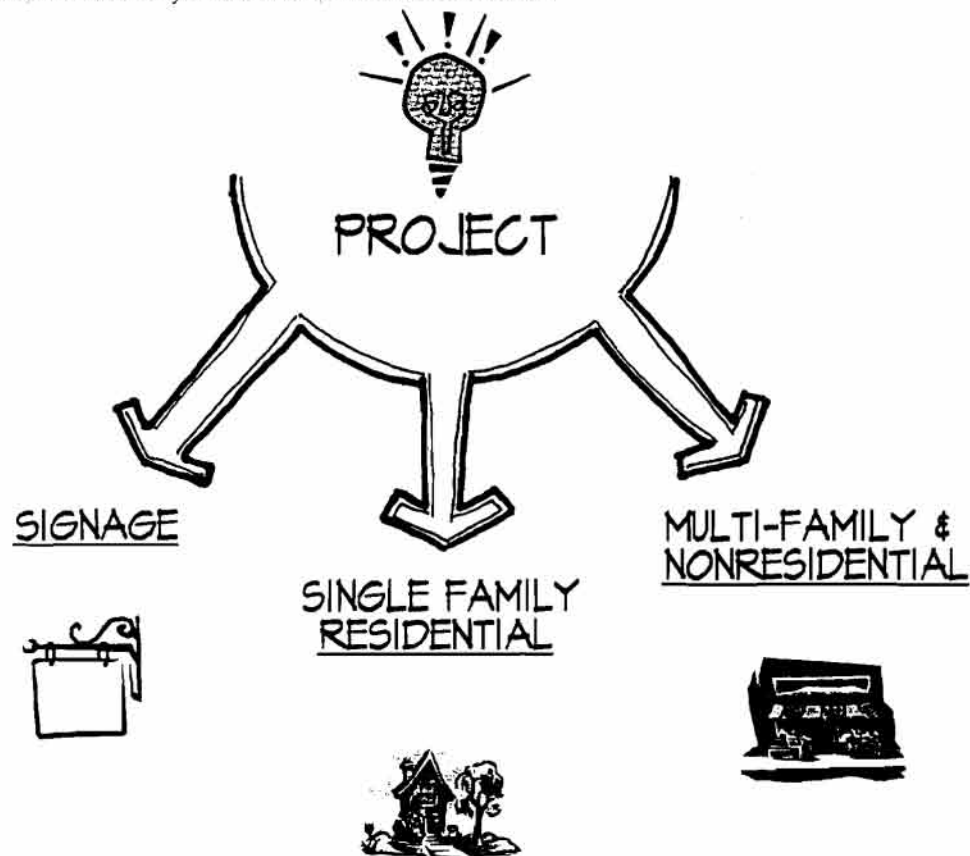
**Upon making a submission to the Northville Historic District Commission, it is required that the petitioner and or the petitioner's representative be present at the review meeting to respond to any questions by the commission.**

**PERMIT**

Upon approval by the Historic District Commission, a building permit shall be obtained from the Building Department.

## BUILDING DEPARTMENT REVIEW

The City of Northville Building Department receives and processes all applications that require review and permits. The Department enforces the building code and city zoning ordinances. The Building Department review process will vary depending on if the project is single family residential, multi-family residential, or non-residential.



\* PROJECTS IN ANY OF THE ABOVE CATEGORIES WILL ALL REQUIRE AT LEAST AN INITIAL REVIEW AT THE NORTHVILLE BUILDING DEPARTMENT AND MOST LIKELY AN APPLICATION FOR PERMIT, PLAN REVIEW AND PERMIT.

\* PROCEDURES FOR EACH OF THE ABOVE ARE CHARTED ON THE FOLLOWING PAGES.

**HINT!** THE MORE COMPLETE AND ACCURATE A PERMIT APPLICATION ———> INCREASES THE LIKELIHOOD OF A FASTER REVIEW PROCESS!!

## **Building Codes & Zoning Ordinances**

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The Applicant should have an understanding of the differences and distinctions between a building code and a zoning ordinance. While both are intended to ensure and protect the public's general health, safety, and welfare, they have different origins, purposes, enforcement, and relief measures.

The building code in Northville is the State of Michigan Building Code, which is substantially the B.O.C.A. Building Code. The City of Northville does not write or amend the building code. City officials are empowered to implement and enforce the Building Code. The Building Code governs the specifics of how a building is used and constructed.

Northville's Zoning Ordinance is determined by local officials with public input. City officials are empowered to implement, amend, and enforce the Zoning Ordinance.

A zoning ordinance generally deals with land use patterns. A zoning ordinance may also regulate how buildings are able to fit into land use patterns (i.e. building height limits, yard setbacks, etc.). A zoning ordinance may also be written to allow a community to reasonably protect a community's natural resources. A local municipality is able to use a zoning ordinance as a tool to maintain, and protect historic properties.

The method to obtain relief from a building code requirement differs from the ability to obtain relief or "variance" from a zoning ordinance. A building code requirement cannot be waived or otherwise varied. To appeal a code requirement, it must be proven to the local building official (via Construction Board of Appeals) that there is an "equivalent" measure provided or otherwise documented in the building's design.

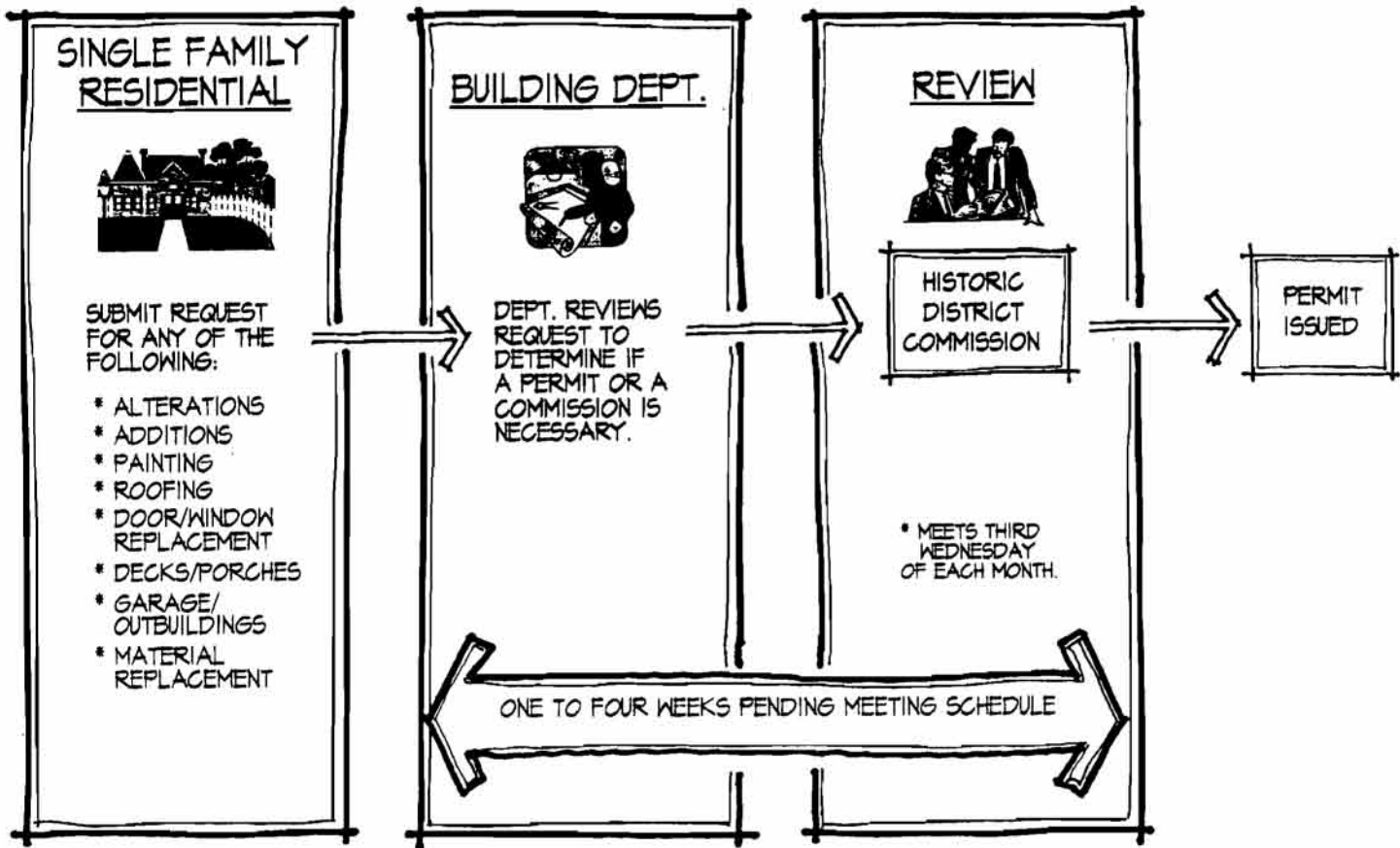
To obtain a zoning variance, one must prove to the local authorities (Northville's Board of Zoning Appeals) that to adhere to ordinance requirements would result in unique practical difficulty and/or undue hardship. Furthermore, economic considerations (i.e. one's return on investment) cannot be considered by the Appeals Board; nor is an Appeals Board empowered to grant a variance because an applicant has a "good idea" or a more rational project than the ordinance may permit.

## **Building Permit**

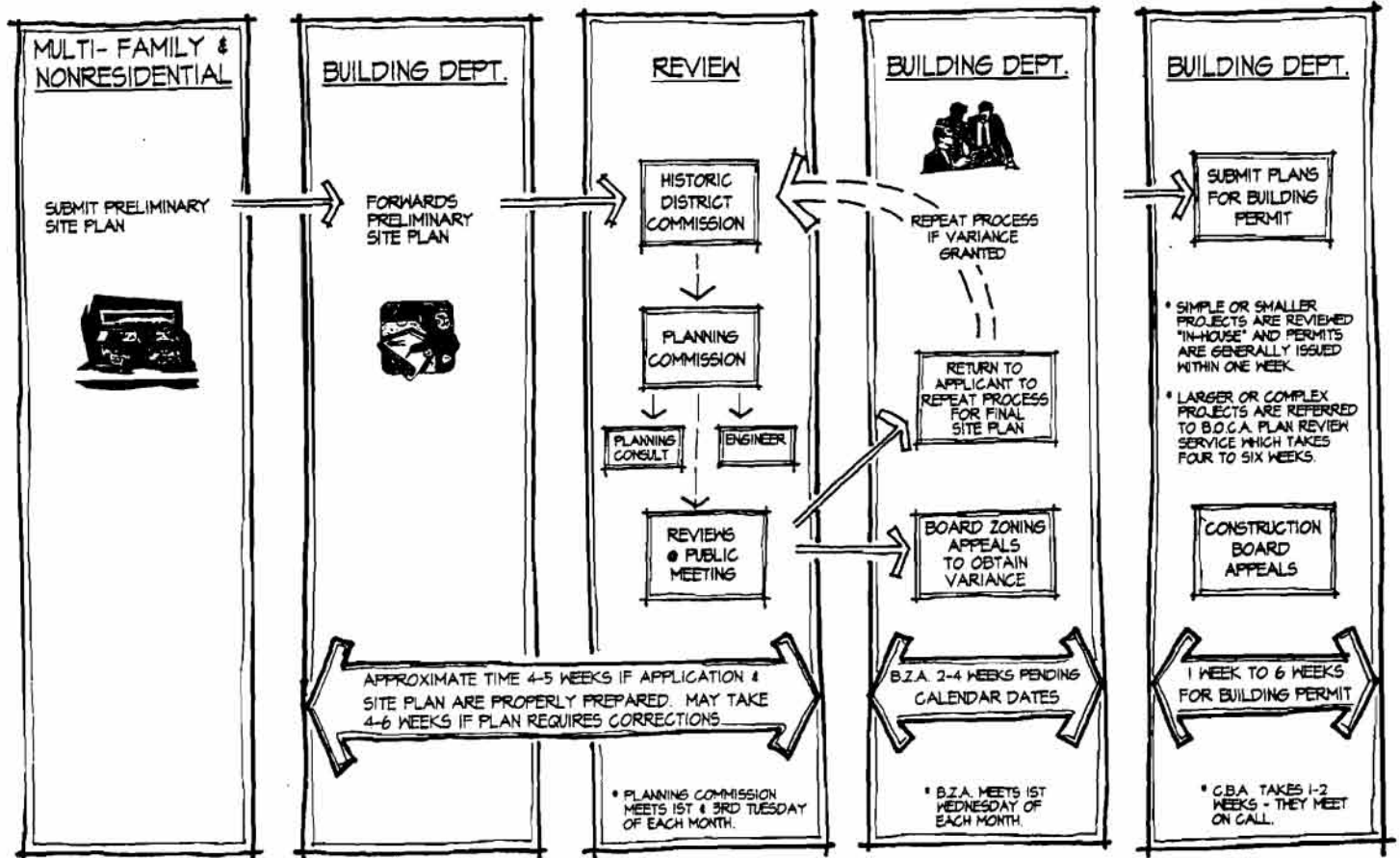
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Permits for signage, alterations, repairs, and new construction are issued through the City of Northville Building Department. The process, schedule, and fees vary with the size and type of project. The attached diagrams illustrate typical scenarios and anticipated schedules.

Applicants should contact the Building Department to determine review fees. When filing for permits, applicants are also encouraged to provide fully completed applications and detailed documentation which may be required. Incomplete application forms and/or insufficient documentation typically adds significant time to the review and permitting process. A sample building permit application is included at the end of Part 7.







## Construction Board of Appeals

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Specific requirements of the building code may be appealed to the Building Board of Appeals for a modification. The goal of the Building Board of Appeals process is to balance the requirements of life safety with the difficulties involved in working with historic buildings. The building code is performance oriented, which means that a variance may be granted if the alternative construction is as good or better solution to the type required in the code. The building owner or architect should have some alternatives in mind to address the code issue in question. If the Board agrees that the modifications and alternatives that you propose will perform to the same standard that the code requires, the Board is more likely to grant a variance. Refer to page 7-9 to see where this Board may be a part of a project.

The goal of the Board is not to stop renovation, but to protect the lives and safety of the community. No variance request is automatically granted. Each request is considered on an individual basis, and the decision of the Board is based on the merits and characteristics of each building. Variances from the code are meant to be fair and equitable, not easy to obtain. The following list is far from comprehensive, but some of the more common variances applied for in historic buildings are listed below. BOCA sections cited are from the 1993 edition. Contact the Building Department or your architect for current and complete information.

Height and Area Limits of the building code present a problem for historic commercial buildings because they are usually mixed use projects. For example, there may be retail on the ground floor and offices or residential use on the floors above. Some uses may not be allowed in certain sizes and types of buildings. Most downtown buildings are constructed of wood frame and exterior masonry walls, which also figures into the formulas for height limits in the building codes.

Variances of height and area limits have been granted to allow the use of upper stories when fire suppression systems and fire alarms are installed as part of the renovation.

The applicable code section: BOCA, Table 503.

Fire Separation requirements also relate to buildings that have different uses on different floors. The requirements are often impossible to meet in older buildings regardless of cost. Alternative solutions involve a combination of fire alarms, sprinklers, and modified separation that satisfies safety requirements. The building code presents several ways to deal with mixed uses, each with its own implications.

The applicable code section: BOCA, Section 313.

Open wells, and open stairways, which are often designed into older buildings to bring light into a basement or to open the second floor up to the first floor, present building code problems with respect to flame spread and smoke separation. These elements certainly enhance the quality of space and usable area of the building and may be approved when fire alarm and suppression systems are installed in combination with other code provisions.

The applicable code section: BOCA, Section 404.

Exiting from upper floors of historic buildings occurs by stair. Almost all of the existing downtown buildings have narrow, steep stairs that may have inadequate headroom, do not have landings, and are not enclosed to provide a protected means of exiting the building in case of fire. Proper exiting is fundamental to life safety, and appeals of this section are scrutinized carefully.

The installation of an alarm or early warning system in combination with a suppression system may occasionally be approved in lieu of total rebuilding of existing stairs.

The applicable code section: BOCA, Section 1014.

A Second Means of Exiting from all levels is required by the code. There are exceptions based on the number of occupants. Low occupancy (less than 50 people) uses may be exempt from the second means of egress. Single family residences are also exempt from the requirement. This can be accomplished by a second interior stair or in very limited cases by an exterior fire escape. In instances where a building is "landlocked" and has no rear access at the first floor to the outside, variances of this requirement may also be considered. The fire department must review escape routes, fire escapes and egress configurations.

The applicable code section: BOCA, Section 1010.

Structural Floor Load requirements are often higher than can be met by most old buildings. Floor load refers to the pounds per square foot that a floor can support. A variance may be granted for loads below code if an engineering evaluation shows that the structure will support the proposed uses.

The applicable code section: BOCA, Section 1010.

## **Barrier Free Design Rule Exception**

In limited cases, the State may grant exceptions to specific requirements of the Michigan Barrier Free code. A word of warning: The Americans with Disabilities Act is civil rights legislation and is not regulated by the State. Variances obtained from the State of Michigan do not insure that aggrieved individuals will not take legal action, and owners of public buildings who do not follow ADA Guidelines put themselves at risk of being sued.

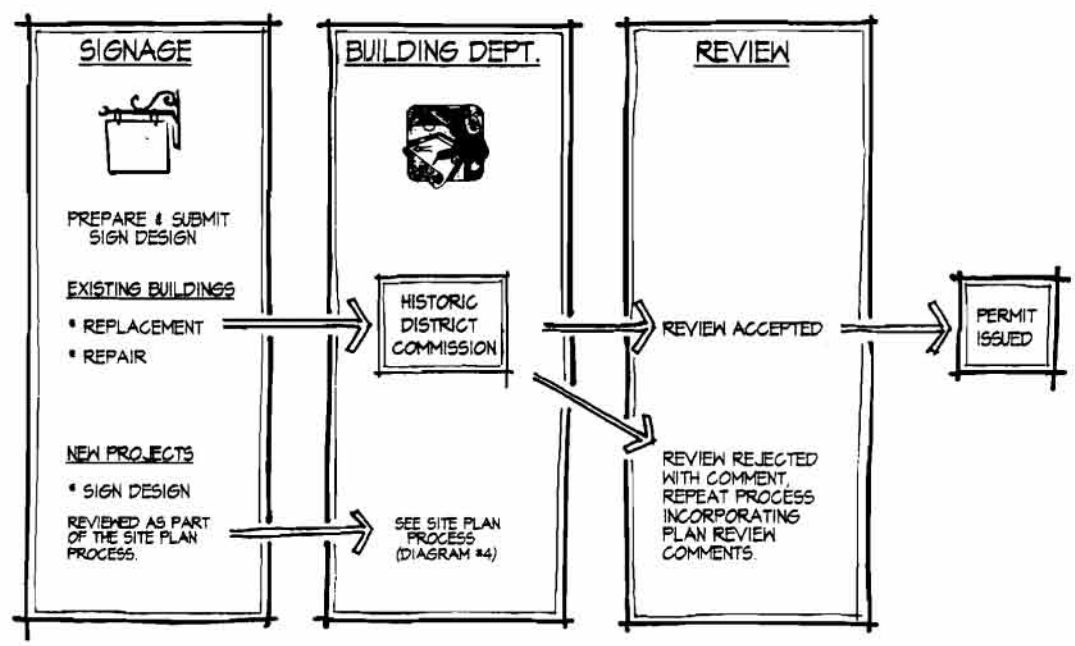
The actual variance must be granted by the State, but the application must go through the City of Northville Building Department. The \$200.00 (current as of this writing) fee is established by the State of Michigan. A portion of the application is completed by the City of Northville Building Department. Applicants typically need drawings prepared by an architect licensed in the State of Michigan. Appeal time may take two to three months.

Sample forms are included at the end of Part 7.

# Sign Permit

All permits for new and altered signs are issued through the City of Northville Building Department. Signs are regulated by the Building Code and Northville Zoning Ordinances.

All signage in the Historic District is reviewed by the Historic District Commission prior to the issuance of a permit. The HDC is empowered to deny sign applications which are inconsistent with the Historic District Standards.



For signage that is a part of a project requiring site plan approval, the signage is reviewed by the HDC and appropriate comment is provided to the applicant and to the Planning Commission.

A sample application is included at the end of Part 7.

## SAMPLE FORMS

The forms in this section are for reference only. Up-to-date forms may be obtained from the building department, and are also available for reference in the Northville Public Library.